



# Essential Workers Guide

## COVID-19 Control and Prevention for Employees on the Job

Measures for protecting yourself from exposure to the COVID-19 coronavirus depend on the type of work you do and the risk it exposes you to as you interact with the public. The following information from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration and the Centers for Disease Control applies to all workers who remain on the job and interacting with customers during the outbreak.

For all workers, regardless of specific exposure risks, it is always a good practice to:

- Frequently wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. When soap and running water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand rub with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands that are visibly soiled.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

For most workers outside of health care, the CDC says the risk of infection with COVID-19 is similar to that of the general American public. For these workers, the CDC suggests the following guidelines:

- Follow the policies and procedures of your employer related to illness, cleaning and disinfecting, and work meetings and travel.
- Stay home if you are sick, except to get medical care.
- Inform your supervisor if you have a sick family member at home with COVID-19.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues in the trash and immediately wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60 percent alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, handrails, and doorknobs. Dirty surfaces can be cleaned with soap and water prior to disinfection.
- Avoid using other employees' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible. If necessary, clean and disinfect them before and after use.
- Practice social distancing by avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance (approximately 6 feet or 2 meters) from others when possible.

## Dealing With Angry People

In any workplace, employees will encounter a variety of anger styles. These styles can range from an angry customer who is loud and intimidating to a co-worker who quietly shuts down and no longer participates in the conversation. Some people refuse to accept any responsibility for their actions; others do not understand why people seem to get upset with them in the first place.

We all can picture people we know who exhibit these or other styles of anger. Often, we allow ourselves to be bullied by anger, giving in to avoid additional conflict. Fortunately, there are effective ways to diffuse another person's anger based on his or her anger style.

Remember, there are three main reasons people feel angry, either personally or professionally:

- Something has happened to create a situation that is perceived as unfair
- A situation exists over which the person has no control
- Control that someone has over a situation has been taken away

Always deal with another person's anger constructively by trying to:

- Let the angry person speak first. Often, just allowing the opportunity to vent anger verbally is enough to diffuse the anger.
- Listen to, acknowledge and validate the angry person's feelings.
- Talk about the actual underlying issues that are making that person angry.

### What to Do and What to Avoid

While we cannot completely control how another person will respond to the complex emotion of anger, we can change the way we react while dealing with an angry person. Since these situations can be made worse, here is a list of things to avoid:

#### Do not:

- Automatically give advice
- Pretend to understand
- Respond with a cliché
- Sound condescending
- Jump to conclusions

Once someone has had a chance to vent, he or she usually is more willing to engage in a productive dialogue. Use the following to get to this more productive stage:

#### Do:

- Allow some time before you respond
- Use short, direct responses
- Tailor your response specifically to that person
- Use an even tone of voice
- Try to genuinely understand the person's needs

While a display of empathy is important, do not give out a potentially insincere, "I know how you feel" response. Try to think of a similar experience that you have had and relate it in a way that lets the person know you really do understand. Listening with care and making an effort to understand the unique experience can help form a bond with the upset individual.

## The Spin Doctor

Political campaigns utilize professional spin doctors who respond to criticism in a timely and productive manner. Try using this technique when dealing with an individual who is irate. If you do not choose words carefully, you inadvertently may elicit a defensive response; this goes against the goal of diffusing or resolving the difficult situation.

Compare and contrast the following statements. Notice how the phrasing can have a significant effect on how the angry person might respond. Put yourself in his or her position, and imagine how you might respond if you were experiencing the anger:

**Say:** "I can tell you have had it."

**Avoid:** "Do not feel that way."

**Say:** "I can tell you are having a hard time with that."

**Avoid:** "You are wrong. It will not work."

**Say:** "I can tell you are disappointed."

**Avoid:** "You are overreacting."

Statements that seem to pass judgment or that tell another person that he or she should see it your way will not usually elicit cooperation. Instead, focus statements on the person's feelings and viewpoints. Address the actual issue at hand; it will help move everyone toward a resolution. With practice, spinning your initial reaction into a form that is better received will come more naturally.

## Understanding Common Anger Traits

It is possible to generally categorize the ways in which people react to the emotion of anger. Sometimes responses can inadvertently re-enforce the angry behavior; try to avoid this through learning the best ways to react.

**Acted-out anger:** This individual makes it very clear that he or she is upset. The person might throw down a paper and storm out, raise his or her voice, rant and rave and outwardly vent anger. Many people will avoid him or her because they do not want to set off the person. Often, people will give in to this type of angry person because it seems easier than dealing with more anger. When confronted with a person who has an acted-out anger style, it may help for you to stay focused, remain calm and talk rationally. This unexpected response may encourage the angry person to act more reasonably when the typically intimidating tactics do not yield the results he or she is accustomed to.

**Unconnected anger:** This person takes no responsibility for his or her actions, seeing no connection between what he or she does or does not do and the reactions of other people. This individual will get angry when people try to hold him or her accountable. Some people will decide to cover for the person or accept that person's blame because they do not want to deal with the situation or the inappropriate response. The best way to deal with this type of anger is to stop covering for the individual and let the consequences fall where they may. He or she will have to eventually own up to them.

**Self-centered anger:** When inconvenienced, this person does not care if there are rules, regulations or protocol. He or she will act out of self-interest, without regard for how the actions will impact others. People tend to overlook this type of self-centered anger, feeling that the individual will never change. However, there are ways to change it: in the future, hold the person accountable for the inconsiderate behavior, and make him or her acknowledge and repair the damage.

**Undercover anger:** This person feels that others look down on him or her; in return the person will commonly act in a discreet, undercover manner, undermining people to get back at them. Those who are aware of the individual's behavior typically talk about it with others but generally do not confront the person. Remedy this by bringing the behavior into the open with specific examples; it will hold the person accountable and make him or her face up to the actions.

**Rigid anger:** A person displaying rigid anger likes to stay in control. The individual feels his or her choices are superior and thus should be the basis for making decisions. He or she will get angry when others try to voice an opinion that counters the person's ideas, often intimidating people to give in, which leads to resentment. To deal with this type of anger, establish a way of confronting issues that gives everyone equal opportunity to share ideas. Stick to the real issues, and do not automatically give in to the person.

**Escapist anger:** This person wants to escape from taking responsibility for his or her actions, denying accusations and often creating elaborate lies and justifications for the behavior. This individual also may be dealing with an alcohol or drug-abuse problem. Stop believing his or her stories, and do not enable this type of behavior by covering up for the person. Let the reality of the situation stand on its own, forcing the person to make a choice about his or her lifestyle.

No one can completely predict how people will respond to situations that make them angry. However, by understanding the best ways to respond to the types of behavior, you have a better chance of remedying situations. Always remember to be aware of the impact of your words and choose them carefully; allow the angry person to vent; resolve the situation by getting to the real issues; be familiar with the different responses to anger; have a specific strategy to better achieve a constructive resolution; and practice new ways of interacting to avoid feeling intimidated and resentful.

## Building Workplace Resilience

Worker burnout is often a function of how you react to large amounts of stress. You may react to negative stress by feeling overwhelmed, irritable and worried. The key to preventing burnout and developing workplace resilience is to find ways to neutralize the stress or turn it into positive stress (where you feel motivated and excited).

### Understanding Stress

Stress is a normal response to life changes. An ability to react to stress is crucial for human survival. Each of us possesses an innate “fight or flight” response mechanism to potentially harmful or dangerous situations. When faced with stress, the adrenal glands secrete stimulating hormones; extra glucose is burned for energy; the heart rate accelerates; blood is channeled to working muscles; and your brain releases epinephrine, cortisone and other hormones to get you ready for the challenge.

### Impact of Stress

While stress can keep you sharp and alert, prolonged stress can strain the body. Unrelieved tension builds up, causing an array of physiological and psychological symptoms that may include:

- A weakened immune system (lower white blood cell count)
- Headaches and migraines
- Stomachaches and ulcers
- Back and muscular pain
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Concentration difficulties
- Chronic fatigue
- Sleep and appetite disturbances
- Dizziness and lightheadedness
- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Job stress also may lead to:
  - Deterioration in work relationships
  - Decreased productivity
  - Low workplace morale
  - Work absenteeism
  - Substance abuse

### Identifying and Coping With Job-related Stress

Stress causes a variety of physical and emotional changes in people. Managers (and employees) should be trained to recognize the common signs of stress and burnout in other people. If you are aware and conscious of these signs, you can implement specific changes in day-to-day activities to minimize (or even eliminate) job-related stress from your workplace.

## Signs of Stress

Stress can manifest itself in a multitude of different physical or emotional changes in a person.

Physical signs of stress include:

- Headaches and migraines
- Stomachaches and ulcers
- A weakened immune system (making it harder for the body to fight viruses and bacteria)
- Back and muscle pain
- Grinding teeth
- Feeling lightheaded
- Trouble sleeping
- Fatigue
- Poor appetite
- Panic attacks
- Difficulty concentrating
- Rashes, itching and hives
- Weight gain or loss
- Increase in drinking, smoking or drug use

Emotional signs of stress include:

- Forgetfulness
- Excessive nervousness, anxiety and worry
- Increased anger and hostility
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Difficulty communicating
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Withdrawal from social interaction

## Ways to Manage or Eliminate Stress

For people who feel stress, there are things to do to minimize the stress and anxiety. Here are some suggestions for coping with job-related stress:

- **Change how you view work:** Eliminate negative words, such as "I cannot do this," "No way" and "I hate this." When you get the urge to use negative words, try to stop yourself and think of positive words instead, such as "Yes," "I will/can," "Certainly" and "I want to succeed." Also, being bored can be just as stressful as being overworked. If you are bored or spend your time on repetitive tasks, try throwing yourself into whatever you are doing, and give it all of your concentration. You will find that time passes more quickly the more you are engaged with what you are doing and are improving the quality of your work. Another possibility is to volunteer for a new task that will challenge you.
- **Learn to manage your workload:** If your position allows you to decide which projects and tasks to undertake, try tactfully saying no to some requests. It is important to pitch in and help out when asked, but do not overextend yourself. For those tasks for which you are responsible, be sure to prioritize them and schedule them on a calendar. Plan each day so that you set realistic goals for getting your work done and

meeting your deadlines. You can accomplish this by breaking bigger projects into smaller tasks. Also, try doing unpleasant tasks first so you can get them out of the way.

- **Seek out the positives in any situation:** If your responsibilities change or you find yourself in a negative situation, try to look on the bright side. What lessons can you take away from the situation? It may not sound easy, but if you can do this, your mood and your outlook at work will improve.
- **Change your work environment:** Is your workspace arranged in a way that prevents you from getting your work done? Perhaps you need a comfier chair, more sunlight, more space, more privacy or a more comfortable work wardrobe. Come up with a list of reasonable suggestions for change, and ask your supervisor if he or she will allow you to pursue them. You can also hang a favorite art poster or bring a plant to change your environment.
- **Take better care of yourself:** You can improve your attitude by improving your health and nutrition habits. Ways to do this include eating healthier lunches and snacks (more fruits, vegetables and whole grains and less saturated fats and refined sugars); drinking coffee and alcohol in moderation, or replacing them with water; quitting smoking; and exercising, even just a few minutes each day. Simple stretches and deep breathing at your desk can leave you feeling refreshed and ready to tackle more challenges. If you can, take short breaks to let off steam, or go for a walk at lunch to change your surroundings.
- **Make the most of your time away from work:** It can be a challenge, but do not think about work when you are not there. Try to spend a few minutes each day doing something just for you: exercising; reading; watching a movie; working on a craft or project; or exploring new parks, shops and restaurants in your neighborhood.
- **Try to make work as fun as possible:** Bring in headphones if your job allows for it. Make a day special by bringing in treats or a special lunch for you and/or your co-workers.
- **Vary your routine:** We all can get in ruts, such as taking the same route to work, having lunch at the same time every day or attending the same meetings every week. If your job allows for it, change your daily routine so you take in new scenery, meet new people and pass your time differently.
- **Exercise before going to work:** Physical exertion is a great way to relieve or reduce stress. Even a walk in the morning helps.
- **Smile:** It seems too easy, but simply having a smile on your face helps reduce stress levels. Think about how it is more enjoyable to be greeted by a smiling person than by somebody who is frowning or who looks mad. Give other people a smile when you see them.
- **Avoid confrontational situations:** Ask if it is possible to work on a different team or on different tasks if constantly stressed out by the same co-workers. If there is one person causing the conflict, see if it is possible to include other co-workers in interactions with that person; this may help defuse the situation.
- **Delegate tasks:** Many people try to do too much, even though they work in a “team” environment. Allow other people to do tasks appropriately.
- **Talk with your supervisor:** Employers do not want to have a burned out workforce. High job-related stress levels lead to high job turnover rates. Job turnover cost employers money. Your supervisor or HR department may have some suggestions for minimizing the stress you feel at work.
- **Seek the assistance of a therapist or mental health counselor:** These professionals have ideas and possible solutions to help reduce and eliminate work-related stress.



## Calming Down After an Argument

Disagreements are a natural consequence of human interaction. Put two people in a room, and the odds are they will have different beliefs on at least one issue, if not hundreds. While these interactions often are simple expressions of different opinions, more heated arguments are also common occurrences in everyday life.

### What Can Help

Once an argument is over, many people find it difficult to walk away and get on with their day. There are things you can do to encourage a return to calm after you or someone you know has been involved in a tense or stressful disagreement:

- **Close your eyes and take some deep breaths:** Twenty or 30 deep, cleansing breaths can help return your heart rate to normal and lower your blood pressure after an argument.
- **Vent your frustration constructively:** Exercise is a good way to beneficially expend energy. Take a brisk walk. Meditate or do yoga. Physical chores like moving furniture, carrying groceries or gardening can also help relieve tension and anxiety.
- **Talk to somebody:** Tell somebody about the disagreement you had, and do so in a calm fashion. Share your feelings with your spouse, significant other, a friend or neighbor. They may have suggestions or be able to offer insight from a different point of view than you have previously considered.
- **Move beyond the argument:** The disagreement happened in the past, so why not leave it there? If the argument was a simple difference of opinions, then it should be relatively easy to move beyond. If the argument turned from a difference of opinions into a verbal attack toward you or the other person, start considering how you will address the person in the future.
- **Apologize or reconcile:** The odds are the person you had the argument with (if they are your friend) feels as bad as you do about the disagreement. Make up with them as soon as possible as a way to bring closure to your disagreement and to facilitate moving forward in your life.

### What Can Hinder

The following actions are not useful when trying to deal with the fallout of an argument:

- **Drinking or using illegal substances:** Alcohol and other substances do not help relieve your tension; they just mask the feelings you have.
- **Reliving the disagreement in your mind:** You have already had the experience one time, so there is nothing to gain from reliving it over and over in your head. Try focusing on something else.
- **Having the same argument again with somebody else:** Do not think of an argument as something that can be “won” or “lost.” If you walked away from the first argument thinking you “lost,” you may feel the need to have it again with somebody else so you can win. But having the same argument more than one time is just a way to compound your anger and frustration. It is not constructive and will lead to you feeling worse, not better.
- **Expressing your feelings in an unconstructive physical manner:** Actions such as punching a wall or an inanimate object will not help you feel better. At best, this will damage property; at worst, it will cause you to hurt yourself.
- **Going to sleep angry:** Many people who go to sleep angry toss and turn for hours because they are still mad. This limits the amount of time they have to rest during the night, increasing the likelihood that they wake up the next morning still feeling tired and disagreeable.

## Dealing With Traumatic Events

During a traumatic event, it is normal to feel a range of emotions from sadness and anxiety to anger and helplessness. It is important to acknowledge these feelings, let them run their course and allow for enough time to properly process the event. This is part of the healing process.

### What Are Common Responses to Tragedy?

Emotional responses to a traumatic event varies. People may exhibit feelings of fear, grief and depression. Physical and behavioral responses include nausea, dizziness and changes in appetite or sleep pattern, as well as withdrawal from daily activities. Responses to trauma may last a few days, weeks or even months, and may include:

**Shock**

**Disbelief**

**Fear of recurrence**

**Anger**

**Alienation**

**Helplessness**

**Guilt or blame**

**Mistrust**

**Sadness**

### Stages of Coping

Most people respond to traumatic events through a series of coping stages. These stages may vary from person to person:

**Shock**

**Denial**

**Intrusion from memories and emotions**

**Working through issues**

**Acceptance**

### Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Most people report feeling better within three months after a traumatic event. If the difficulties in daily functioning become worse or last longer than one month after the event, the person may be suffering from a post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The symptoms of PTSD fall into three broad types: re-living, avoidance and increased arousal.

- Re-living through flashbacks or nightmares
- Avoidance of activities, places or thoughts or feelings related to the trauma
- Increased arousal including being overly alert or easily startled

Other symptoms linked with PTSD may include panic attacks, depression, suicidal thoughts, drug/alcohol abuse and not being able to complete daily tasks.

### When to get help for PTSD

About half of those with PTSD recover within three months without treatment. People should consider seeking professional help when symptoms affect their relationship with family and friends, or affect their daily level of functioning, including job performance. You can contact your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or talk with a health care provider to get help.

## Tips for Employees Dealing With a Traumatic Event

The following tips can help one to cope with a traumatic event:

- Understand that your reactions are normal
- Keep your daily routine
- Resolve day-to-day conflicts so they do not add to stress
- Do not shy away from situations, people and places that remind you of the event
- Find ways to relax
- Turn to family, friends and others for support
- Participate in leisure and recreational activities
- Recognize that you cannot control everything
- Contact your EAP for professional help
- Get plenty of rest
- Eat right and exercise
- Do not turn to drugs or alcohol to help you cope.
- Try finding healing through writing.
- Be patient during this period, and do not rush the healing process.

There may be setbacks and emotional relapses along the way. Do not ignore your feelings or reactions. Be honest with yourself and others. Make a commitment to learn from your experiences and turn difficult events into positive life lessons.

# Are you emotionally overwhelmed?

## 7 Signs Not to Ignore

The phrase “nervous breakdown” is not a medical term. However, indicators that have historically been associated with a nervous breakdown, such as depression, anxiety or stress, can be an indication of an underlying mental health problem. Understanding these conditions and addressing them before they threaten to overwhelm you can prevent more serious mental and physical health issues from developing. Seven indicators to keep in mind:

### Lack of concentration

Stress is the body’s natural reaction to physical or mental demands. As such, it can be beneficial by increasing concentration, memory and awareness. However, over time, the body’s continued response to stress can lead to an increase in blood pressure and heart rate, heightened anxiety and an overall strain on the system. As unrelieved tension builds up, it provokes an array of unhealthy symptoms. Among these are feelings of anxiety, fatigue, depression and distraction. Physical effects can include high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.

### Irregular heartbeat

Strong emotional stress or anger can contribute to cardiac arrhythmia, or an irregular heartbeat. Arrhythmia is a problem with the rate or rhythm of the heartbeat. During an arrhythmia, the heart can beat too fast, too slow or irregularly. Most arrhythmias are harmless, but some can be serious or even life threatening. Panic or anxiety attacks can mimic cardiac arrhythmia. Parallel symptoms include feeling the heart pounding against the chest, increased heart rate and excessive sweating. Seek immediate medical attention if you are experiencing these symptoms.

### Stomach issues

Stress and anxiety often manifest as gastrointestinal issues, including chronic heartburn, ulcers, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Stress and depression also tend to be present in those who suffer from irritable bowel syndrome, which can be triggered by an immune system response to stress. Symptoms of IBS include frequent cramping, bloating, gas, constipation and diarrhea.

### Muscle-contraction headaches

Muscle-contraction, or tension, headache is named not only for the role of stress in triggering the pain, but also for the contraction of neck, face and scalp muscles brought on by stressful events. Ninety percent of all headaches are classified as tension/muscle contraction headaches. Occasionally, muscle-contraction headaches are accompanied by nausea, vomiting and blurred vision. Research has shown that for many people, chronic muscle-contraction headaches are caused by depression and anxiety. Certain physical postures that tense head and neck muscles, such as holding one’s chin down while reading, can lead to head and neck pain.

### Sleep problems

Experts cite stress as the No. 1 cause of short-term sleeping difficulties. Worries related to work, school, marriage, relationships and life events can interfere with the ability to fall or remain asleep, or to achieve a restful state of deep sleep. People who suffer from clinical or short-term depression may also have difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much. While stress and depression can interfere with sleep, the inability to sleep, known as insomnia, can trigger or intensify stress and depression symptoms.

## Depression

Everybody feels occasional sadness. However, an extended period of sadness may be an indication of depression. Symptoms of depression, including feelings of guilt, sadness, hopelessness, lack of enjoyment, inability to concentrate and irritability, have been associated in the past with a “nervous breakdown.” Depression is a serious illness, but it is treatable. Among the treatment options are talk therapy, antidepressant medications and lifestyle changes, including improvements to diet and exercise routines. Untreated depression can lead to serious mental and physical health problems.

## Anxiety

People with generalized anxiety disorder suffer from constant worry that is much more severe than normal, day-to-day anxiety. People may experience chronic, exaggerated worry and tension that does not seem to have a specific cause. They also regularly anticipate disaster and often worry excessively about health, money, family or work, or even about a cause that is hard to pinpoint or nonexistent. This makes it extremely difficult for people to relax. These worries can be accompanied by trembling, twitching, muscle tension, headaches, irritability, sweating and hot flashes. Severe anxiety can be debilitating, making it difficult to carry out ordinary daily activities.

## Coping Strategies

Many of the symptoms historically associated with a “nervous breakdown” can be managed and treated. Here are some suggestions:

- **Seek support.** Do not wait until you reach your breaking point. Talk to a physician, therapist or contact your Employee Assistance Program for help.
- **Try to identify the causes of stress.** By recognizing the reasons behind your tension, you can feel more in control and change the source of the stress.
- **Get enough rest.** Doctors recommend eight hours of sleep a night for adults.
- **Exercise regularly.** Swimming, running, brisk walking, aerobic exercises and other repetitive fitness activities are especially beneficial. Experts recommend exercising at least 20 to 30 minutes three to five times a week.
- **Engage in fulfilling activities.** Take a little time each day for something you like to do: a hobby, a walk, an hour with a good book, a home-improvement project, etc.
- **Avoid caffeine, nicotine and other stimulants.** These can induce stress and anxiety.
- **Avoid alcohol, tranquilizers and recreational drugs.** These may contribute to anxiety and depression and a sense of loss of control.

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Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.

## Learn the 5 Signs of Suffering

Nearly one in every five people has a diagnosable mental health condition, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Often our friends, co-workers, neighbors and family members are suffering emotionally and don't recognize the symptoms or won't ask for help. And sometimes we're the ones who are suffering and won't admit it.

Here are five signs that may mean you or someone you know might need help:

- 1. Their personality changes.** You may notice sudden or gradual changes in behavior. That can be acting in ways that don't seem to fit the person's values, or the person may just seem different.
- 2. They seem uncharacteristically angry, anxious, agitated or moody.** You may notice more frequent problems controlling their temper or that they seem irritable or unable to calm down. People in more extreme situations of this kind may be unable to sleep or may explode in anger at a minor problem.
- 3. They withdraw or isolate themselves from other people.** Someone who used to be socially engaged may pull away from family and friends and stop taking part in activities he or she used to enjoy. In more severe cases, the person may start failing to make it to work or school. Unlike someone who is naturally introverted, this sign is marked by a change in typical sociability, as when someone pulls away from the social support he or she typically enjoys.
- 4. They stop taking care of themselves and may engage in risky behavior.** You may notice a change in the level of personal care or an act of poor judgment on his or her part. For instance, someone may let his or her hygiene deteriorate, or the person may start abusing alcohol or illicit substances or engage in other self-destructive behaviors that alienate loved ones.
- 5. They seem overcome with hopelessness and overwhelmed by their circumstances.** Have you noticed someone who used to be optimistic and now can't find anything to be hopeful about? That person may be suffering from extreme or prolonged grief, or feelings of worthlessness or guilt. People in this situation may say that the world would be better off without them, suggesting suicidal thinking.

### If you recognize that someone is suffering, what should you do?

The answer is simple: reach out, connect, try to inspire hope and, above all, offer help. Show compassion and caring and a willingness to find a solution when the person may not have the will or drive to help himself or herself. It may take more than one offer, and you may need to reach out to others who share your concern about the person who is suffering.

You can help change the conversation about mental health issues and stigma associated with it by learning the 5 signs. And if you or any member of your household needs help, your employee assistance program is designed to provide short-term counseling services, work-life assistance, and other guidance to help you and your family handle concerns constructively before they become major issues.

### Source

The above information was provided by the **Campaign to Change Direction**, a collection of groups joined together in a national campaign to raise awareness of and provide education about mental health issues. You can learn more at [www.changedirection.org](http://www.changedirection.org).

# Psychological First Aid: Supporting Those Who Are Suffering

Even if you do not encounter violence directly, chances are that you know someone who has or will experience trauma. While a victim copes with the direct impact of trauma, those close to the victim might also struggle in the aftermath. Friends and family often have a hard time finding the right words to comfort their loved one, and often feel helpless and distant.

That's why learning about psychological first aid is vital to responding to such situations. PFA aims to reduce stress symptoms and assist in a healthy recovery following a traumatic event, natural disaster, public health emergency, or even a personal crisis.

## The Effects of Trauma

Emotional distress is not always as visible as a physical injury, but is just as painful and debilitating. After going through a life altering experience it is common to be affected emotionally.

Victims of violence or trauma often face a wide range of struggles. They often question what has happened or what they may have done to cause or prevent it. Many wonder how they will heal and why they cannot connect with their loved ones as they once did. Some common stress reactions include:

- Confusion
- Fear
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Sleep problems
- Physical pain
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Grief
- Shock
- Aggressiveness
- Withdrawal
- Guilt
- Shaken religious faith
- Loss of confidence in self or others

## What You Can Do to Help

While physical first aid is used to reduce physical discomfort due to a physical injury, Psychological First Aid aims to reduce the painful range of emotions and responses experienced by people exposed to high stress.

PFA's goal is to create and sustain an environment of:

- Safety
- Calm and comfort
- Connectedness
- Self-empowerment
- Hope

Psychological First Aid addresses basic needs and reduces psychological distress by providing a caring comforting presence and education on common stress reactions. It empowers the individual by supporting strengths and encouraging existing coping skills. It also provides connections to natural support networks, and referrals to professional services when needed.

## Unique Reactions

Psychological First Aid is a tool that each of us can use to reduce our stress level. By understanding your stress reactions and utilizing PFA principles, you can enhance resilience in yourself, your family, workplace, and community.

Keep in mind that since everyone's experience is unique, there is no one-size-fits-all remedy for victimized loved ones. For those who care about a person who has experienced a violent trauma, finding ways to be helpful and maintaining a healthy relationship can be challenging. Use the following tips to help your loved one who has been victimized:

- 1. Listen:** Talking about the experience, when the survivor is ready, will help acknowledge and validate what has happened to him or her and can reduce stress and feelings of isolation. Let your loved one take the lead, and try not to jump in with too many comments or questions right away.
- 2. Research:** If the victim wants more information, would like to report a crime or has other questions, you can help find answers and resources.
- 3. Reassure:** As strange as it may sound, survivors often question whether an incident was their fault or what they could have done to prevent the crime against them. They may need to hear that it was not their fault and be assured that they are not alone. Support groups can be a great source of reassurance for many survivors.
- 4. Empower:** Following trauma, victims can feel as though much what happens in life is beyond their control. Aiding them in maintaining routines can be helpful, as can offering survivors options or possible solutions.
- 5. Be patient:** Every journey through the healing process is unique. Try to understand that it will take time, and do what you can to be supportive. The healing process has no pre-determined timeline.
- 6. Ask:** Your loved one may need help with any number of things or have questions on many different topics. Even a favor as mundane as running a few errands or taking the dog for a walk can be a big help, so consider lending a hand.
- 7. Get help:** Remember that you are only providing "first aid." Some trauma may necessitate longer-term care with a professional. Do not be afraid to ask your Employee Assistance Program or other resource for help.

## Resources

Minnesota Department of Health: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/oep/responsesystems/pfa.html>

SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center: [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

National Center for PTSD: [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

National Institute of Mental Health: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress: [www.aaets.org](http://www.aaets.org)

Anxiety and Depression Association of America: [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

American Psychiatric Association: [www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)



## Self-care for Stress Relief

To feel your best, it is important to take care of yourself. That means eating well, exercising, keeping work and home life balanced and maintaining good relationships. There are times, however, when even these things can't prevent stress and anxiety from creeping in. That's why self-care is so important. Taking a small amount of time out of your busy schedule just for yourself is key to handling all your duties while getting the most out of life. Try these tips to give yourself the attention you need to be your best.

### Deep Breathing

Breathing from our chests or shoulders can create more tension and stress by preventing air from reaching the bottom of our lungs, increasing blood pressure and preparing the body for action instead of relaxation. Deep breathing focuses on using the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) to draw slow, deep breaths into the lungs and to release them slowly. Take a couple of minutes every hour to practice some deep breathing.

### Stretching and Yoga

Stress often appears as tension in our necks, shoulders and head—what's commonly referred to as the stress triangle. Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Yoga is a more formal method of stretching, but even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times a day can have positive effects.

### Massage

Physically, massage can help alleviate tense muscles, lower blood pressure, promote deep breathing and improve posture. Mental benefits of massage include reduced anxiety, increased body awareness and enhanced creativity.

### Meditation and Visualization

Meditation involves "quieting the mind" by blocking out sensory input and distraction, while visualization involves using the brain's creative capacity to create a stress-free experience, much like daydreaming. Both meditation and visualization can be helpful in relieving stress. What they need, however, is a quiet time and place to practice them. Try to carve out 15 minutes daily to quiet your mind and body.

### Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle-relaxation techniques involve systematically tensing, relaxing and visualizing each major muscle group. It is best to practice these techniques when you have about 20 minutes and are able to find a quiet place where you can lie down without being disturbed. You may want to play some soft music or relaxation tapes while practicing this technique.

### Calming Thoughts

Our thought patterns often cause or contribute to the stress that we are feeling. The next time you encounter a stressful situation, take a moment to tune into your thoughts and feelings. Write these thoughts down and then write down a more positive replacement.

### Other Useful Tips:

- Take some time to reflect on your personal goals and any activities that bring you joy. Grab a notebook, or open a blank document on your computer or phone, and start jotting down ideas.
- Try learning a new skill, such as woodworking, cooking or painting. Schedule an hour each week for an activity that you genuinely enjoy.
- Take a walk, a power nap or a long shower.
- Try making a meal with fresh produce at least one day a week.
- Take a moment and check in with your body to determine how to best care for it.
- A journal is a place where you can learn to express your thoughts openly without review or criticism. If you are angry, proud or sad, write about why. Use your journal as a private space for self-analysis and revisit it regularly to update your self-care plan.

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Contact us anytime for confidential assistance.



## Creating a Self-care Plan

To feel your best, it is important to take care of yourself, especially when your job demands so much from you emotionally. Maintaining emotional resilience requires eating well, exercising, keeping work and home life balanced and maintaining good relationships. But there are times when even these things can't prevent stress and anxiety from creeping in. That's why self-care is so important. Taking a small amount of time out of your busy schedule just for yourself is key to handling all your duties while getting the most out of life. Try these tips to give yourself the attention you need to be your best.

**Deep Breathing.** Deep breathing focuses on using the diaphragm (the spot just under your rib cage) to draw slow, deep breaths into the lungs and to release them slowly. Take a couple of minutes every hour to practice some deep breathing.

**Stretching.** Stretching exercises can relieve tension, make your body more flexible and produce a calming effect. Even just shrugging your shoulders, stretching your arms and rolling your neck a few times a day can have positive effects.

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## Dealing With Difficult People

Work relationships can be challenging because people have different personalities, working styles, goals, attitudes and moods. Working well with others involves understanding human nature, being willing to compromise and looking beyond the surface to understand people and the reasons for their actions. Here are some ways you can improve your interactions with people at work.

### Co-workers

- Always remain professional.
- Be polite, keep an open mind and treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Stay positive and do not concentrate on minor disappointments or issues.
- Never confront or ignore a co-worker.
- Be kind and encouraging and take an interest in co-workers.
- Do not discuss topics in the workplace that would make co-workers uncomfortable.
- Respect the moods of fellow employees. (Everyone has a bad day every now and then.)
- Try to work out problems with co-workers before going to a supervisor.

### Managers, Supervisors and Bosses

- Be friendly, even during a disagreement.
- Always look a supervisor in the eye.
- Do not be afraid to talk to the boss about problems or questions.
- Express feelings in positive ways. Never use bad language.
- Do not talk negatively about a supervisor; if you do not have anything nice to say, it is best not to say anything at all.
- Maintain a professional relationship with mutual respect.

### Patients or Customers

- Keep a positive attitude. People remember negative traits more than positive traits.
- Be polite, even when a patient or visitor is rude. Listen and respect their concerns about service or products. Always be eager to provide assistance.
- Apologize to the patient if he or she is dissatisfied.
- Try to resolve any issues the patient presents.
- If a manager is needed, get the manager calmly and without appearing stressed.