

Mental well-being tips, resources, and tools to share with public health responders and employees

Below are sample messages about mental well-being that can be shared together or one at a time. The goal is to share short and actionable tips for people to try and to add to their well-being toolbox.

Breathing and Mindfulness

Meditation is a proven tool to reduce stress and anxiety. Focusing on your breath can help calm your central nervous system and interrupt the constant stress we are all experiencing right now. You do not have to build an extensive meditation practice or expertise to benefit. Use one of these tools or simply sit in silence for a few minutes each day and focus on your breathing.

- [Mindful Breathing Tips \(https://us.ctrinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Mindful-Breathing-Tips.pdf\)](https://us.ctrinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Mindful-Breathing-Tips.pdf) - 4-2-4-2 exercise from the Crisis and Trauma Resource Institute.
- [The Three-Minute Breathing Space Practice \(https://www.mindful.org/the-three-minute-breathing-space-practice/\)](https://www.mindful.org/the-three-minute-breathing-space-practice/) - Brief information and a three minute guided meditation.
- [Headspace Meditations \(https://www.headspace.com/covid-19\)](https://www.headspace.com/covid-19) - Brief meditations developed for COVID response.

Nature

[Nature improves our health \(https://www.childrenandnature.org/research/greenspace-exposure-is-associated-with-wide-ranging-health-benefits-across-143-studies/\)](https://www.childrenandnature.org/research/greenspace-exposure-is-associated-with-wide-ranging-health-benefits-across-143-studies/). Nature is a natural antidote to stress and anxiety. Access to nature improves our mood, social connectedness, physical activity, performance, attention, family relationships, and reduces violence, and risk for mental health disorders. [Even access to views of nature \(http://www.childrenandnature.org/research/window-views-to-green-landscapes-help-high-schoolers-recover-from-attention-fatigue-and-stress/\)](http://www.childrenandnature.org/research/window-views-to-green-landscapes-help-high-schoolers-recover-from-attention-fatigue-and-stress/), pictures or sounds of nature can help

us to manage and reduce stress. Nature is especially important for children – it promotes self-regulation, cognitive development, and curiosity. Minnesota is rich in natural resources. How are you connecting with nature every day? Did you bring your office plant home? Could you use your “commute” time to walk outside while working from home? Here is one nature resource even if you cannot get outside.

- [The Forest Awakens-Music and Nature Sounds for stress relief \(https://youtu.be/4cmdDWzhzaU\)](https://youtu.be/4cmdDWzhzaU) - UMN Center for Spirituality and Health, 6-minute video with nature pictures and sounds.

Tips for Working from Home

Work from home is expected to continue for some time. Take steps to improve your workspace. Tips include:

- **WORKSPACE:** Establish some designated workspace, work materials, and work rituals.
- **COMFORT:** Improve the comfort of your workspace; adjust your desk and chair settings appropriately, ensure proper lighting.
- **EQUIPMENT:** Get the equipment you need (e.g. headset, wireless mouse).
- **HEALTH:** Stand up and stretch regularly, schedule breaks, establish a routine if you can, eat healthy foods.
- **LONELINESS and ANXIETY:** Connect with others, with video if possible. Take a few minutes before going back to home life, and write down how you are feeling each day.
- Reach out for support if you need it!

Finding Flow and Purpose

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the author of [Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience \(https://www.amazon.com/Flow-Psychology-Experience-Perennial-Classics/dp/0061339202\)](https://www.amazon.com/Flow-Psychology-Experience-Perennial-Classics/dp/0061339202), describes FLOW as a state of mind when you are in deep concentration, working on something that is challenging but for which you have the skills to accomplish. Finding FLOW contributes to our sense of accomplishment and purpose. Ultimately, frequent experiences of FLOW improve our daily and long-term **happiness**. During COVID many of us are experiencing frequent interruptions from family at home or even from the constant sound of emails, disrupting our opportunity for this experience.

Some tips to help find flow, even for a part of each day, include:

- Set a goal for each day that is meaningful and feasible.

- Reduce distractions for a designated part of each day (turn off email if you can, or turn down the tone, turn off your phone)
- Recognize your accomplishments.
- Consider how you feel when you are in Flow.

Coping with Grief and Loss

Everyone is experiencing some loss from COVID-19- from disruption in work, sharing a laugh in the coffee room, connections to our loved ones, participation in community practices and rituals, and even death of a community member, family, or friends.

- We have to understand **how to support and communicate with each other, our staff, and community members** who are all managing some grief and loss. People process grief differently. Helpful practices include: communicate frequently, provide brief and clear messages, promote calm and positive energy, promote community rituals and togetherness, acknowledge grief, be authentic with your own experience, avoid blaming, and model tolerance and patience as the “new normal” continues to change. For other communication tips visit:
- [Grief Leadership During COVID-19](https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Grief_Leadership_During_COVID19.pdf) (https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Grief_Leadership_During_COVID19.pdf) - Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress tip sheet for leaders on how to support communities and organizations with grief. (4 minute read)

Practicing Self-Compassion

"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable." –Fred Rogers

Various kinds of loss due to COVID-19 impacts us all. As public health workers, we care deeply about our work and communities, and may be experiencing loss in many ways. Everyone responds differently to grief; there is no right or wrong way to grieve. As we work together to get through this, **we must be gentle and compassionate with ourselves and others**. We must **allow ourselves and others to feel difficult emotions**, but we do not have to feed them if we feel overwhelmed. Try to stay in the present moment, especially if you feel overwhelmed. Doing something physical or focusing on the sensations in your body can help. For more tips on practicing self-compassion while feeling grief and loss:

- [Coping with Change and Loss in COVID-19 Times](https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/coping-change-and-loss-covid-19-times) (<https://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/coping-change-and-loss-covid-19-times>)

- [Grief and Loss: Helping in the Moment](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDgAn5YJv3o&feature=youtu.be) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDgAn5YJv3o&feature=youtu.be>) - This 6-minute video is especially valuable for those working directly with the public.

Preventing Burnout

Many working in public health have been pulled in to work on the COVID-19 response, and may be more likely to experience burnout. Workplace burnout can happen when we feel overworked. It can also happen when we spend time with overwhelmed people experiencing emotional distress.

Emotions can be contagious and when you spend time with overwhelmed people, it can slowly tap your emotional reserves. Your cup of strength and resilience becomes drained. The closer you are to the stress, the faster the burnout will happen. If there is no opportunity to recharge, you will feel burned out.

Take action to help keep yourself safe and healthy by practicing self-care to recharge. This can look different for everyone. Some things you can do:

- Take breaks. Everyone needs a break. If you are working in high intense situation, you should schedule breaks into your shifts to make sure you are getting enough rest to recover.
- Take care of your basic needs. Make sure you are eating well and getting enough movement into your day. Try picking out healthy snacks before your workday begins to make it easy to access throughout the day.
- Take care of your emotional needs. Chat with others about something you care about, cry freely if you need to, tell a joke or send a joke to a friend or colleague.

Learn more about [Self-care & Organizational Care](https://youtu.be/VcDTXJpCMiY) (<https://youtu.be/VcDTXJpCMiY>) in this 25-minute video. The video highlights the reasons self-care and organizational care are needed in high stress settings, or with people with trauma histories, and provides examples of integrating strategies into workflow.

Compassion Fatigue for COVID Responders

Compassion fatigue can happen when we spend time caring for others, and is much more likely to happen when we are caring for others with significant emotional or physical pain and suffering. Those responding to the pandemic may have broad or specific caregiving roles, and may experience compassion fatigue.

The [First Responder Toolkit App \(https://firstrespondertoolkit.com/\)](https://firstrespondertoolkit.com/) can help you understand your risk for compassion fatigue and traumatic exposure to stress, and provide recommendations for stress management strategies.

The [Compassion Fatigue Wallet Card \(https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/dbhis-collections/disaster-response-template-toolkit/disaster-responder-stress-management\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/dbhis-collections/disaster-response-template-toolkit/disaster-responder-stress-management) by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is another tool to help disaster responders to keep track of their own behavioral health needs.

Connecting with Coworkers to Manage Mental Well-being

Connecting with someone you can talk with is one of the most important tools you can use to help manage stress.

Working virtually has made it challenging to connect organically as we would in a shared office space. Remember, it is okay to take quick breaks with coworkers to chat and catch up. Try to find some time throughout the week to connect with a coworker or friend.

If you can, find a work buddy. If you're new to the workplace, reach out to someone you know and ask them to help you make connections – as your new coworkers, we want to support you! Make a plan to check in with your work buddy daily or every other day. Talk about your work roles, the challenges you are facing and celebrate what you are doing to contribute to your work goals. This helps you make meaning of what is happening, clarifies our purpose, and builds connection.

Another way you can stay connected during this time is to use a video chatting service, such as Skype or Microsoft Teams, and turn on your video camera during calls and virtual meetings. Seeing others' face can help you get a better sense of how they are feeling, and can help you feel more connected to other people.

Need Motivation?

Working from home, often with fewer colleague interactions, with changing roles and responsibilities, and in a world where so much is uncertain can be overwhelming. Add the layers of steps and people required to keep our work in public health moving, and your motivation might be tapped out. Certainly, we all have good days and bad days, but if you are like many folks today, you could use a heavy dose of motivation to get your work groove back on.

TIPS, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS TO SHARE WITH PUBLIC HEALTH
RESPONDERS AND EMPLOYEES

Apply your gratitude muscle to your work! We know that building our gratitude muscle helps improve our well-being. [A study published in the Harvard Business Review](#) indicates that instead of just adding more to our to-do list, jotting down our accomplishments each day can help us stay engaged, find purpose, and maintain our mental well-being. Use this [Daily Work Progress Journal](#) or a personal notebook or journal. Try it for a few weeks. Better yet, try it and share a reflection with your coworkers. Check out the [COVID Wellness Pocket Guide](#) for more action steps and journal ideas.



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