



CARING FOR COMMUNITY CAREGIVERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: SELF-CARE STRATEGIES FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS, FIRST RESPONDERS AND OTHERS

Because of the ongoing COVID19 virus pandemic, many individuals are experiencing:

- Worries about themselves or a loved one getting the virus
- Illness (COVID19, flu and others)
- Feelings of anger, anxiety, fear, grief, loss, loneliness, guilt and powerlessness
- Economic uncertainty or loss
- Increased social distancing between individuals
- Community wide shut-downs and closures of school, work, faith-based and recreational places
- Difficulty accessing necessities like food, shelter, medicine and health care
- Increased isolation, loneliness, relationship challenges and parenting dilemmas
- Greater risk of domestic violence

In addition, first responders, health care providers and providers of other essential community services continue to work long hours to provide valuable services for individuals, families and communities. They have been working under difficult, stress producing and sometimes dangerous conditions. Their goals are caring for those who have or may have the COVID19 virus, preventing its spread to others whenever possible, and minimizing their own exposure to the virus. We appreciate the care they give all of us.

First responders, health care providers and community service providers often encounter situations that cause them to feel fear, sadness, grief, anger or guilt. Many have difficulty expressing, sharing and resolving these powerful emotions, and caring for themselves. Therefore, they may experience burnout, (feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed) or secondary traumatic stress reactions from repeated exposure to other individuals' traumatic experiences. To continue effectively helping those they serve, it is important for these community caregivers to take care of themselves, their personal relationships and their co-workers. Below are strategies for doing so.

Use 8 tips to build trust and support with your team, partner or buddy:

1. Get to know each other by talking about your lives and interests outside the job.
2. Keep an eye on each other. Look out for each other.
3. Relax with each other using humor, mealtime or breaks while maintaining safe social distance.
4. Start the shift with partner, team or community meetings or "check ins" with each other. Ask:
 - How are you feeling today?
 - What are your goals for today?
 - What help will you need to achieve your goals?
 - Who can help you do so?
 - Do you need or want me to check in with your later today?
5. Remind each other to breathe deeply, drink water, take breaks and eat healthy food this shift.
6. Celebrate accomplishments and give compliments.
7. Monitor shift length (no more than 12 hours) and work assignments.
8. Debrief at the end of the shift or after handling a difficult, frightening or traumatic experiences.

Apply 20 tips for professional and personal self-care:

1. Believe you and your work are valuable: You help others be safer, healthier and more secure.
2. Practice social distancing and other virus prevention techniques.
3. Work safely and wear protective gear.
4. Follow evidence-based, best practice standards for your occupation at all times.
5. Don't bring your work into your home or to your family.
6. Practice good hygiene: Shower, wash hands, clean clothes, sanitize your home, car and jobsite.
7. Change from street clothes into your uniform, and back to street clothes at your work place.
8. Wash your uniform clothes and footwear at your work place if possible.
9. Eat healthy food.
10. Cut down on sugar, salt, alcohol and/or recreational drug consumption.
11. Be active and exercise (but not in a public gym).
12. Stay busy: Use art, music, games, puzzles, reading, writing, hobbies and/or projects.
13. Center yourself: through meditation, self-reflection, faith and/or spirituality.
14. Stay safely connected with family and friends via phone or social media.
15. Share your feelings and fears with trusted family, friends, co-workers and/or a therapist.
16. Sleep well every night: Doing so repairs daily cell damage, lowers stress, and raises immunity.
17. Know you (or a loved one) may get sick: Don't panic about it.
18. Have a plan and prepare in case you (or loved ones) do get sick.
19. Continue to follow your health care providers' medical and behavioral health recommendations.
20. Remain positive, confident and optimistic that the COVID19 health and economic crisis will end.

Take "CARE" to build and maintain healthy relationships with family members and intimate partners

- ❖ **Communicate** openly, honestly and fairly without judging, blaming or shaming each other.
- ❖ **Accept** responsibility for your own thoughts, words, choices, actions and inactions.
- ❖ **Respect** loved ones' physical space, bodies, feelings, thoughts, needs and wants.
- ❖ **Empathize** and show you understand each other's feelings, fears, strengths and needs.
- ❖ **Seek** common ground, "win-win solutions" to problems and wise outcomes to resolve conflict.

Recognize, respond to, refer and prevent domestic or intimate partner violence

It is a pattern of behavior designed to obtain and maintain power and control over another person in an intimate relationship. Injuries can be emotional, financial, mental, physical, sexual or social. Safe, free and confidential help is available for victims from Crisis Center North. Contact us by phone (412-364-5556), text (412-444-7660) or chat (www.crisiscenternorth.org).



Crisis Center North

Providing direction to victims of domestic violence