
Developing Resiliency Through the Pandemic

by John Sutton, LCSW

Cape Fear Valley Employee Assistance Program Corporate Director

There has not been a global pandemic since 1918. Currently, no one has been through a crisis like the crisis we are facing. Learning to build resiliency through the COVID 19 pandemic is crucial to being an effective healthcare provider. Resiliency is the ability to recover from or adjust to adversity or change.

Throughout the pandemic we may be asked to adjust the type of work that we do. We must remember that we chose a career in health care because we want to take care of patients during their time of need. We must also remember that we have a valued skillset that allows us to perform these functions. We may be asked to change the duties we currently perform in order to function in a more critical capacity. Remember that flexibility is the key to resiliency. The job or unit may be different than the one we currently hold, but the skillset is the same one that we have built throughout our careers.

Stress is caused by uncertainty and the perception that we do not have control. Most healthcare professionals like to be in control of their situation. It is normal to have emotional reactions:

Feeling overwhelmed	Emotional Shock	Inappropriate emotional responses
Loss of emotional control	Emotional outbursts	Apprehension
Intense anger	Depression	Irritability
Agitation	Anxiety	Denial
Panic	Grief	Guilt
Fear	Frustration	Feelings of hopelessness

We may notice that we have these changes in our behaviors:

Withdrawal	Inability to rest	Intensified pacing/fidgeting	Erratic movements
Change in appetite	Hypervigilance	Increased alcohol/nicotine	Change in tolerance

These are all normal reactions to abnormal circumstances. In efforts to build resiliency it is important to be aware of your emotional state and not allow your emotional state to control your behavior. It is important to spend time with others. Give yourself permission to feel rotten and remind yourself to stay grounded. Reach out to others. Check in on your coworkers and ask how they are doing. Sometimes we may be plagued with negative thoughts and writing them in a journal can help us let them go. If you tend to catastrophize events, make sure that you counter those thoughts with a positive. Example: If you are plagued with thoughts of getting fired, write down what type of work you would like to do. If you are worried about your current relationship, consider what being single might mean for you.

Realize that others around you are also stressed. Do not personalize if others are withdrawing. If people are angry, remind them that we are all in this together and we all want the same positive outcomes. Keep an open mind and insure that you are not holding a grudge. Be willing to actively listen and consider the other person's perspective. Decide where your common ground is and build from that.

The corona virus has added stress to all of us. For some, it has added to already existing anxieties. Remember that we have lived through other stressful world events: HIV, H1N1, SARs, mass shootings, and 9/11. It is healthy to have respect for COVID 19, Flu A and B, and other communicable diseases but

we do not need to panic. Keep up with accurate information from reliable sources like the CDC, NIH, and the World Health Organization. Social Media platforms may provide the most sensational information but not the most accurate information. Learning what is known about the virus is helpful in combating anxiety and frenzied speculation from the media.

Limit News Overexposure: The events of 9/11 taught us the deleterious effects of watching 24-hour news coverage. Sensational news coverage can perpetuate unnecessary anxiety. Remember to balance news reports with healthy activities. Make sure that you are eating healthy. Although there has been a rush on toilet paper and sanitizing wipes, there are plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables available. Eating a balanced meal at scheduled meal times gives us a sense of order. Make sure that you are getting enough rest. Remember to start relaxing before attempting to go to bed. Seek out the enjoyment around you: Love your children and spouse. Play a board game or video game that gets your mind off the stresses of life. Pet your dog and cat. Watch a comedy and remember to laugh. Facetime with friends and family. Remind them that you work in a stressful environment and encourage them to keep the conversation light.

Remember to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness is being present in the moment and being aware of our emotional state. Make sure that the task you are performing does not diminish the care that you are providing. Relish the “Thank you” that you receive from grateful patients and family members. Remember to thank those who help you.

The corona virus is a reality. This has become our “new normal.” It is in the news and on our minds. We do not have control over it, but we do have control over how we react to it. Strengthen yourself with facts. We have always used Universal Precautions and this has not changed. When your anxiety is high remember to ask a question rather than making assumptions. If you find yourself having difficulty managing your stress the Employee Assistance Program is available to help you with coping skills. You can call our office (910-615-1733) to schedule an appointment. For those of you who cannot come to our office you can call to request a time to speak with someone telephonically. Not all issues can be addressed on the telephone. People who are in acute crisis or who are overwhelmed with thoughts of hurting themselves or others will be asked to meet with a Counselor in person. If you cannot find time to come to our office, speak with your manager to see if they can arrange a confidential space that we can meet with you at your work site.