

Tips on Supporting Staff

Burnout, compassion fatigue, lateral workplace "bullying" violence, and decreased job satisfaction are related to the mental and emotional toll that can be overwhelming if staff members do not have the support systems and tools to handle the stress of working in healthcare. Providers must take steps to ensure the health and well-being of their staff.

The ideas below can help providers prevent burnout and ensure staff members feel supported at work. This can help promote employee engagement and foster culture.

RESOURCES FOR PROVIDERS

What Leaders and Managers Should Do

Talk to the leaders and managers in your organization about how they should be checking in with their employees to support them.

- Check in with staff frequently; set an expectation for managers to reach out once a week.
- Ask staff how they are doing and feeling, and how their families are doing - make sure they feel heard and understood.
- Find small ways to show your support and care for staff. Help them identify solutions to problems and find support services where needed (see resources below).
- Make sure staff take care of themselves (e.g., encourage staff to take a five-minute mental health break, and provide lunch or food to ensure they are eating well.)

Understand and Identify Burnout & Secondary Traumatic Stress

Healthcare workers experience stress during a crisis, but also during routine tasks such as end-of-life care, working with a combative resident, or staffing shortages/challenges. When stress builds up it can cause:

- Burnout – feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed.
- Secondary traumatic stress – stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event.

Coping techniques like taking breaks, eating healthy foods, exercising, and using the buddy system can help prevent and reduce burnout and secondary traumatic stress. [Recognize the signs of both conditions](#) in yourself and staff to be sure those who need a break or need help can address these needs.

Employee Programs

Setting up or accessing programs to support employees can make a big difference for staff who may be struggling with challenges in their personal lives that can prevent them from being effective employees.

- **Employee Assistance Programs:** If you have them, make sure staff know how to get in touch and what it is for
- **Set up a Quiet Room for Staff.** During stressful and demanding shifts, staff may benefit from a space where staff can take a break and re-group. Provide snacks, access to meditations or soothing sounds, aromatherapy, or guides on stretching or deep breathing.
- **Connect staff with resources for childcare.** Many staff are dealing with struggles with childcare and may not have or be aware of resources to provide care for younger children. Check out [ChildCare.gov](https://www.childcare.gov) for information resources to help pay for childcare.
- **Engagement Programs:** It is important to recognize and engage staff. Find ways to acknowledge them – treats in the break room, appreciation from residents/other staff/families, appreciation from leadership.

Get Support from Team Members

[In a buddy system](#), two employees partner together to support each other and monitor each other's stress, workload, and safety. The goals of the buddy system are to:

- **Get to know each other.** Talk about background, interests, hobbies, and family. Identify each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- **Keep an eye on each other.** Try to work in the same location if you can.
- **Set up times to check-in with each other.** Listen carefully and share experiences and feelings. Acknowledge tough situations and recognize accomplishments, even small ones.
- **Offer to help with basic needs** such as transportation.
- **Monitor each other's workloads.** Encourage each other to take breaks. Share opportunities for stress relief (rest, routine sleep, exercise, and deep breathing).
- **Communicate your buddy's basic needs and limits to leadership** – make your buddy feel "safe" to speak up.

DIRECT RESOURCES FOR STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

Here are some additional resources employers can provide to their leaders and staff directly:

- [Webinar: Bullying is Not limited to the playground – It's time to take a breath!](#)
- [Self-care Podcast series](#)
- [Building Trust Workshop](#) is a 4-lesson virtual program full of tools and resources to help leaders build trust with staff.\

- [Trauma-Informed Care Training](#) created by AHCA/NCAL in association with the American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing has developed a certificate program is designed to provide education that will assist facility leaders in implementing trauma-informed care in their facility with staff who are appropriately trained and competent to care for residents who are at risk for re-traumatization.
- [The Disaster Distress Helpline](#) is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service. Stress, anxiety, and other depression-like symptoms are common reactions to a disaster. Call 1- 800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.
- CDC [Poster on Coping with a Disaster](#)
- [Compassion Fatigue Wallet Card](#)
- CDC [Response Resources for Leaders](#)
- [Palouse Mindfulness Online Training](#) is a free online training course on mindfulness- based stress reduction.
- [Caregiver Action Network](#) is a resource that is primarily targeted towards family caregivers; however, has some valuable information for those working in long term care.
- [DDH OPSC for Survivors and Responders of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#): Vibrant Emotional Health, administrators of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline as well as the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is excited to announce the launch of a new resource, DDH Online Peer Support Community (DDH OPSC) for Survivors and Responders of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

DDH OPSCs are private, members-only, moderated groups on Facebook where survivors and responders of disaster can offer and receive mutual aid and peer support from people who have gone through similar experiences and from similar backgrounds. The DDH OPSC for Survivors and Responders of the COVID-19 Pandemic is open to anyone who currently identifies (or who has once identified) as a "survivor" or "responder" of COVID-19. Members in the group will then be able to connect with trained DDH Peer Supporters who help keep the OPSC safe & interactive, as well as access DDH Crisis Counselors 24/7/365 through Crisis Support Center over Messenger.