


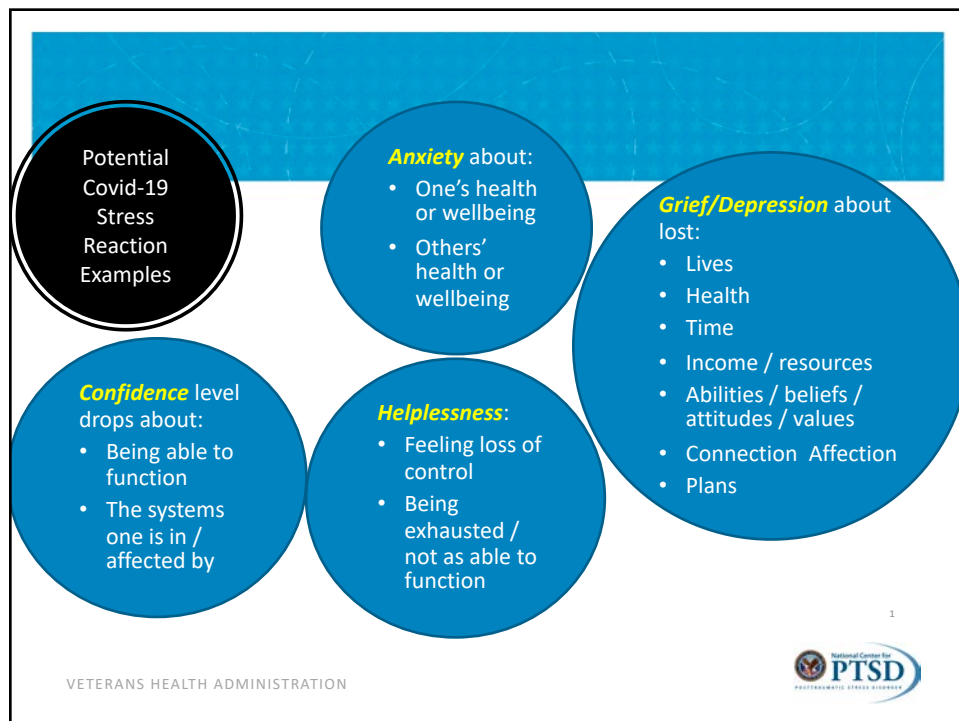
Self-Care and Coworker Support in Health Services Workers During the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak

Patricia Watson, Ph.D.
National Center for PTSD

May 2020

 **VA** HEALTH CARE **EXCELLENCE** in the 21st Century


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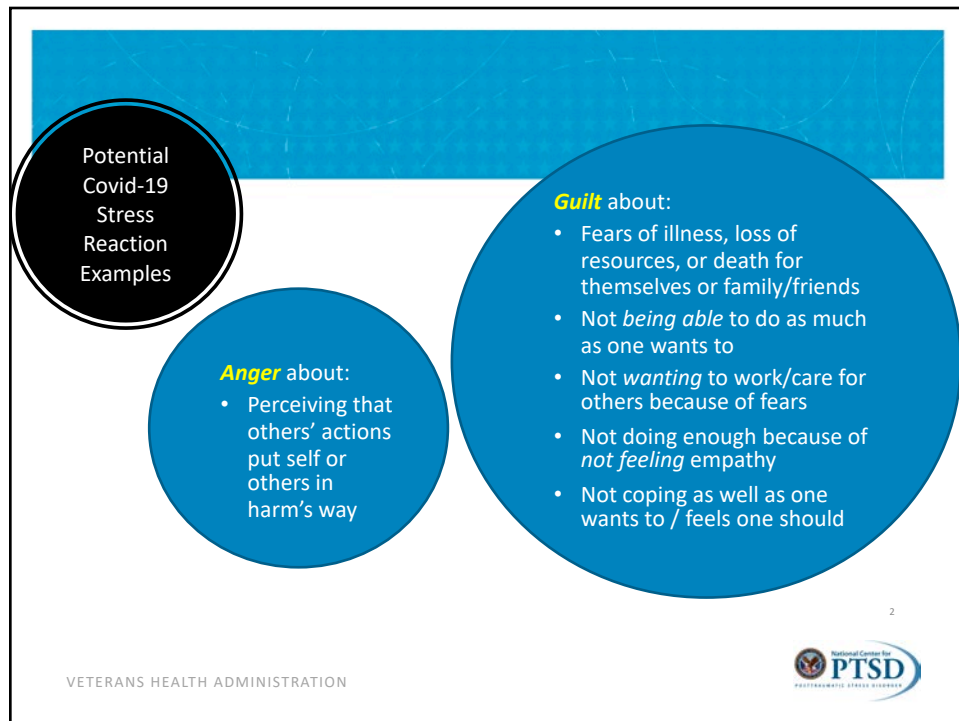
Potential Covid-19 Stress Reaction Examples

- Anxiety** about:
 - One's health or wellbeing
 - Others' health or wellbeing
- Grief/Depression** about lost:
 - Lives
 - Health
 - Time
 - Income / resources
 - Abilities / beliefs / attitudes / values
 - Connection Affection
 - Plans
- Confidence** level drops about:
 - Being able to function
 - The systems one is in / affected by
- Helplessness:**
 - Feeling loss of control
 - Being exhausted / not as able to function

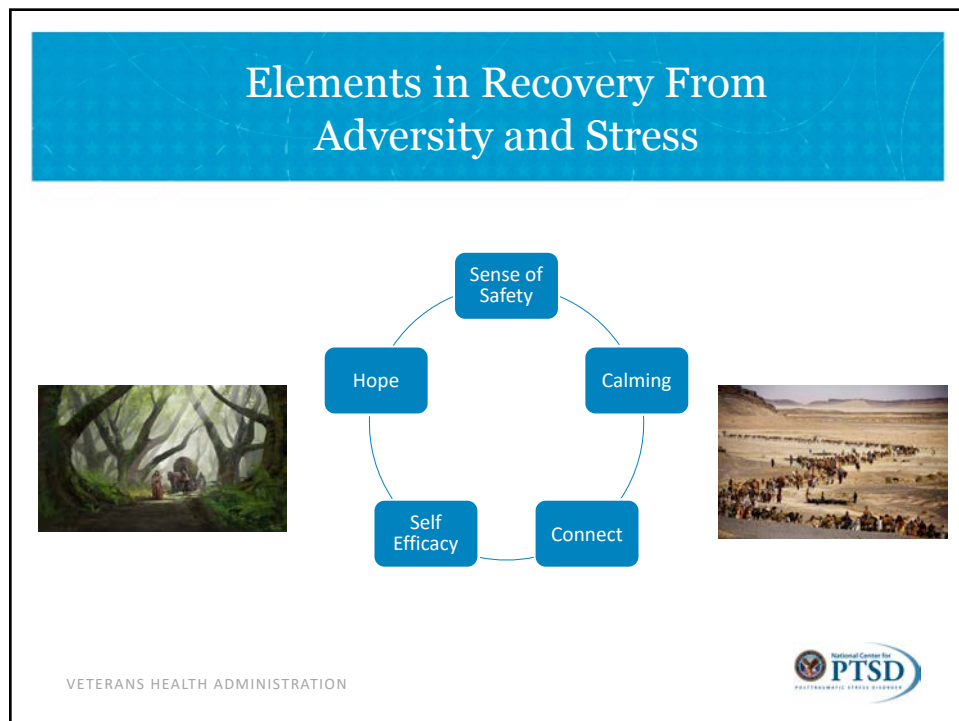
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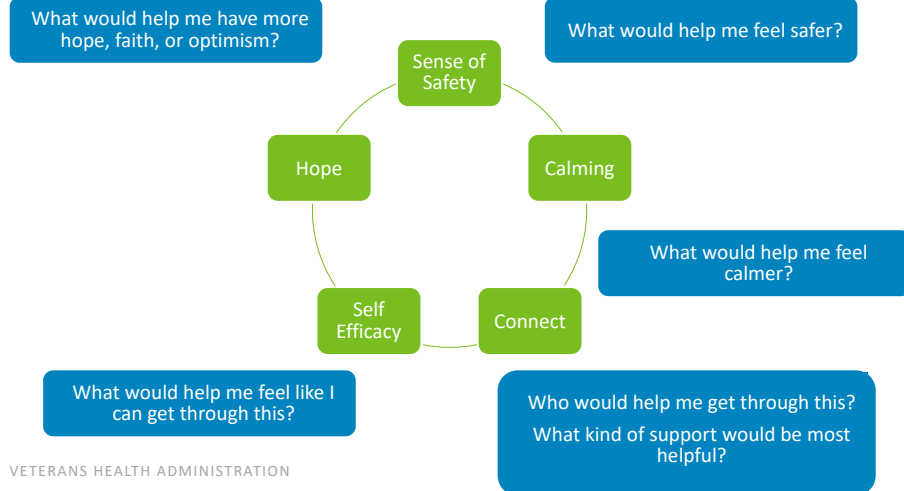


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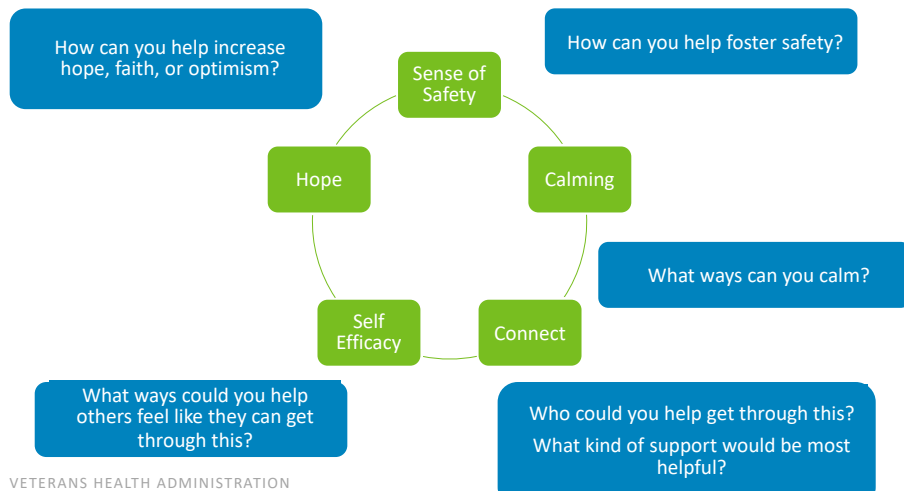
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Elements for Wellbeing Self Reflection



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Elements for Wellbeing Coworker Support




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Stress Continuum: Circumstances and Features			
READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<p>Circumstances: Well trained Supported</p> <p>Optimal functioning: At one's best In control Motivated</p>	<p>Circumstances: Responding to multiple stressors at work or home Double-edged sword vulnerabilities</p> <p>Mild and transient distress or impairment: Changes in mood Loss of motivation Loss of focus Physical changes</p>	<p>Circumstances: Strong or multiple stressors: • Trauma • Loss • Moral injury • Wear and tear</p> <p>More severe or persistent distress or impairment: Loss of control No longer feeling like normal self</p>	<p>Circumstances: Unhealed orange zone stress Additional stress Risk factors</p> <p>Clinical mental disorder: Symptoms persist and worsen Severe distress Functional impairment</p>


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Characteristics of Stress First Aid

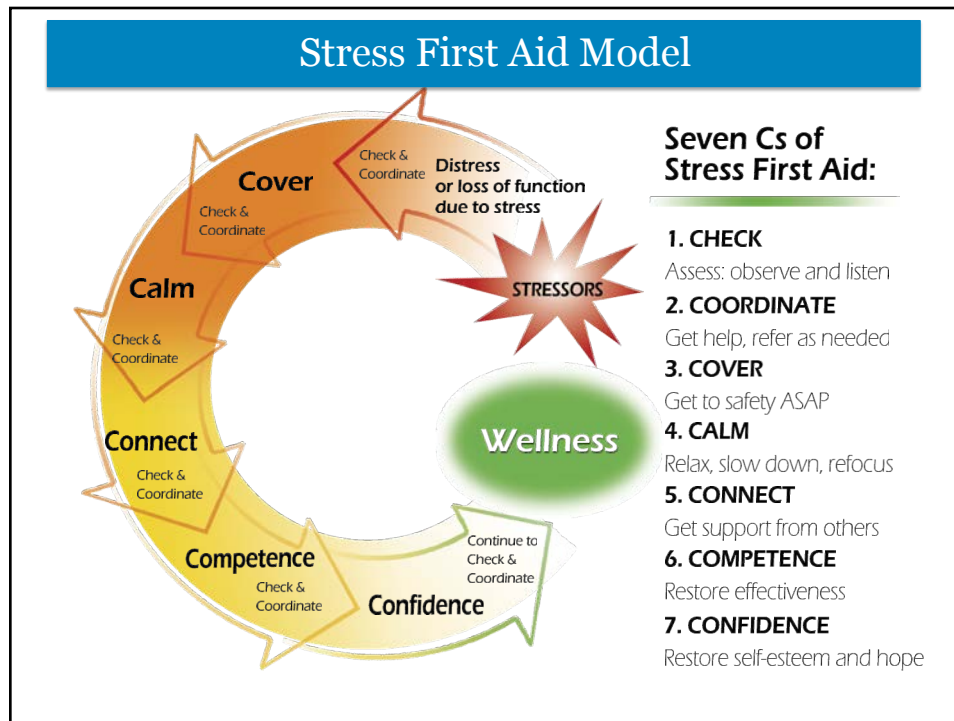
- Self-care and coworker support framework
- Early supportive / preventive actions
- Flexibility and “tiny steps” are emphasized
- Timing and context are important
- Mentoring and problem solving are highlighted
- SFA is not meant to address all ranges of issues
- Bridging to higher care is recommended when indicated



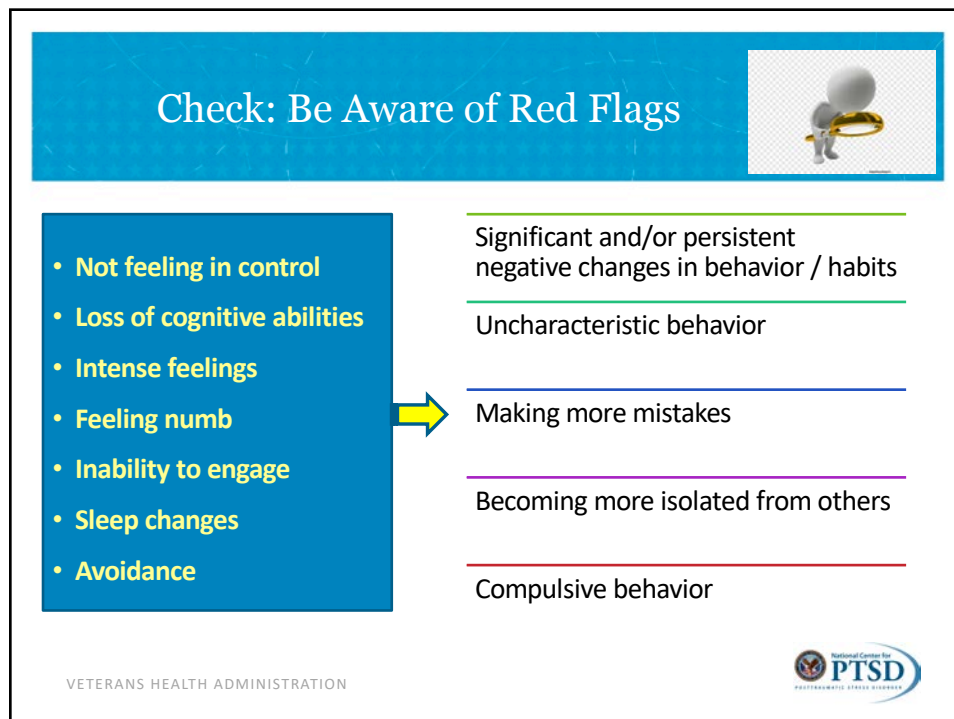
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Checking on Others



- Pick the right place and time to talk
- Begin with a casual two-way communication
- Find the right way to check on someone
- Check in on anniversaries or after reminders

"Leaders are often afraid to ask how they can help because they don't want to promise what they can't provide. Ask about biggest challenges, what's working, and what's needed. Let them know you may not be able to fix everything, but together as a team you can try to creatively adapt to challenges."

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SFA Group Questions



1

What are / have been your greatest challenges, hassles, or frustrations?

2

What are / have been your greatest rewards or successes?

3

What does it mean to be a in this team?

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SFA Group Questions



Cover	Calm	Connect	Competence	Confidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How has this affected your sense of safety? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What changes have occurred regarding sleep or ability to keep calm? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has there been an impact on how you connect with others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you have any concerns about being able to handle anything? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you noticed any change in your confidence in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> yourself leadership mission Other

**What do you need ?
What can I/We do to help?**


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Cover Actions: Coworker Support

- Provide information on how the organization is working to keep employees safe
- Elicit needs and suggestions
- Provide information on keeping oneself safe
- Brainstorm and problem solve solutions
- Help reduce anything that make the person feel unsafe
- Brief staff regularly about changes in practice / strategies / resources / events



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Calm Actions: Coworker Support

- Mentor
- Give information
- Communicate calmly
- Listen empathically
- Validate concerns
- Distract
- Acknowledge / praise
- More flexibility
- Encourage breaks
- Assist with practical needs



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Calm Actions: Loss

- If you don't know what to say, stay present, stay quiet and listen
- Be authentic
- Take things off the person's plate so they have time to grieve
- Offer a menu of options of what you can provide
- Provide ways to honor the loss
- Believe in the person
- Check in over time



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Connect Actions: Coworker Support



- Open communication with co-workers
- Check in regularly
- Offer different types of social support (practical, inclusion, emotional)
- If someone has retreated, find ways to indirectly include them
- Help problem-solve obstacles to connection
- Keep calling, texting, and talking with co-workers
- Assist with any negative social influences

"On the whiteboard, we would write our name if we thought we were in the green zone that day, to give permission for coworkers to approach us for support without worrying about being a burden. We could erase our name if no longer in green."

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Competence Actions: Coworker Support

- Remind of strategies and skills that have worked before
- Encourage active coping
- Help problem-solve and set achievable goals
- Give extra training / mentoring
- Help "recalibrate" expectations/goals
- Connect to community resources

"When I walk on unit, there are two things that show stress:

- 1. If there's a big open bag of candy.*
- 2. If I can't hear "please", "thank you", or "I appreciate.."*

When people say "please", "thank you", and "I appreciate.." consistently, it changes the tone and builds teams."



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Confidence Actions: Coworker Support

- Support each other and remind each other of strengths
- Focus on core values, priorities
- Look to learn from each situation
- Look for any meaningful elements of the situation
- Find ways to enhance gratitude
- Mentor or recommend seeking out mentoring
- Honor and make meaning of losses
- Reframe guilt and self-defeating statements
- Be willing to talk with them as many times as they need



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SFA Actions: Self-Care



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Self-Care Obstacles: Attitudinal

- “It would be selfish to take a break from this work.”
- “I’m okay, I’m fine, I’m not even tired.”
- “The needs of those I’m supporting are more important than my own needs.”
- “I’m not doing enough.”
- “I can contribute the most by working all the time.”
- “I don’t want anyone to know how affected I am.”
- “Only I can do x, y, and z.”



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Self-Care Obstacles: Behavioral

- Working too long by yourself without checking in
- Keeping stress to oneself
- Ignoring drops in functioning
- Underestimating needs
- Relying **only** on alcohol / substances to relax for extended periods of time
- Becoming more disengaged / isolated
- Overdoing without balance
- Underdoing what is needed
- Not seeking help / expertise



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READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Safety: Staying informed Facing facts Calm: Changing expectations Being patient Keeping balanced Connect: Apart but connected Self-Efficacy: Planning and adapting Focusing on prevailing Problem solving Making routines Seeking mentoring/training Hope: Living by values Gratitude Faith / philosophy actions	Short-term view Taking on too much Ignoring drops in functioning Not changing expectations Not checking in with others Underestimating needs Not adapting self-care Overriding the concern of others Self-medicating Lack of routine Unhelpful thoughts / habits	Lack of attention to chronic yellow zone stress Stuck in unhelpful patterns More disengaged / isolated Overdoing Underdoing Stigma	Lack of attention to orange zone stress Not seeking help / expertise Engaging in counterproductive behaviors

Actions that Contribute to Stress in a Pandemic

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READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Safety: Stay informed Face facts Calm: Change expectations Be patient Keep balanced Connect: Apart But Connected Self-Efficacy: Plan and adapting Focus on prevailing Problem solve Make routines Seek mentoring/training Hope: Live by values Find gratitude Faith / philosophy	Safety: Take a marathon approach Build healthy habits Set boundaries Calm: Be disciplined about taking breaks Identify unhelpful thoughts Practice helpful thoughts Focus on what you can control Connect: Seek specific support Self-Efficacy: Build resilience skills Hope: Make time to reflect Seek mentoring /support	Safety: Get help with setting routines and boundaries Calm: <i>Rest and recuperate</i> <i>Build tiny health habits</i> Connect: Ask for targeted or sustained support Self-Efficacy: Identify unhelpful ruts Tackle one issue at a time Hope: Ask for assistance in reframing unhelpful thoughts Remind yourself that you don't need to be perfect	Safety: Make small positive behavior changes Calm: Pause...take a time out Distance from stressor to reduce agitation Connect: Get formal behavioral health treatment Find a mentor Self-Efficacy: Regain lost ground Rehabilitate as you would a physical injury Hope: Reconnect with values

Self-Care in a Pandemic

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Cover Self-Care Actions

- Actively seek information
- Get an accurate understanding of risks in order to plan
- Educate loved ones about activities / risks
- Get help with personal responsibilities
- Self-monitor for stress reactions
- Plan for regular check-ins with coworkers
- Making contingency plans for different scenarios



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Cover Self-Care Examples: More Helpful Self-Care Thoughts

- "Taking a break from this work will help me be more effective."
- "Even though I feel fine I need to pace myself."
- "I can better care for others if I also attend to my needs."
- "I'm doing enough."
- "I can contribute the most by pacing myself."
- "Letting someone know how affected I am can help me."
- "I can trust that others can fill in when it's necessary."



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Calm Self-Care Actions

Prioritize
simple
preferred
strategies
to use
daily:

Breathing
Exercise
Yoga
Social support
Reflection/meditation/yoga/prayer

Focus
on:

Whatever helps you to keep focused on the present
Being realistic
Planning for long term
Acceptance
What you're grateful for
Adjusting beliefs that don't serve you in this context
Helpful thoughts and habits



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Connect Self-Care Actions

- Seek out contact
- Be open to different types of support
- Discipline yourself to have conversations
- Reprioritize your schedule
- Find creative ways to engage in social activities
- Connect with others around resilience actions
- Help others as you can



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Competence Self-Care Actions

- Focus on what is most needed
- Shift expectations
- Learn from others
- Create routines
- Be flexible
- Re-prioritize
- Evaluate the absolute risk
- Proceed with life's necessities
- Learn or practice resilience skills



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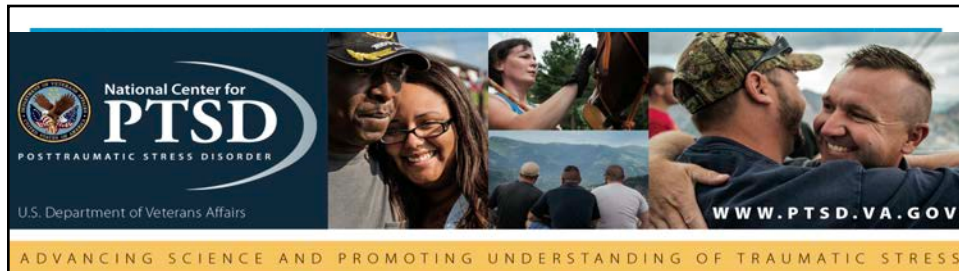
Confidence Self-Care Actions

- Use small triumphs to build confidence.
- If you have doubts, talk with mentors, friends, or spiritual guides, or read more self-help books or articles
- Don't push yourself to "process" the situation in any particular time frame, but if something triggers you, give yourself time
- Use the wisdom gained from experiences to reconfirm your values, make changes in your life, or help others

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**NCPTSD
Covid-19
Related
Fact
Sheets**

- Managing Stress
- Managing Healthcare Workers' Stress
- Providers and Community Leaders
- Mental Health Providers
- Leadership: Supporting Employees
- Helpful Thinking
- Supporting Others
- Grief

Treating PTSD During the COVID-19 Virus Outbreak
Sonya Norman, PhD
Lisa-Ren Cuccumella, PsyD
Marianne Silva, LCSW
Sadie Larsen, PhD
Kelly Phipps Maerltsch, PhD

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Other Potential Resources

The following resources may be helpful:

- NCPTSD PTSD Provider Resilience Toolkit
- NCPTSD PTSD Coach mobile app
- NCPTSD Mindfulness Coach mobile app
- NCPTSD PTSD Coach online
- VA's Moving Forward Problem-Solving mobile app
- SPR Online Course

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PTSD Consultation Program
FOR PROVIDERS WHO TREAT VETERANS

About the Consultants

- Experienced senior psychologists, psychiatrists, pharmacists, and other health professionals who treat Veterans with PTSD
- Available to consult on everything from toughest clinical scenarios to general PTSD questions

Ask about:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence-based treatment Medications Clinical management Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Referrals Collaborating with VA on Veterans' care Developing a PTSD treatment program
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Available Resources www.ptsd.va.gov/consult

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free continuing education Videos, educational handouts, and manuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTSD-related publications PTSD and trauma assessment and screening tools Mobile apps, and more
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WWW.PTSD.VA.GOV