

Emotionally Surviving COVID-19:

An informational and self help guide provided by your Lighthouse EAP team.

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ISSUE 1

Happy New Year!

We hope that 2021 starts to bring some healing and peace after a tumultuous 2020 but we know that is a process which will take time. For so many, 2020 was a whirlwind that left us a bit dazed and confused and it will take some stillness to assess the individual damage. Across the nation, many saw a decline in counseling services as individuals were forced to focus more on primary basic needs including employment, childcare, home-schooling children, physical health, and the needs of aging parents. Your EAP program wants to encourage you in 2021 to re-prioritize You! We really do need to “put on our own oxygen mask first” in order to be there for others in a meaningful way, on a long-term basis. EAP can help you re-assess your emotional, physical, spiritual, and overall wellness goals and figure out a self-care plan. Remember, your EAP is a confidential, no-cost service to you that can be used to discuss any issue in your life, no matter how big or how small.

Stress, Burnout, and Compassion Fatigue



Stress is a combination of how our body and mind reacts when we feel we do not have the resources to cope with the demands of life. These resources differ by individual but might include time, energy, motivation, patience, or financial resources.

While there are some more universal stressors (Covid-19 being a great example) most stress is unique to us. While one person might find their job to be a primary stressor, another person might find their job to be a rewarding welcomed escape from personal stressors, and vice versa. Take a moment and reflect on the areas of your life that cause you the most stress. Are there ways to increase your resources to better meet those demands? Increasing resources might include things like learning to say no more often, creating healthier boundaries, asking for help, making more time for yourself in order to recover/repair between stressful events, or re-prioritizing certain aspects of your life.

Burnout is a type of stress that pertains to the work setting. It happens when someone experiences chronic, prolonged stress in the workplace, often caused by either the demands of the job, feeling unsupported, and/or a lack of civility in the workplace.



Take a moment to reflect on whether you are experiencing some of these signs and symptoms of burnout:

- Feeling tired and drained most days.
- Lowered immunity, feeling sick often.
- Headaches and/or body aches/muscle tension. Gastrointestinal distress. Disrupted sleep.
- Sense of failure or self doubt.
- Loss of motivation or detachment from work and/or home.
- Feeling cynical or overly negative.
- Decreased sense of satisfaction or accomplishment.

Compassion fatigue is a unique type of stress that leads to emotional and physical exhaustion often caused by long-term caring for others, witnessing repeated traumatic events while at work, and/or feeling helpless in efforts to care for the suffering. This type of stress is often experienced most by employees in helping professions such as healthcare workers, first responders, and mental health providers who are exposed to frequent secondary trauma and suffering and who are expected to maintain compassion and empathy at all times. Compassion fatigue does not just appear one day but rather it is a progressive problem that often goes unnoticed until

the individual starts to experience problems in other areas of his/her life. It can be a slippery slope so it is important to identify early warning signs and talk to someone before it progresses. The good news is that one can always make changes in their life to create healthier boundaries between work and home, which can help one re-engage and get back that original sense of purpose and meaning in the work that they do.

Take a moment to reflect on whether you are experiencing some of these signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue:

- Distancing self from coworkers, friends, and/or even family
- Cutting corners, making mistakes, and or carelessness at work
- Avoiding seeing clients and/or becoming irritated with clients
- Avoiding talking to friends and family about work
- Mocking clients and/or coworkers
- Using inappropriate humor and/or denigrating the people you serve
- Feeling like others are incompetent, naive, ignorant, or couldn't possibly understand what you go through

This has just been a brief overview of the types of stress many are experiencing right now. The effects of excess, chronic stress can cause and/or exacerbate numerous mental and physical health issues including depression, anxiety, cardiovascular issues, autoimmune conditions, skin disorders, diabetes, gastrointestinal issues, and numerous other conditions. Again we want to remind you that EAP can be a great place to start if you are experiencing any of these types of stress.



A few simple ways to cope with stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue:



Physical Activity: Studies now suggest that a sedentary lifestyle is the new smoking so get active any way you can. Think about an exercise activity you can do several times per week like walking, running, dancing, kick-

boxing, or cycling. We realize however that many are not ready to commit to this type of activity so start by taking smaller steps. Ideas include: parking farther away from the door; taking the stairs vs the elevator; taking a brief walk around your office or neighborhood twice a day; getting up to stretch once an hour; or, doing a few jumping jacks in between meetings. It helps to wear comfortable shoes or at least have a pair at work so you can be ready at any time for some additional physical activity. A fitness tracker can also keep you better informed and accountable to this challenge.

Better Nutrition: Stress can cause people to overeat, crave unhealthy foods, and/or to ignore hunger cues and forget to eat. Make sure you are taking the time to prepare to eat which means prepping nutritious snacks and meals in your free time. Substitute at least one unhealthy meal or snack a day with a healthier option. Sneak in fruits and vegetables whenever you can to help prevent cravings for junk food. Remind yourself to stay hydrated and drink plenty of water; you can even use an app or phone reminder to stay on track with hydration.

Get Better Sleep: We know that even slight sleep deprivation can greatly affect our memory, mood, and judgment and can lead to physical health problems. Try getting 30 minutes of extra sleep a night. Some tips for better sleep include: going to bed at the same time every night; making sure your room is dark; figuring out your ideal sleep room temperature; silencing your phone or putting it in another room; avoiding large

meals, caffeine, and alcohol too close to bedtime; getting fresh air and exercise each day; having a nightly bedtime ritual; avoiding naps too close to bedtime and for too long; and, thinking about the best parts of your day at the end of the day vs ruminating about the worst parts. Some people find sleep stories helpful and there are plenty of apps that offer these soothing mix of sounds and tales to help you go to sleep.

Engage in Mindfulness: Many of our previous EAP newsletters have included information on mindfulness activities including deep breathing, muscle relaxation, yoga, meditation, and practicing gratitude. Remember to ask us about our myStrength app that can help you learn more about these highly beneficial activities and guide you through practices. Of course there is now an abundance of free on-line videos, tutorials, and apps to help you increase these activities.

Create Meaningful Connections: Make sure you are placing an emphasis on cultivating healthy relationships and activities whether that be better engaging with family/friends, increasing hobbies or recreational activities, deepening a spiritual or religious connection, and/or giving yourself time for greater self-exploration and growth. Some various ways to engage in this might include: journaling; going to counseling; drawing or creating art; reaching out to someone you haven't spoken with in a while; opening up more with someone you trust; working on forgiveness of self and others; finding ways to re-connect with your spouse or children; disconnecting from your phone or social media for periods each day or on the weekends; learning to ask for help; becoming more accepting of others for who they are vs trying to change or fix them; or, by volunteering in your community.



HOW STRESS AFFECTS THE BODY

BRAIN

difficulty concentrating, anxiety, depression, irritability, mood, mind fog

SKIN

hair loss, dull/brittle hair, brittle nails, dry skin, acne, delayed tissue repair

CARDIOVASCULAR

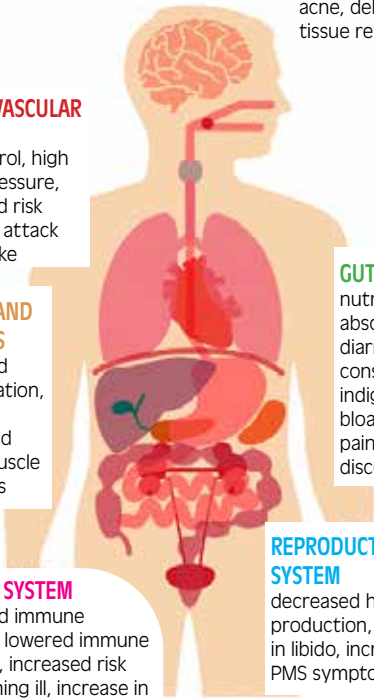
higher cholesterol, high blood pressure, increased risk of heart attack and stroke

JOINTS AND MUSCLES

increased inflammation, tension, aches and pains, muscle tightness

IMMUNE SYSTEM

decreased immune function, lowered immune defenses, increased risk of becoming ill, increase in recovery time

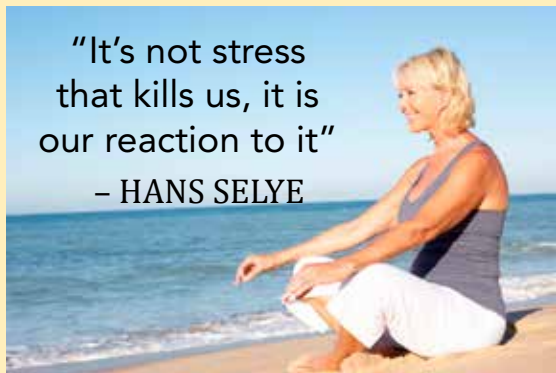


GUT

nutrient absorption, diarrhea, constipation, indigestion, bloating, pain and discomfort

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

decreased hormone production, decrease in libido, increase in PMS symptoms



"It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it"
- HANS SELYE

"In order to empathize with someone's experience you must be willing to believe them as they see it and not how you imagine their experience to be"
- BRENE BROWN

Homework:

Start your own **Self-Care Plan** by identifying several things you can do if you are having a bad day, feeling down, or just want to make sure you are getting in a self-care activity.

Here are some ideas you may want to consider to get you started on creating your own individualized list:

- Wear your favorite outfit.
- Drink a glass of water and/or eat a healthy snack.
- Bring home fresh flowers.
- Get take-out from your favorite restaurant.
- Write in your journal about something you did well today.
- Listen to relaxing music while practicing deep breathing.
- Escape for 20 minutes in a good book.
- Plan your next vacation.
- Re-organize your closet or re-arrange a room.
- Watch a funny movie.
- Attend an on-line support meeting.
- Meditate, pray, or recite an inspirational poem.
- Play a game with your children.
- Walk barefoot in the park.
- Take a bath with your favorite bath oils.
- Light a candle.
- Call a parent, friend, or someone you haven't spoken to in a long time.
- Dance, sing and/or simply play your favorite song.
- Work on a puzzle, crossword, color, or do another activity that takes your thoughts off of your worries for a while.



Homework Continued:

I-Spy gratitude game:

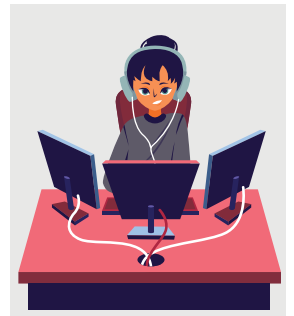
Whether you are having a bad day, dreading going to that event, or simply having the Monday morning blues, challenge yourself with a fun game of I-spy. Be on the look-out for any and all things to be grateful for and see how many you can find. You can even make a check mark on a piece of paper, or better yet, write them down for reflection at the end of the day. When you shift your focus to finding the everyday beauty in your life, your overall energy will follow. This is an activity you could challenge yourself with once a week and see if the amount of things you can identify increases. Over time you won't have to try as hard, as you are training your mind to be better at identifying the positives in your life. These don't have to be extraordinary events to make your list but rather every day occurrences such a good cup of coffee, the sun shining, a visit with your parents, getting that dreaded work report done, your favorite show airing tonight, a good laugh at work with coworkers, listening to your favorite song on your way to work, or your child getting up for school on time.

Creative On-line Video Events

Social distancing should not mean emotional distancing. While it is certainly more challenging right now to find alternative ways to connect, it is more important than ever. Loneliness and isolation can exacerbate feelings of stress, depression, and anxiety, which can also lead to decreased physical health and immunity, impaired sleep, and increased maladaptive coping mechanisms such as substance use or excessive social media use.

Here are a couple of fun ways to help you keep up that connection:

- Schedule a family/friend game night via a video platform. Games like Bingo, Trivia, Pictionary, or 20-Questions are fun, engaging, easy games to play on these platforms. There are also game apps that allow you to play with friends such as Uno, Boggle, Life, Monopoly, Clue, or Scrabble.
- If you are not a traditional game person there are many other ways to connect via these video platforms. You might try on-line cooking or baking with someone and then sharing a meal. Or, maybe something more creative like hosting "Cake Boss" with a group of friends and see who can make the most unique holiday or birthday cake. You could also host an on-line Paint or Drawing night in which members take turns choosing a picture to re-create. Other ideas include a version of Toastmasters, a reading group, talent or comedy show, or a poetry reading night. These activities are likely to include a lot of laughter, which is a great immune system booster!



Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact [419-475-5338](tel:419-475-5338) to schedule an appointment.

Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.