



New Jersey Psychological Association Compassionate Communities Message Psychological Coping during a Pandemic For the Health Care Community

*Fact Sheet from the Psychologists' Association of Alberta, and
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Life is not always easy in New Jersey – especially now, as we are adapting to changes in our personal & work lives brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. **New Jersey First Responders do not have to figure out how to navigate these areas or face these challenges on their own.** Relationships, work, finances, & health are common areas that may become challenged & strained. The state of these areas may affect how we think & feel about ourselves & the world. During a pandemic, it is not uncommon to experience strong & difficult emotions. What was once considered routine or simple may now seem like a huge or impossible obstacle.

Below are strategies from psychological research & practice specifically for first responders.

Take your Breaks with Intention

- When it is possible to take a break during your shift, do so. It can feel tempting or even heroic to decline your break to continue to work so that you can continue to help, but it is just as important to slow your body & mind & to replenish yourself.
- See your breaks as an opportunity to provide yourself with what you need. Ask yourself what it is you need for each break. Is it food? Silence? To connect briefly with a family member? What you need may vary depending on the day.

- If you decide to spend your breaks with others, try to steer clear of conversations related to the pandemic, or anything else that may prevent you from nurturing or energizing yourself

Connect with Others

As humans, we aren't meant to survive, let alone *thrive* in isolation!
More than ever, support & connection with others is needed

- Ask for help & tell others what you need. Do you need help with meal prep, or having groceries ordered & picked up? Do you need help keeping up with your lawn? Those who want to help us may need specifics. Apply your delegation skills to your personal life.
- Form a buddy system at work & look out for your buddy every day. Check in with one another during shifts. Make it a priority to share your thoughts & feelings with someone who truly understands the reality of your work situation.
- Stay connected with those you care about & with those who are a source of strength for you. The amount of time talking may not be as important as the quality of the interaction or message. A quick note to let someone know you're thinking of them may have a huge impact. Schedule catch-up times with important people, even if it is just for a 10-minute window

Boundary Setting

Boundaries help us to live in accordance with our values, & may greatly improve our sense of well-being when they are upheld

- Limit how much time you spend on all media. Limit media consumption to once or twice daily. If you use news apps, consider adjusting notification settings, or removing the app altogether.
- Safeguard your breaks at work & follow through on giving yourself what you need. If quiet or solitude feels right, take that. If you're more social, thank your colleagues for inviting you to share your break with them, & let them know you hope to join them another time
- Try not to personalize others' words or actions whenever possible. We may feel more sensitive than usual to the comments & actions of others – and emotions run high during crises. Don't take everything personally. Be selective in what warrants your time & attention!

Reasonable Expectations & Wellness Safeguards

- Expect & accept that, at times, we will have less to offer. You may have excelled with balancing certain tasks but now find that performing at that same level is more difficult, or just not possible. **That is completely okay.**
- When this happens, accept that you need to lower your expectations. Allow yourself to accomplish less. Ignoring signs of fatigue or stress or overdoing increases risk of becoming emotionally overwhelmed, making errors, & experiencing burnout.
- Health care workers have been renowned for altruism & dedication to serving others. Health care workers well-being is a requisite for serving others!

Leadership

- Opportunities for leadership exist all around us-- especially now, during this challenging time
- A leader does not need to be in a formal position to make a positive or lasting difference for their colleagues, patients, & organizations
- Continue to strive to communicate with kindness & respect. This can be especially difficult when circumstances are difficult, but this is important for promoting a healthy workplace

When to seek professional help

Psychologists are trained to help people find constructive ways of dealing with anxiety & emotional stress. Contact a psychologist if:

- You feel overwhelming nervousness or lingering sadness adversely affecting you
- You notice persistent feelings of distress or hopelessness & you feel like you are barely able to get through your daily responsibilities & activities
- You are engaging in any behavior that induces guilt, regret and/or helplessness.

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