

SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE DURING COVID-19



As a behavioral health provider, you are likely experiencing additional challenges during the COVID-19 infectious disease outbreak. This may include concerns about your own health, your family's health, stigma from within your community, and managing the distress of people you support in your professional life.

We acknowledge the risks you take every single day, and we recognize that with the COVID-19 outbreak the world feels upside down. You are shifting your office setting to telepractice, learning new technologies, determining who needs a face to face appointment and how to do that safely, and where to send people who may be in more distress. We recognize that with all the changes comes increased stress. We also recognize the increased risk and burden placed upon you and your family. If you are still needing to see people face to face for support of their behavioral health condition, your duty to serve can put you at increased risk of getting sick and conflicts with your own safety. That is a stress most will never understand. We thank you for showing up day after day, and for shifting to work through technology, while the rest of the community may not understand all the nuances of what you do. We thank you for your bravery and dedication to serving others every day, and especially during this crisis.

The intention of this kit is to provide resources to help preserve your own resilience and mental health, as well as that of your family. Additionally, it highlights areas you can monitor for yourself and your peers during this crisis, in order to seek help early in coping with the unique stress you experience. Many front-line behavioral health providers are experiencing increased levels of depression, anxiety, insomnia and stress. You are not alone in these feelings, and there are resources to help you get through them.

Resources For Behavioral Health Workers

For Your Family

Childcare for Essential Workers in Michigan - Executive Order 2020-16 expanded access to childcare for essential workers responding to COVID-19. Find access to childcare: <https://www.helpmegrow-mi.org/essential>.

For Your Health

EAP (Employee Assistance Programs) - Ask your employer if you have an EAP for free, confidential assessments and short-term counseling for mental and emotional well-being. Many EAPs help with trauma and other emergency response situations.

Finding Better Sleep During COVID-19

https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Fight_COVID19_w_Better_Sleep_Health.pdf

Compassion Fatigue Resources

- <http://champsonline.org/assets/files/ToolsProducts/OEResources/CF-Resources-Handout.pdf>
- <https://www.goodtherapy.org/for-professionals/business-management/human-resources/article/cost-of-caring-10-ways-to-prevent-compassion-fatigue>

CSTS (Center for Study of Traumatic Stress) - Provider, Leader and Family Resources

<https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response>

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) - <https://www.nami.org/Find-Support>

The American Psychological Association - <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/>

American Psychiatric Association:

- <http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19>
- <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/apa-blog/2020/02/coronavirus-and-mental-health-taking-care-of-ourselves-during-infectious-disease-outbreaks>

First – Be safe!

The best way to prevent the spread of illness is to **stay home when you are sick**. Behavioral health providers have shifted so much to technology, but even doing that work and emotionally supporting others can be exhausting. If you are still engaged in face to face encounters, you may have direct contact with sick and otherwise vulnerable populations. Screening staff when they report for duty reduces the risk to patients and other employees.

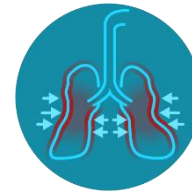
Every healthcare worker, including behavioral health workers, like those in community mental health clinics, opioid treatment programs, and inpatient psychiatric units, should screen themselves every shift. Answer three simple questions when you report for duty:



Do you have a cough?



Do you have a fever?



Are you short of breath?

If you are experiencing symptoms, feel ill, or develop a fever – **stay home** and contact your employer for further direction regarding potential testing, isolation and shift coverage, in accordance with their COVID-19 Plan. If you work in an adult foster care setting or a residential facility, identify a coverage plan in case you become ill so your patients know where to go.

Have A Plan In Case You Become Ill

At work:

Discuss what will happen if you become ill with COVID-19 with your manager or supervisor.

- Where will you isolate?
- How will you isolate from your family to protect them?
- How will you be compensated during isolation?
- How long will your employer expect you to remain off duty? What is the policy for returning to work?
- Are there tasks you can do from home if you must isolate?

At home:

Find ways to get your family involved in routine and emergency activities that prevent the spread of illness in your home.

Prevent illness in your household:

- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially when returning home from work.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces like doorknobs, counters, phones.
- Teach your family best practices for hand washing, cough and sneeze hygiene, and surface cleaning.

Plan for illness in the household

Behavioral health workers have unique needs when it comes to planning for illness in the household. Discuss with your family what to do if you become ill, or if another family member becomes ill. By participating in the plan, your family might not feel as overwhelmed or as if they do not have power in the situation.

- Consider separate living spaces and bathrooms.
- Create a plan for childcare and pet care if you become ill.
- Create a family plan for where you will isolate (at home or away from home) if you become ill.
- Discuss the possibility for increased shifts, longer shifts, schedule changes, increased travel, or telework during this crisis.

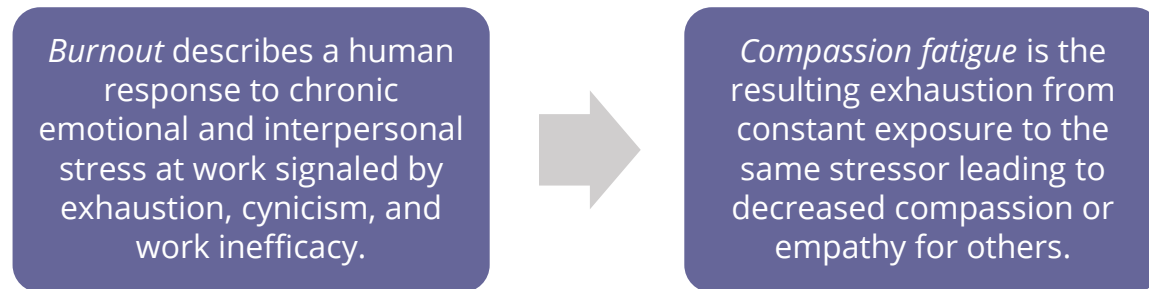
Download the Michigan Prepares Mobile App to help your family plan together.

Michigan.gov/MichiganPrepares

- Update your emergency contacts.
 - Fill out your emergency plan.
 - Review supply checklists.
- (Tip: you don't want to have to leave your house if you become ill.)

Recognize When You Need A Break

The fact that COVID-19 is human-to-human transmissible, relatively unknown, and potentially fatal may intensify the feelings of personal danger. It is important to understand types of stress so that you can recognize them in yourself and in others.



Resilience is the ability to adapt successfully in the face of trauma, adversity, tragedy or significant threat. Creating a stress resilience plan helps you fight against burnout and compassion fatigue.

Create a Stress Resilience Plan

- 1**
Self-Assess
 - What are my early warning signs of excessive stress?
 - What do I do currently on a daily basis for self-care?
 - What do I do on a weekly basis to improve self-care?
 - What do I do when my stress level is unusually high?

- 2**
Plan for the Future
 - What can I add to my self-care routine?
 - How will I make time for these new strategies?
 - How often should I review what I am doing?
 - What challenges do I expect to have with my plan for change?
 - How will I know if my changes are helping?

- 3**
Get Support
 - Who can I turn to for support with my plan?
 - How often should I check in with them?
 - What professional support is available for me if I need it?

Stay Healthy!

Behavioral health workers, just like all those in healthcare, need to take care of their own health to be able to provide care for individuals in a high-stress environment. Workers must be able to stay focused on the job in the dynamic, crisis environment.

Pace Yourself

- Pace yourself, this pandemic is a marathon, not a sprint.
- Watch out for each other. Coworkers may be intently focused on a particular task and not take appropriate precautions to protect themselves.
- Be conscious of those around you. You might be exhausted, stressed, or even temporarily distracted, and that can lead to errors or irritability.
- Take frequent rest breaks. Mental fatigue, particularly over long shifts, can greatly increase workers' risk of injury and burnout.

Prioritize Your Physical Health

- Keeping a healthy routine, especially during uncertain times, will help curb stress.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- Maintain a healthy diet and exercise when you are able. Simply taking 20 minutes and going for a walk can help manage stress.
- Take breaks away from your workspace, or go out for fresh air, when possible.

Don't Ignore Your Mental Health:

As a behavioral health workers, you know how important mental health is, but often forget to watch your own mental health. Make sure you think about your mental well-being during this extraordinary time of stress. Some of the following may help:

- Keep in touch with friends and family: A simple phone call, text message, or video chat helps to manage stress and keeps you in contact with those close and important to you.
- Limit media exposure: Take some time every day to digitally unplug and get a break from all the media.
- Recognize and accept what you cannot change such as the organizational structure, complex work environment, waiting times, supply shortages, etc.
- Talk to people when you feel like it. You decide when you want to discuss your experience.
- Identify a buddy, ideally a peer, who understands your unique stresses, and check in often with one another. Try to process the difficulties of a shift or a day in the clinic, and then point out positive elements too. Lift one another up!
- Give yourself permission to feel upset or scared: you are in a difficult situation.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks are normal—do not try to fight them. But, remember, if your sleep is so disrupted that it is hard to function, take time off and seek mental help. You cannot emotionally support others as well if you are having difficulties and not maintaining your own balance.

IDENTIFYING STRESS

Physical

Behavioral health workers experiencing any of the following symptoms should seek IMMEDIATE medical attention:

- Chest pain
- Difficulty breathing
- Severe pain
- Symptoms of shock

If behavioral health workers experience symptoms over time or if they become severe, workers should seek medical attention.

- Fatigue
- Nausea/vomiting
- Dizziness
- Profuse sweating
- Thirst
- Headaches
- Visual difficulties
- Clenching of jaw
- Nonspecific aches and pains

Behavioral

As a result of a traumatic incident, behavioral health workers may notice the following behavioral changes in themselves or coworkers:

- Intense anger
- Withdrawal
- Emotional outburst
- Temporary loss or increase of appetite
- Excessive alcohol consumption
- Inability to rest, pacing
- Change in sexual functioning

Cognitive

If these symptoms occur on the scene, workers may not be able to stay clearly focused to maintain their own safety or to help patients in distress.

Behavioral health workers may experience momentary cognitive symptoms; however, if symptoms are chronic or interfere with daily activities, workers should seek medical attention.

These symptoms include:

- Confusion
- Disorientation
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Poor concentration
- Poor problem solving
- Difficulty identifying familiar objects or people
- Memory problems
- Nightmares

Emotional

Strong emotions are ordinary reactions to a traumatic or extraordinary situation. Behavioral health workers should seek mental health support from a disaster mental health professional if distress continues for several weeks or if they interfere with daily activities. Emotional symptoms include:

- Anxiety or severe panic (rare)
- Guilt/sense of failure
- Denial
- Grief
- Fear
- Irritability
- Loss of emotional control
- Depression
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Blaming others or self

MANAGING STRESS

Recognizing stress in yourself is important. Here are some things you can do for yourself to help you manage your stress:

Talk to your peers about the stresses of the day, jobs, and other worries you share. Place an emphasis on validating one-another's concerns without focusing on the grim. Help point out positive elements of the shift or day for one another.

Seek help from support systems available in the healthcare environment. Many systems have point people or resources to help with burnout, fatigue and other concerns. Having conversations about your worries can help reduce anxiety. Check out the list of resources at the end of this document as well.

Self-care helps you stay strong in order to better help others. Self-care can be eating healthy, exercising and getting good sleep. Self-care may also include taking care of family, including children and others. Making sure you fill your own cup is just as important as pouring from it to serve others.

Stay in touch with older parents and family members you would normally visit. Connect by phone or video chat, write letters, or send supplies safely to their residence to maintain your connectedness.

Take things one day at a time - step back from the "sprint" mentality. Remember that this pandemic will not be solved quickly, treat it like a marathon.

Take mindful minutes. Slow breaths on the top of the hour, taking time to recognize all the small things around you, acknowledging them, and letting them go. Getting outside or stepping away from your workspace regularly.

National Disaster Distress Helpline



Call
1-800-
985-5990



Text
TalkWithUs
to 66746

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline



Call
1-800-
273-8255



Text
TALK
to 741741