



National Center for  
**PTSD**  
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

## Collegial Support

Receiving support from your peers can be valuable in a number of ways. Being able to explore responses to challenging situations in a supportive environment can help you manage stress more effectively and build a sense of self-efficacy. Participating in peer support can help you to feel more confident in confronting work challenges.

People who participate in peer support interventions report better general health; increased participation in work activities; increased development opportunities; and a sense of feeling supported at work.<sup>1</sup>

### Suggestions for improving peer support:

Find a trusted and supportive colleague with whom you can talk through or brainstorm the following themes:<sup>2</sup>

- What is hardest about this work? What are the biggest challenges?
- What are the rewards of doing this work? What are the biggest benefits?
- How have I changed since I began this work? Consider both positive and negative changes.
- As I think of my work, what are my specific goals? How successful am I in achieving these goals?
- What is my sense of personal accomplishment in my work?
- What work barriers get in the way of my having more satisfaction and how can these barriers be addressed?
- What am I going to do to take care of myself?
- What do I need?
- What would I like to change?
- Have I talked to anyone about my feelings, and if so, what did the person say that I found helpful or unhelpful?
- Is there anything about my work experience that I have not told anyone?
- Is there anything about my work experience about which I say to myself, “I can't handle that”?
- What are my social support options? How can I use social supports more effectively?

## Start a peer support group to:

- Provide opportunities for discussion and reflection with colleagues, focusing on work-related stress and burnout.
- Provide opportunities for mutual support among colleagues, to share and compare experiences and to learn from one another.
- Discuss alternative ways to handle perceived stressful situations.

Support group members can share both challenges and successes confronted in the workplace. Consider having a facilitator who can manage interpersonal processes within the group.

The group could focus first on the question, ***What do you believe causes stress and burnout?*** Write down everything that comes to mind, considering organizational, societal, and individual perspectives. Pool the results of all group members, and choose themes for discussing potential solutions in coming sessions.

This method was used in a trial that showed favorable long-term effects on self-reported work demands, general health, perceived participation at work, and support at work. In that research, participants suggested the following themes:<sup>1</sup>

| Individual Factors   | Workplace Factors   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demands on the individual, and solutions for meeting them</li><li>• Drawing limits</li><li>• Balance home and work/work and home</li><li>• My stress signals/symptoms</li><li>• Self-confidence</li><li>• Powerlessness – inadequacy</li><li>• What can I do to reduce my stress?</li><li>• Self-imposed high demands – try to please others</li><li>• What can improve my vitality?</li><li>• Difficulty in relaxing – why?</li><li>• My further development</li><li>• Emotions</li><li>• Which strategies do I need for continuous growth?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unreasonable demands or time pressure at work</li><li>• Psychosocial work environment</li><li>• Communication at work</li><li>• Conflicts at work</li><li>• Staff welfare</li><li>• Positive factors at work</li><li>• Stressors at work and solutions</li><li>• Management does not listen</li><li>• How can involvement at work be improved?</li><li>• How can I contribute to a positive social climate at work?</li><li>• How to increase job satisfaction?</li></ul> |

## Suggest a work group to improve work relationships:

Civility, Respect, and Engagement at Work (CREW) - a work group model shown to improve burnout symptoms - uses the following steps:<sup>3</sup>

- 1) Introduce the need to improve working relationships to work group members and management, and discuss the formation of a work group to address these issues.
- 2) Have management encourage civility as a core value of the organization, with a signed commitment from a senior official to begin a work group process.
- 3) Distribute an initial survey to identify baseline organizational attitudes and behaviors. Identify facilitators who will receive summaries of the responses.
- 4) Create a learning community to develop and implement methods for improving working relationships.
- 5) Hold weekly workgroup meetings led by a facilitator to discuss challenges and solutions around specific topics (e.g., respect, attentiveness, accountability, cooperation, conflict resolution, professionalism, camaraderie, and leadership).
- 6) Create a community building process among all work participants, including conversations where facilitators share the identified challenges and solutions. Facilitators can lead exercises including practice in active listening; settling disputes; conflict resolution; and brainstorming suggestions for scenarios related to perceived disrespectful behavior. Activities can also occur between groups. For example, participants can agree to enact specific behaviors with coworkers during the upcoming week; keep logs of special contributions or acts of civility witnessed during the week; and give a weekly award for exceptional contributions to respectful behavior.
- 7) Include quarterly sustainability training and community building among participants.



## References:

1. Peterson, U., Bergström, G., Samuelsson, M., Åsberg, M., & Nygren, Å. (2008). Reflecting peer-support groups in the prevention of stress and burnout: Randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 63, 506-516. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2008.04743.x
2. Meichenbaum, D. (2007). Self-care for trauma psychotherapists and caregivers: Individual, social and organizational interventions. In 11th Annual Conference of the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment of Victims of Violence, Miami, FL. Retrieved from [http://www.melissainstitute.org/documents/Meichenbaum\\_SelfCare\\_11thconf.pdf](http://www.melissainstitute.org/documents/Meichenbaum_SelfCare_11thconf.pdf)
3. Leiter, M. P., Laschinger, H. K. S., Day, A., & Oore, D. G. (2011). The impact of civility interventions on employee social behavior, distress, and attitudes. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 96, 1258-1274. doi:10.1037/a0024442

## Suggested Reading List:

1. Kottler, J. A. (2012). *The therapist's workbook: Self-assessment, self-care, and self-improvement exercises for mental health professionals*. (2nd Edition). New York, NY: Wiley.
2. Lipsky, L. v. D., & Burk, C. (2009). *Trauma stewardship: An everyday guide to caring for self while caring for others*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
3. Norcross, J. C., & Guy, J. D. (2007). *Leaving it at the office: A guide to psychotherapist self-care*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
4. Pack, M. (2016). *Self-help for trauma therapists: A practitioner's guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.
5. Rothschild, B., & Rand, M. (2006). *Help for the helper: The psychophysiology of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Co.
6. Skovholt, T. M., & Trotter-Mathison, M. (2016). *The Resilient Practitioner: Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Prevention and Self-care Strategies for the Helping Professions*. Routledge.
7. Wicks, R. J., & Maynard, E. A. (Eds.). (2014). *Clinician's guide to self-renewal: Essential advice from the field*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.