COVID-19 Workplace Re-entry Toolkit

As government and health authorities investigate how to reopen economies and lessen social restrictions, they also face the daunting task of how to do so safely and effectively. These are welcomed discussions for many employers and employees as mandated policies and procedures have impacted society, both at financial and personal levels.

Although a return to previous norms may not be entirely possible, the return to workplaces and common social interactions and practices is imminent. Irrespective of government announcements and health guidelines, employers and employees will need to understand how to reopen and how to implement policies and procedures in the workplace that ensure safe environments for all. At social levels, physical distancing practices may extend well into the future with possible limits on the size of gatherings or events. We all have unique physical, mental, and social considerations to manage.

As these considerations impact your day to day activities, you may find yourself endlessly navigating through various sources of information. At Homewood, we've continued to implement and amend our pandemic response and protocols to align with new practices from trusted sources including Health Canada, The Public Health Agency of Canada, the World Health Organization, and others.

It is our privilege to provide you with timely, supportive, and meaningful communications as we navigate uncharted territory during these unprecedented times. The entire Homewood team is here for you.

This pandemic Workplace Re-entry Toolkit is a consolidation of content focused on the considerations facing employers and employees as the world prepares for life after COVID-19. We've put together a package of informative materials to support you and your organization. Additionally, we've included resources for managers and employees, providing guidance and support while addressing some frequently asked questions.

We're here to help you prepare for and manage the coming days as safely and effectively as possible. Please don't hesitate to reach out should you wish to discuss any components of the toolkit, or if there is anything we can do to provide support to you or your organization.

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SECTION 1

COVID-19
Return to work:
Key considerations
for employers

As governments and health authorities continue to study the COVID-19 virus, its' behaviours and the patterns of infection, employers within all industries prepare for reopening and what that means for their business and the employees who support overall success. While returning to work is a positive signal, employers are cognizant that there is still a long way to go before defeating the virus. The disruption to work and social routines has been incredibly difficult for many. Unfortunately, the pandemic will continue to disrupt our lives for the foreseeable future. It is normal that many employers and employees may be anxious as they prepare to return to physical workplaces. Added to the initial apprehension and worry of becoming infected or potentially exposing a household to COVID-19, are numerous employee sensitivities including but not limited to the following:

- **Preparing for the psychological impact of returning to the workplace**
Returning to work after a prolonged absence, adherence to physical distancing mandates, the use of personal protection equipment and possible self-isolation will be challenging for many. In some instances, employees may have experienced increased workloads, or adjusted to working from work, while others may have lost their employment.

When faced with a return to the physical workplace, and to an environment that differs from what they left, employees may experience feelings of anxiety, grief and/or loss when reflecting on how the world has changed. They may also have fears related to the adoption or acquisition of new work/life skills to keep up with the new normal. As an employer, you can expect that as employees begin to return to work there will be heightened stress and tension.

- **Managing anxiety and stress related to entering public places and using public transit**
Over the past few months, the majority of the workforce has been in the safety of their homes, going out only as needed and with limited social contacts. Returning to work physically, commuting, or being in public places may feel overwhelming. Our bodies may also perceive these scenarios as threats to our safety, which in turn may trigger unwanted physical and emotional reactions. Combined, these factors may create a sense of loss and/or lack of control. If an employee feels unsafe, they may experience the feeling of being scared, leading to freeze or flight reactions which may prevent them from seeing the full reality of a given situation. These are all normal responses to an incredibly stressful time in our communities.

- **Helping to manage bullying and harassment due to COVID-19 related stigma**
  Unfortunately, stigma related to culture, religion, and physical and/or mental health exists in our society and sometimes in our workplaces. Added to the complexity, we now face a new challenge associated with COVID-19 related stigma. The virus has changed the world in unprecedented ways, leaving some employees in a state of uneasiness, with increased feelings of anxiety and/or, depression. An employee who had tested positive for COVID-19 and has recovered may now be returning to work. They may be nervous or worried about how they will be treated if people know they had tested positive. Other employees may be afraid to learn a coworker, friend or family member has tested positive. Unfortunately, stigma and discrimination during COVID-19 have also tremendously impacted persons of Asian or more specifically Chinese descent. These behaviours can increase the chances of stigma with negative implications to your workplace, community, and increase tension when we interact with one another. Just like any behaviour or action that stigmatizes another, this is unacceptable and employers need to be prepared to manage these occurrences.

- **Guidance for higher-risk and essential occupational and industries**
  Not every job is the same. Some occupations represent a higher risk than others and some work environments will require more time to plan and implement adjustments than others. Each employer will need to consider their organizations' specific needs and adopt new policies and practices to ensure safe work environments for their employees and their communities. This may include the introduction of measures to ensure physical distancing, signage and requirements for personal protective equipment.

- **Unique aspects for first responders, front-line workers and public-facing employees**
  First responders, front line workers, and public-facing employees may face unique challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many instances, these employees can become overwhelmed by the amount of illness and death witnessed during the pandemic, which can lead to compassion fatigue or experiences of survivor guilt or moral injury. These combined factors may include mourning the loss of patients, having to make extremely difficult decisions, and responding to continuous questions from patients and their family members, which can lead to a buildup of pressure and potential burnout. For some, fatigue and stress are often factors as they have remained in isolation from family and people they care about for safety reasons. It's imperative employees take the time to share their feelings and seek help when needed. These employees have continued to work during the pandemic and have navigated this unprecedented situation adapting quickly to new realities. It is normal to anticipate that eventually, the experience may have an impact on their mental health.

- **For managers, leaders and key persons. Be prepared for a second wave, and how to deal with continuous change and instability**
  As a manager or leader in the organization, you need to be aware of your own biases as well as the climate of your team(s) when they return to work. It is important that you have access to resources that can support you on how to handle situations involving stigma, discrimination, bullying and conflict resolution. Providing a safe physical and psychological workspace for your employees will help to reduce fears while managing stigma and conflict – allowing employees to come together and thrive. It's important to model behaviours that are expected in the workplace, so your team(s) has a better chance of recovery and success. Make yourself available to staff, answer questions to reassure them about work and other concerns that may arise. If you are managing staff remotely, make sure to use virtual meeting options with video for regular check-ins and to allow teams to connect. It's critically important to foster connections during the pandemic, as isolation can lead to mental health issues and decrease performance and productivity. Make sure to remind staff of the help available through Homewood Health, and what other resources and they may be able to access.

Where applicable, employers must also examine the realities of new work environments, including the rethinking of physical spaces and the rebuilding of infrastructure, while maintaining protocols to ensure employee safety. At this time, there are many public health safety precautions that must be met by all businesses wishing to return to face to face services. Many employers will face challenging questions from an apprehensive workforce Here are a few common questions that may arise:

https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/work-return-coronavirus-employers-employees-1.5555593

- **Do employees have to go back into the workplace if asked?**
  If the employer has met the safety requirements and has taken all precautionary measures outlined by provincial and territorial health authorities, employees are required to return to their physical workplace. Employers should communicate expectations and encourage employees to speak with their manager or leader regarding any concerns.

- **What questions might employees have before they return?**
  When apprehensive, employees might first ask about the actions that the employer has taken to minimize risk and ensure their safety. Measures such as physical distancing and frequent handwashing to lessen the risk of exposure and infection will be important to employees. It's important to note, responses will vary by industry and physical environments. Be prepared for questions that you may not have considered. Ask for feedback. Listen. Act. This will reassure employees that you are serious about reducing exposure in your workplace.

- **Does an employee have to tell the employer if they have been exposed to COVID 19?**
  Employees who could conceivably place someone at risk should inform their employer. Some legal experts suggest that employees who put coworkers or others at risk without informing them could be personally liable. Make sure your employees understand expectations and address any fears that they may have about sharing this type of information.

- **What if an employee returns to work and becomes infected with COVID-19?**
  In general, an employee would not be able to take legal action against their employer. Experts suggest the preferred course of action is to apply for Workers Compensation as a contraction would be treated as a workplace accident or injury. For employees not covered by workers compensation, legal action may be taken if the employer was found negligent. However, determining where you became infected would be challenging.

As provincial governments cautiously introduce the lifting of restrictions and amend regulations for both essential and non-essential businesses, employers are looking at how to reopen safely. Having a clearly communicated strategy and a documented plan in place will assist with the reintegration process. Here are few considerations to support a successful transition back to work.

https://www.snapcomms.com/blog/returning-to-work-after-covid19

- **Manage employee numbers**
  When faced with a large volume of employees returning to shared workplaces, the risk of infection is vast. Consider a staggered reintroduction where possible or establish a process where different sections of employees work from the office every few days. Examine variations in shifts and/or normal business hours. Creating these groups across different departmental or functional lines ensures coverage across multiple functions, supports physical distancing and reduces the risk of exposure.

- **Maintain remote work opportunities**
  Where possible, employers should consider continuing with remote working arrangements for the coming months. There may be future restrictions where the threat of infection remains high. Moving back and forth between central and remote locations can be hugely disruptive. In some instances, if a staff member becomes infected, remote work solutions may be mandated.

- **Rethink physical setup**
  Reopening does not equate to the removal of all restrictions imposed during COVID-19, nor does it mean the risk of infection no longer exists. Businesses must adhere to regulations governing social and physical distancing and hygienic practices. In many instances, reconfiguring office spaces may be necessary based on the potential requirements of having six feet between employees. Bringing employees safely back to work and reopening to the public may require installation of signage and equipment to ensure physical distancing is maintained.

- **Improve workplace morale**
  Often overlooked, the human component of returning to office requires as much focus as any other consideration. Remember, employees who have been away for extended periods may feel unsettled when returning. Unfortunately, some colleagues may have lost their positions permanently. A motivated workforce is essential to overall success. Rebuilding morale and acknowledge employee concerns with sensitivity is imperative.

- **Review infrastructure needs**
  For most businesses, it may take several months to return to pre-COVID-19 conditions. There are now likely deficiencies in the infrastructure and support that employees require to perform their jobs. Each department should review their operations and identify any areas of deficiency, especially in technology and communication.

- **Maintain regular communications**
  The COVID-19 pandemic forced organizations to increase their communications. When employees return to their workplaces, maintaining frequent and open lines of communication will provide reassurance to those with questions about the business and their roles. Acknowledge any uncertainties and increased stress employees might be feeling. Provide as much clarity as possible and encourage employees to speak with their managers and/or leaders.

- **Embed your learnings**
  COVID-19 has brought forward new learnings for businesses. With stronger collaboration within and across teams, organizations have been more productive while reinforcing positive health practices. By embedding your learnings, you are better prepared for tomorrow's challenges.

As we maneuver through the easing of pandemic restrictions for industry and individuals, our collective outlook is a combination of relief, optimism and concern. The reality remains true, the risk of spread and infection still exists and protocols enacted by governments and health authorities must be adhered to. These precautionary measures have to some degree helped to flatten the curve. News of re-openings and vaccines are not indications that the risk of infection has been eliminated. Many employers and individuals continue to face challenges and governments continue to address the needs of various populations. For up to date information please check your provincial government websites, or the following federal website.

https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19.html

**Homewood Health
We're here for you.**

COVID-19: Face-to-Face Treatment Updates

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to all aspects of life for businesses and individuals alike. As we move through this pandemic, news from coast to coast and around the world is beginning to shift to re-opening and getting back to normal with the re-starting of businesses and economies. At Homewood Health, as we examine and identify our requirements to return to what normal may look like and how we can best support our customers and their businesses, we continue to pay close attention to the guidance offered by public health and provincial government officials.

As we maneuver and manage a safe and effective return to face-to-face counselling, our commitment to a professional and quality experience remains as high as ever. Here are a few of the key considerations we continue to examine to ensure we deliver a meaningful solution that brings forward the level of safety, support and resolution being sought for all stakeholders:

- We are going to move cautiously, following the highest national standards, as the consequences of being a part of an outbreak are significant. Should a client, employee or member cause the spread within their workplace or home, the impact and priority considerations are:
  - The health and safety of our service providers;
  - The health and safety of our clients; and
  - The health and safety of our customers work and their environments

- In order to begin re-introduction of face to face counselling, we will need to ensure that all cleaning/decontamination protocols along with physical distancing guidelines are followed. Homewood has the best chance of ensuring this in our own offices. This is equally as challenging when it comes to considering re-opening face-to-face access to our service providers who run their own practices in separate locations and facilities.

- As we collectively face the potential of a second wave of the pandemic, we need to consider the implications of contact tracing. Contact tracing requires a substantial amount of time and effort, and carries with it the sacrifice of client confidentiality when information needs to be shared with public health authorities. Not only would that individual's name and whereabouts need to be supplied, but also the names of other clients seen by that service provider during the same period of time and within the same space.

- A subsequent factor is the need for physical distancing, and the time required to thoroughly sanitize counselling spaces between counselling sessions. This, just like with retail outlets, means fewer clients can be seen within the course of a working day. This is further compounded if re-launching our own offices, meaning fewer face to face counsellors will be available in our network. This will lead to significant delays when requesting face to face counselling.

Due to the above factors, and the significant risks associated with a premature return to face to face support, Homewood Health will maintain its current practice of offering virtual counselling and support to its clients and customers. With respect to Crisis Management Services (CMS), Homewood Health will also continue to offer virtual support, and evaluate the need for face to face support on a case by case basis, using the highest standard of safety protocols.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership through this challenging time across the globe. We genuinely appreciate the trust you place in Homewood Health to provide support to you, your organization, your managers, your employees and the people they care about.

We're here for you.

COVID-19: Workplace Re-entry – Provincial Guidelines

As federal and provincial governments along with health authorities share information on re-opening strategies for businesses, the need for up to date information is increasingly essential. Employers and employees will need to plan and implement policies and procedures to reopen and ensure a safe workplace environment. At a social level, physical distancing practices may be extended for the foreseeable future with possible limits on the size of gatherings or events. We all have unique considerations to manage, including physical, mental and social perspectives.

The table below summarizes key information at the provincial and territorial levels and is meant to be used as a general guideline. For current and up to date information, please use the links provided to the websites for each province and territory.

We're here to help. Please don't hesitate to reach out for support for you or your organization.

Common Requirements	
Physical Distancing Measures	• Where possible, position workers two metres apart and maintain a two metre distance between clients • You may consider stay at home policies if employees exhibit any cold or flu like symptoms including coughing, sneezing, having a runny nose, sore throat, or prolonged fatigue • Where possible, establish work from home arrangements and/or flexible work hours • Avoid in-person meetings, add support for telephonic and/or virtual conferencing if possible • Limit gatherings • Staggering start times, shifts, breaks and lunches • No handshakes • Avoid and/or limit non-essential travel • Avoid shared work spaces and supplies
Engineering Controls	• Implement physical barriers as needed, where possible
Administrative Controls	• Hand hygiene • Increased cleaning/infection control policies • You may consider policies to stay home with cold or flu like symptoms and when they can return to work, ensure no disincentive to stay home when sick • You may consider policies regarding who can be at the workplace/prohibit and limit visitors • Where possible and required, review and revise policy for working from home • Where possible and required, review and revise policy/process for work refusals • Where possible and required, review and revise policy regarding following provincial health orders • Review travel policy • You may consider provisions for additional sick time • Provide mental health resources • Provide hand sanitizer • Provide staff training • Post signage • Conduct hazard assessments • Conduct contact tracing • Where possible, implement temperature checks or other screening measures
Personal Protective Equipment	• May be required where two metre distance cannot be maintained e.g. gloves, face shield or face mask

Province	More information
Alberta	https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-workplace-guidance-for-business-owners.pdf
British Columbia	https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/covid-19-provincial-support/bc-restart-plan
Manitoba	https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/infomanitobans/print,workplaces.html
New Brunswick	https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/covid-19/covid-op-plan-guide.pdf
Newfoundland	https://www.gov.nl.ca/covid-19/files/Physical-Distancing-for-Businesses.pdf
Nova Scotia	https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/occupational-health-and-safety/
Ontario	https://news.ontario.ca/opo/en/2020/04/ontario-providing-employers-with-workplace-safety-guidelines.html
Prince Edward Island	https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/topic/business-0
Quebec	https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/answers-questions-coronavirus-covid19/employers-workers-covid-19/
Saskatchewan	https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/health-care-administration-and-provider-resources/treatment-procedures-and-guidelines/emerging-public-health-issues/2019-novel-coronavirus/re-open-saskatchewan-plan/covid-19-workplace-information
Nunavut	https://www.gov.nu.ca/health/information/covid-19-novel-coronavirus
Northwest Territories	https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/services/employers-employees/health-advice-employers-and-businesses
Yukon	https://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/eco/eco-guidelines-delivery-critical-essential-other-services-covid-19-may-8-2020-final.pdf

As you navigate back to work protocols and requirements, please use the provincial links for up to date information on guidelines and suggested strategies to support both your organization and employees.

SECTION 2

Organizational Wellness and Workplace Interventions: Programs for your organization and employees

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to the workplace for both employers and employees. Our team of experts have developed the following COVID-19 related sessions to support your organization and employees with content focused on the considerations facing employers and employees as the world prepares for life after COVID-19.

COVID-19: Building resilience

In the midst of a pandemic, our normal routines, our relationships with others, and our work and home environments are subjected to sometimes sudden and unexpected change. Having so many areas in our life affected at the same time, together with a sense of not having control over these events, can bring about uncertainty, confusion, worry and stress. But there are techniques for managing these responses. Research shows that individuals can improve how well they adapt to challenges and adversity. This session will help break negative thought patterns and offer healthier ways of thinking and behaving. Participants will be introduced to a variety of effective, practical tools to improve physical health, respect mental/emotional health and even cultivate a strong social support network under the unique circumstances generated by COVID-19.

COVID-19: Calming your mind in challenging times

The COVID-19 pandemic brings unique challenges: social isolation, worry over family and friends, concern for our own well-being, and changes to work and home routines. In the face of these challenges, it is even more important for us to practice self-care, including taking the time to relax and decompress. This session will explore personal stress triggers and review some practical, easy techniques to equip participants with the brief relaxation moments that are such an important tool for coping during these challenging times.

COVID-19: Strategies for managing stress

The challenges and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming: social isolation, worry over family and friends, concern for our own well-being, and changes to work and home routines are all substantial stressors around circumstances we may feel we have little control over. But there are effective techniques that can help to bring us back to equilibrium. This session will explore all aspects of the stress response, focusing on practical tips and tools to bring us to optimal stress levels, thereby helping us to maximize our energy and performance in the face of COVID-19.

COVID-19: Working from Home

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, many employees are now working from home. Although working from home can bring many benefits, it can also present many challenges as employees adjust to home and work lives coexisting within the same location. These challenges can be heightened as employees try to cope with isolation, disruption and the uncertainties surrounding COVID-19. This session will equip employees with practical strategies to help them create healthy boundaries between work and home life, manage distractions during working hours, take care of themselves physically and emotionally, and maintain effective communication with their colleagues and clients.

During this one-hour wellness session employees will:

- Understand and acknowledge the "new realities"
- Create a plan for working from home efficiently
- Develop coping skills
- Manage a healthy work-life balance

COVID-19: Self-Care Strategies

We often hear people say "take care of yourself." What does this really mean? The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unique challenges including but not limited to: social isolation, worry over family and friends, concern for our well-being, and changes to work and home routines. In the face of these challenges, it is even more important for employees to practice self-care. This one-hour session will increase employees' awareness and understanding of self-care and highlight the factors that can promote and preserve their health and well-being during the COVID-19 crisis. Employees will gain practical tools and resources to activate their own personal self-care practice.

During this one-hour wellness session employees will:

- Increase awareness & understanding of what self-care is
- Enhance their knowledge of the factors that can support health & well-being during the COVID-19 crisis
- Gain tools and strategies for the development of a successful practice of daily self-care to enhance well-being during this challenging time

Reducing Anxiety and Managing the Transition to Remote Work during the COVID-19 Crisis

Part I – Reducing Anxiety: Anxiety is an adaptive response to real or perceived danger.

For many of employees the COVID-19 pandemic makes for a very uncertain future. While anxiety is a normal and expected reaction to the pandemic, too much anxiety may cause harm and take a toll on one's mental health and well-being. This 30 minute session will explore practical strategies and resources employees can start using today to help mitigate stress and anxiety.

Part I – During this 30-minute wellness session employees will:

- Increase awareness of anxiety in relation to the current COVID-19 crisis
- Learn strategies to manage anxiety and increase well-being both during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

Part II - Managing the Transition to Remote Work – COVID-19.

The immense speed at which things are evolving with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented.

For many employees this has resulted in an abrupt shift in their work environment from an office setting to that of working from home. Whether your employees are seasoned remote workers or new to this arrangement, the transition and associated uncertainty can feel overwhelming. This 30 minute session will explore strategies for navigating the transition with greater ease while providing tips and tools to increase your wellbeing and productivity in this new work setting.

Part II – During this 30-minute wellness session employees will:

- Gain a better understanding of the change process in the context of COVID-19
- Learn practical tools and strategies to increase your wellbeing and productivity in a remote work setting

COVID-19: Foundations of Positive Parenting

The sudden and drastic changes to family life as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming to children and parents. This practical session will provide employees with the principles and tools of positive parenting that focus on children's skills in social development and well-being. Employees will also be given an opportunity to review and discuss strategies for bringing positive parenting into the home during these challenging times.

During this one-hour wellness session employees will:

- Gain a better understanding of what positive parenting entails

- Use this foundation as a springboard to parenting practices that can help your child develop social development and well-being skills

- Learn effective strategies to facilitate positive behaviour, help prevent misbehaviour and deal effectively with inappropriate or unwanted behaviour during these challenging times

COVID-19: Communication in Family Life

The challenges and uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming: social isolation, worry over family and friends, concern for our well-being, and changes to work and home routines. These added levels of stress are likely to put a strain on family relationships. This session describes some fundamental aspects of communication that apply to interactions within families. Employees will review communication strategies and skills that allow for healthy and open communication to enhance the quality of their relationships during these challenging times.

During this one-hour wellness session employees will:

- Discuss common issues related to family communication that may be heightened during the COVID-19 crisis

- Gain an overview of some effective strategies for improving communication in the family during this challenging time

- Develop self-expression and listening skills

Managing Remote Teams (for managers, leaders and key personnel)

Workplaces are increasingly moving to, and recognizing the benefits of, remote working arrangements. Remote arrangements can include full-time telecommuting, flexible work schedules, compressed workweeks, working from home or elsewhere, and many more alternatives. Although remote work arrangements come with many benefits, including improved employee productivity and greater job satisfaction, as a leader, it's important to understand what the barriers are and how to overcome them to build a successful and productive virtual team.

During this one-hour wellness session mangers, leaders and key persons will:

- Understand and recognize the challenges and strengths that a remote workforce brings

- Learn about what drives success in virtual teams

- Discover strategies that can increase remote employee engagement and productivity

Given the impact of COVID-19 within the workplace, we have created two new virtual Workplace Intervention programs designed to address various forms of harassment, unanticipated workplace disruptions and employee return to work scenarios by providing the expertise needed during these unprecedented times. Our specialists provide third-party support responding to immediate employer concerns and issues. Our expertise helps employees at all levels by building additional skill sets and developing new perspectives, while concurrently increasing workplace productivity and resilience.

Virtual Support Groups (for managers and leaders or employees)

Virtual support groups are designed to support the unique needs and challenges of two groups; managers, leaders and key personnel and general employee populations. The service provides all participants with an opportunity to share their experiences of the personal impact the pandemic has exacted in both their work and personal lives, and to hear and learn how others have been coping with these challenges.

Virtual support groups are delivered online using a video conferencing platform. A single session or a series of sessions can be scheduled. Typical session lengths range from one to three hours.

Virtual Return to Work (RTW) Focus Groups (for managers and leaders or employees)

The prospect of returning to the workplace may precipitate conflicting emotions for many. On the one hand, many employees may be craving a return to normalcy and the return to familiar and daily routines, being productive, and enjoying social connections at work. At the same time, employees may be confronted by strong feelings of anxiety, stress, worry, anger or fear, and these heightened states of arousal may wittingly or unwittingly contribute to interpersonal friction or conflict if individuals feel their personal health and safety is at risk.

Virtual RTW Focus Groups are designed to support the unique needs and challenges of two groups; leaders and general employee populations. The service provides participants with an opportunity to discuss the personal impact of this experience as well as their concerns related to a full or partial return to work. The service will bring to the forefront all of the above concerns and challenges which will allow both managers and employees to be more conscious or mindful of their conduct in the workplace.

The sessions will also provide an opportunity for participants to receive guidance and training on how to better manage difficult emotions and interactions when and if they arise. Virtual RTW focus groups are delivered online using a video conferencing platform. A single session or a series of sessions can be scheduled. Typical session lengths range from two to three hours.

SECTION 3

Crisis Management Services (CMS) Response to COVID-19
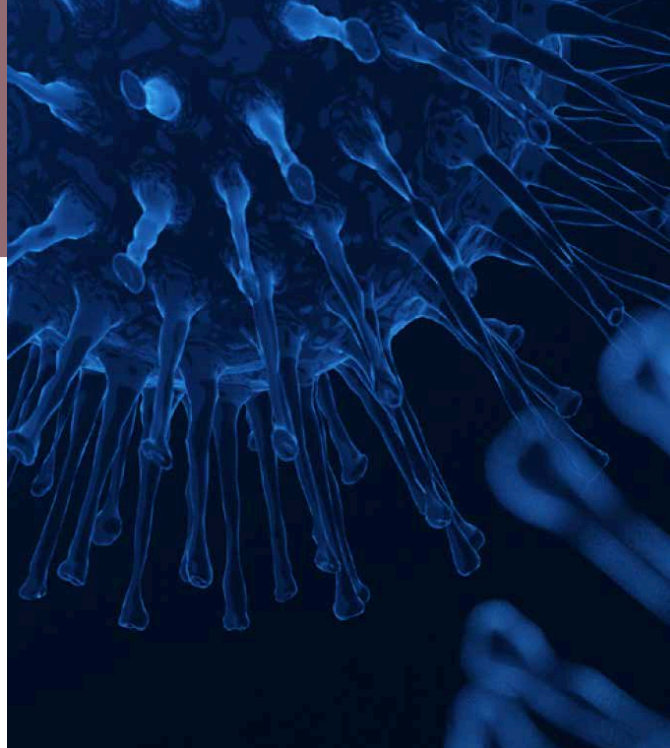
CMS Telephonic and Video Support Options

Option 1
First Call Care. For urgent and immediate needs, employees should be encouraged to call our 24/7 line

to speak with a First Call Care (FCC) clinician (or crisis counsellor). Managers can be offered the option to provide names of their impacted employees so that our Call Service Center (CSC) creates files for them ahead of time, to facilitate the transfer when they call. Our FCC service is free of charge.

Option 2
Outreach Calls. For a CMS response, Customers can also reach out to our CMS team and provide a list of impacted employees, their phone numbers and verbal consent to receive a call back from one of our CMS clinicians. This is reserved for impacted employees showing signs of distress, risk factors, First Responders, or any high need population during this pandemic.

Option 3
Standby. Customers can also reach our CMS team to 'virtually deploy' one or more CMS provider(s) for blocks of time to be available for employees via telephonic calls. This would be set up by the Customer,

and the Employee would call our CMS crisis line to be transferred to a provider or book the next telephonic availability in a confidential manner.

Option 4
Telephonic Groups. The Crisis Management Services program will continue to offer a group support option for impacted teams. A dedicated conference line will be arranged to support a maximum of 10 employees for each group session, facilitated by one of our crisis management clinicians.

Option 5
Video Support. Customers can also request video support, whether it's for individual or group options, with a maximum of 10 attendees. Video support for CMS can be initiated by calling the CSC line and requesting to speak with the Crisis Management Services (CMS) team.

Option 6
In-Person Support. This will be on a case-by-case basis to be vetted by Homewood Health management. This is subject to change.

Homewood TEAMcare™

Designed to mitigate the impact of critical incidents or unique scenarios and challenges facing organizations, Homewood Health has developed its innovative TEAMcare™ solution. This innovative program adapts to address the unique needs of your organization to facilitate a healthy recovery for both the organization and all affected employees. The focus on Cumulative Stress is highlighted in this program as a result of multiple and on-going critical events. As an example, during the COVID-19 crisis, some teams may be working virtually for the first time and may be feeling isolated, anxious, or even lost without the day to day comfort of the worksite. Other teams may be working in unusual ways, or dealing with unanticipated volumes, or in some cases, much less work than they're accustomed to.

Why TEAMcare™?

Our unique TEAMcare™ solution employs a multi-faceted, resilience-based approach. The service is designed to offer consultation, psychological first aid, and psychoeducation on reactions, coping and self-care strategies to team members. TEAMcare™ proactively addresses the range of emotions, reactions and psychological impacts at a group and/or individual level through an ongoing crisis or sustained change to what teams consider normal.

The Intervention

A TEAMcare™ intervention is typically up to three hours in length, delivered either telephonically or by video. The service consists of a group session of up to one hour and an additional two hours of individual stand-by support sessions immediately following the group session, or some variation therein. Typically individual sessions last 20-30 minutes to review, plan, and/or provide coaching needs. An employee may be referred to EAP sessions for ongoing support, or if there is no EAP in place, the organization may opt to fund additional individual hourly sessions for employees who need them.

As a response to COVID-19, group sessions can be either psycho-educational or interactive, and includes a themed discussion surrounding various topics including rebuilding after the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 related stigma, fear and bullying, management support, front-line workers, essentials and public-facing employee realities and challenges, moral injury, survival grief, social anxiety, return-to-work challenges and coping with the new normal. Groups are typically capped at ten employees to ensure sessions are moderated effectively and to allow enough time for employees to share their insights. Multiple group sessions may be facilitated concurrently.

Homewood will provide a group level summary to the organization including key findings, general group-level reactions and recommendations on the next steps to recovery where needed.

Individual sessions allow employees to share greater personal disclosure with details on how they have been impacted and what challenges they face. Where applicable, our experts may recommend additional programs and services to assist with the recovery process and to assess current risks where applicable.

All individual sessions maintain and adhere to strict privacy and confidentiality standards. No individual-level reporting is provided to the organization.

Our team

TEAMcare™ is grounded in current and evidence-informed best practices. Key components include providing support, resiliency coaching, and guidance to assist with post-incident needs. The service provides psychological support and guidance to enhance coping abilities and the return of the workplace to pre-incident levels of functioning. Services are delivered by our large professional national network of trained specialists and are available in both English and French.

For more information on TEAMCare™, including pricing, contact your Homewood Health account executive or call and ask to speak with the Crisis Management Services team:
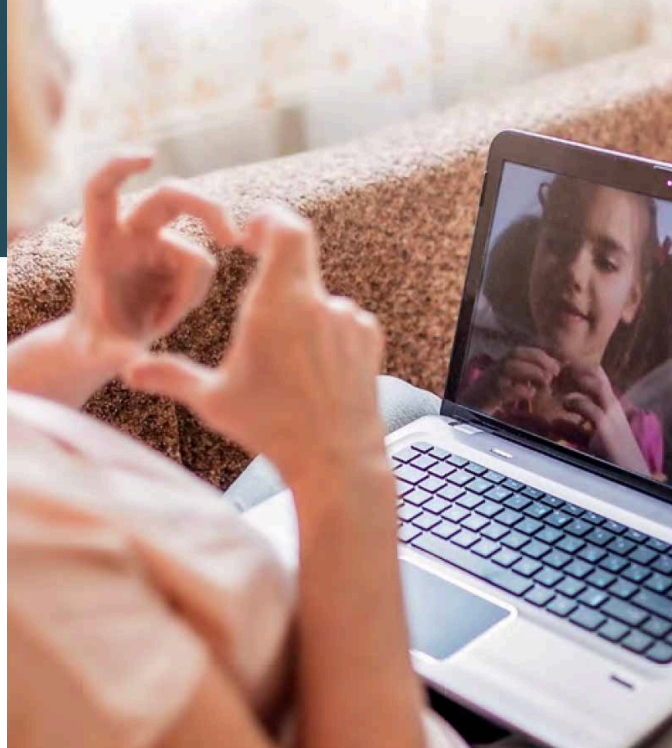
1-800-663-1142 | TTY: 1-888-384-1152 | International (Call Collect): 604-689-1717
Numéro sans frais – en français : 1 866 398-9505

HomewoodHealth.com/teamcare

SECTION 4

COVID-19 Communications, Facts and General Information

COVID-19: Those with family members in long-term care facilities

As the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, public health authorities and medical experts have expressed growing concern for high risk populations, including the elderly. High risk populations have greater susceptibility to infection and more likely to experience possible serious complications if infected.

With a number of long-term care homes across the country in outbreak scenarios, elderly residents face increasing risk of infection and the personal challenges presented by physical distancing, particularly where relatives assisted in providing essential care support.

According to Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's chief public health officer, the majority of deaths from COVID1-9 have been attributed to those who are 80 years of age or older.[1] As a result, families with persons they care for in a long-term care facility have a greater need to timely and reliable information.

As the number of cases increase among long-term care residents and personal support workers, provincial governments are enacting measures to control the spread of infection within facilities. Many homes designed for shared accommodation and common spaces have taken action to create better isolation areas.

In some instances, provinces have stopped support staff from working in more than one home to combat the spread of infection. Additionally, provinces have increased testing frequency for residents and staff while assigning additional funding for personal protective equipment. The federal government has also established new guidelines for long-term care homes including, enhanced cleaning, mandatory medical screening for staff, and physical distancing protocols within common spaces and at meal times.

Dr. Samir Sinha, director of geriatrics at Sinai Health System and the University Health Network in Toronto, listed four considerations of safety for long-term care homes in a recent interview.[2]

- **Is the facility restricting non-essential movement?** Has the home eliminated all non-essential business and visitors, including onsite services delivered through external third parties, and have partial restrictions on visits by family members been established?

- **Are staff members only working in one long-term care home?** Having support staff working at one facility decreases the risk of infection.

- **Are all visitor and staff members wearing masks?** As medical experts continue to investigate the virus, findings have indicated that community and asymptomatic spread is occurring. It's recommended that everyone in the facility wear a mask at all times.

- **How much are they testing?** Recent federal and provincial measures have increased the requirements for testing, including frequency. This applies to both residents and staff.

As families address new challenges related to long-term care, many are questioning whether they should remove the person they care about from the residential care facility. These are difficult and unique scenarios for everyone involved. Dr. Barbara Liu, executive director of the Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto, suggests the following for those considering this important decision.[2]

- **Do you have the physical care needs required?** Seniors often need mobility assistance which may require more than one person or mechanical supports. There may be bathing and dressing needs as well as special dietary considerations, and physical roadblocks like stairs.

- **Do they require cognitive support?** Beyond physical challenges, as a caregiver you need to consider the cognitive difficulties that may be present including dementia. In some instances behaviours may be unpredictable and combative. Additionally, there may be a risk of wandering without continuous supervision.

- **What are their medical requirements?** Families need to consider the ability to administer appropriate medications including injections and oxygen. Caregivers also need to monitor and recognize changes in health condition and how to access help when needed.

- **Will they be able to return to the facility after the pandemic?** It's important to verify policies with the home before making a decision. In some instances you may be placed on a waiting list or fast-tracked. Remember, it's best to ask questions before taking any action.

Remember, the task of becoming a primary care provider is physically and emotionally demanding and the requirements on time are varied. Many families find themselves as the sandwich generation, meaning caring for both children and parents while managing professional work obligations. Take time to understand your unique situation, becoming educated will assist in your decision making.

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COVID-19: Increases in Domestic Violence

Self-isolation and quarantine are essential in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Unfortunately, home is not the safest option for individuals and families experiencing domestically violent relationships. As quarantine measures continue, many experts and statistics show domestic violence is increasing.

Victims are experiencing intensified environments with growing frequency as many are confined at home with their abusers. Separate from physical violence, abusive relationships often involve isolation from friends, family and co-workers. Victims are subjected to constant surveillance; strict behavioural demands; and restrictions to necessities. Many resources are becoming overwhelmed with increased calls and many shelters have reduced capacities, as they've had to implement physical distancing protocols within their facilities.

Government reaction

The Canadian Government is providing up to $50 million to women's shelters and sexual assault centres. This additional support will help community organizations across the country to stay operational and accessible to victims. Many shelters are working with community partners and police to find safe spaces for those suffering from domestic abuse.

The breakdown of this funding, according to the Government of Canada is as follows:

- Up to $10 million will be provided to Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) and their existing network of 46 emergency shelters on reserves to support Indigenous women and children fleeing violence.

- $40 million will go to Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) with up to $30 million assigned to address the immediate needs of shelters and sexual assault centres.[1]

Increase in domestic violence calls

It has become harder for women to leave unsafe situations. "Vancouver's Battered Women's Support Services says their staff have seen a 300 percent increase in calls over the last three weeks."[2]

Added to these complex and difficult scenarios is the presence and potential for children to witness domestic abuse as school closures have been extended until further notice.

Support for mental health

Potentially, without physical access to normal resources and support systems such as other family members, victims of abuse will have to adjust for necessary support. If you or someone you know needs help, reach out to local crisis centres or one of the support services below for assistance.

Support services

There are many support services for individuals experiencing domestic violence – with the increase of calls during COVID-19, the lines may be busier than normal. Here are victim helplines or crisis centres depending on your provincial or territory location.

Alberta	Family Violence Info Line	780-310-1818
British Columbia	VictimLink BC	1-800-563-0808
Manitoba	Provincewide Family Violence Helpline	1-877-977-0007
New Brunswick	Domestic Violence Outreach, Saint John	506-632-5616 or 506-649-2580
Newfoundland	Hope Haven Transition House Crisis Line	709-944-6900
Northwest Territories	NWT Help Line	1-800-661-0844
Nova Scotia	Transition House Association of Nova Scotia	1-855-225-0220
Nunavut	Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Helpline	867-979-3333
Ontario	Victim Support Line	1-888-579-2888
Prince Edward Island	P.E.I. Family Violence Prevention Services	1-800-240-9894
Quebec	Domestic Violence Hotline	514-873-9010
Saskatchewan	24-hour Crisis and Abuse Line	1-800-214-7083
Yukon	Yukon Victim Services	867-667-8550

As the pandemic continues, victims are more likely to experience increasing episodes of violence as households face potential job loss and financial setbacks. In many instances, isolation has broken existing support networks, making it more difficult for victims to get help or escape. If you find yourself in immediate danger, call 911.

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COVID-19: Support for First Responders, Front Line Workers and Public Facing Employees

As a first responder, front line worker, or a public facing employee, you are subject to ongoing and unique challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this article, we will provide tips on building resilience, preventing burnout and managing your intake of media surrounding the pandemic.

Building resilience

Resilience is an important quality given the fast-paced, stressful, and ever-changing world of COVID-19 realities. Resiliency is our ability to face life's challenges, cope with disruptive change and to rebound from setbacks without acting in a dysfunctional way.[1] Being resilient doesn't mean you don't feel sad, angry or upset because of a traumatic or difficult event. It ultimately means you find a way to deal with the challenges presented. To help build resilience, you can follow the tips below:

1. **Create a support system.** Having family members, friends or even coworkers who you can share your thoughts and feelings with is an important step towards building resilience.

2. **Be aware of your mental health.** Pay more attention to your feelings and acknowledge how you are feeling or reacting at the time of these events.

3. **Don't judge or blame yourself.** Don't criticize yourself for having these reactions, and remember to be patient with yourself.

4. **Develop your problem solving and communication skills.** When faced with a crisis, learn to rationally examine the situation and come up with solutions. Stay calm and remain focused on the problem.

5. **Find ways to distract yourself during non-working hours.** Some people find it helpful to dedicate time to hobbies, exercise or routine chores.

Resilience helps us in every aspect of our lives – from the day-to-day frustrations and challenges of parenting and working to coping with unexpected challenges, tragedies and setbacks. It's more than bouncing back from adversity. Resilience is the ability to bounce forward – coming back stronger, wiser and better able to face future adversities.

Preventing burnout

Working and placing yourself at increased risk of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic may be adding additional stress and complexities to your personal life and everyday working situations. Many front line workers may be experiencing increased fatigue and signs of burnout during these unprecedented times.

Burnout has been defined as the consequence of severe stress, high ideals and from working too hard, too much and for too long. In times of unprecedented hardships with long hours and workloads partnered with the constant emotional demands of the job and pressures to excel can take their toll on a person's emotional, physical and mental health.

Severe conditions may cause one to become disillusioned, exhausted, and in some instances unable to cope with the events of the day. They're burned out.

Symptoms of burnout

- Feeling tired and drained most of the time
- Frequent headaches, back pain, muscle aches
- Change in appetite or sleep habits
- Self-doubt, feeling as if you've failed
- Feeling helpless, trapped or defeated
- Loss of motivation
- Withdrawing from responsibilities
- Using food, drugs or alcohol to cope

Take some time for yourself. When was the last time you took the necessary time to relax, reflect and recharge? Rest and relaxation not only revitalize, but provides new goals and new perspectives.

Managing your media and online intake

With the inundation of COVID-19 news and media coverage, it can be difficult to disconnect, especially while being submersed during working hours. There are unlimited sources of information, and it can be overwhelming. What can you do to help stay calm during this period of unprecedented change?

It's common that during periods of difficulty or natural disasters we are more exposed to media and our feelings of distress or anxiety may increase. It's important to give yourself a break from the news and being submersed in the realities of the pandemic. It's important to not avoid the news entirely but be mindful of the source – as some information can be vague or unfounded. It's always better to rely on trusted forms of communication from organizations such as Health Canada, Centers for Disease Control or World Health Organization rather than social media and other, sometimes unreliable resources. Check back periodically, but don't overconsume to a point where you are feeling overwhelmed.

Try and focus on something else. During this time, relying on your support network can be particularly helpful. Keep in touch with your friends and loved ones, but talk about things other than COVID-19 (entertainment, pop culture etc.) so you aren't causing or feeding into more worry. Also try and take some time to focus on a hobby such as reading, writing or trying something new to help you relax.

If you find that your distress, burnout or anxiety is interfering with relationships, school or work, you may want to reach out to your EAP or a mental health professional. If you are already in treatment for a condition, you should continue being treated during the pandemic.

How to prevent infection

Although many measures have been implemented to protect the public from COVID-19, we each play a part in managing risk. As a reminder, here are some tips to implement into your daily practices and routines to further protect yourself while on the job.[2]

- **Wash your hands frequently.** Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.

- **Maintain physical distancing, when possible.** When someone coughs or sneezes they emit small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain virus. If you are too close, you may breathe in the droplets.

- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.** Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth. From there, the virus can enter your body and can make you sick.

- **Practice respiratory hygiene.** Droplets spread the virus. By covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze, you protect the people around you from further risk of infection.

- **If you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early**. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent spread of viruses and other infections.

Homewood Health would like to extend our thanks and express our gratitude for all first responders, health care workers, front-line and public facing workers including those who are putting themselves at risk to help others during these difficult times.
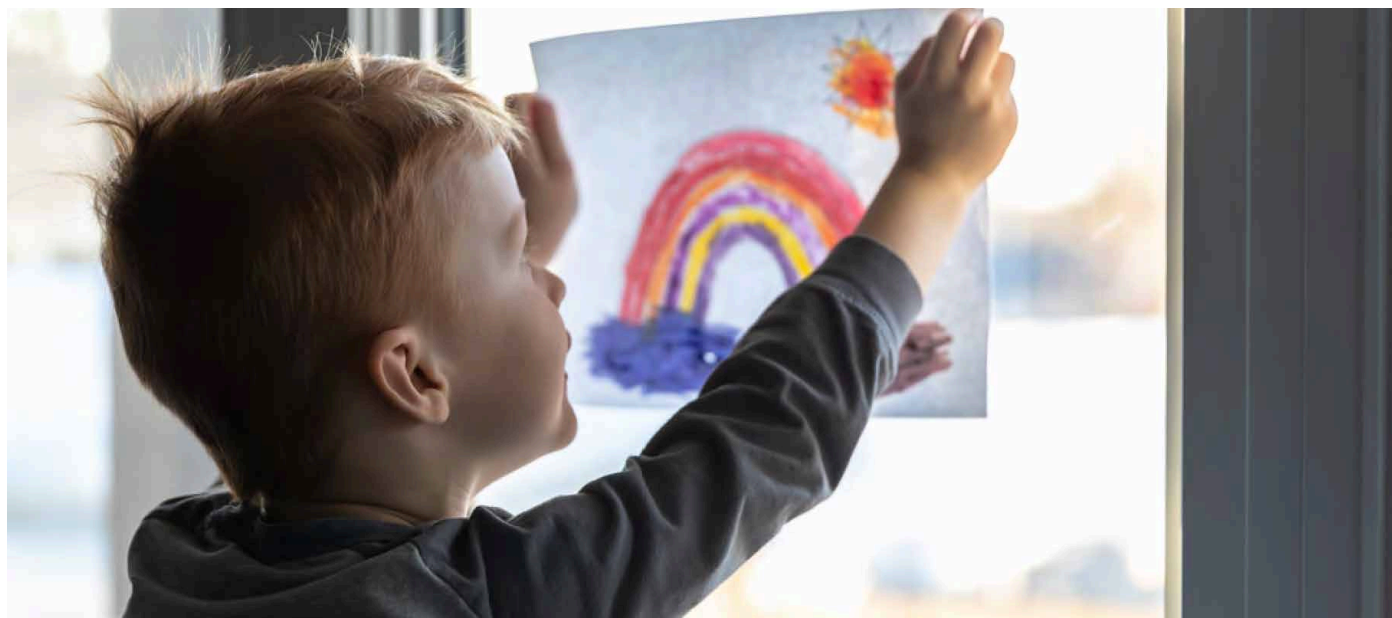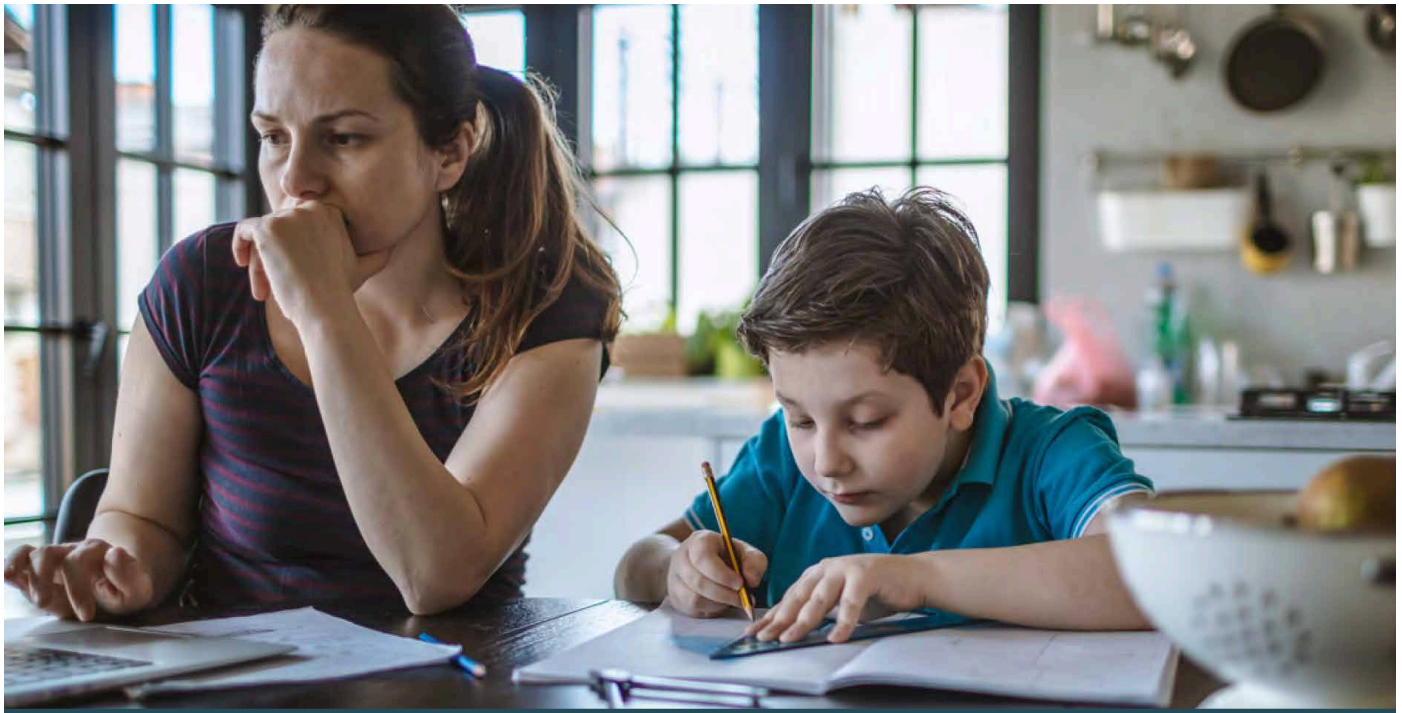
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Parenting during a pandemic

As we enter a new month of COVID-19 protocols, the indirect and evolving implications of the pandemic are establishing new norms and roles within our family units for parents, guardians and those tasked with childcare responsibilities.

For employees of essential service organizations, and as non-essential entities ponder re-opening strategies and requirements, employees with children face numerous challenges including extended school closures, childcare facility shortages and the increasing necessity to provide adequate and sometimes constant care with educational support. These demands paired with the new realities of remote work environments and the professional obligations of day to day work have amplified the need for employee support measures and workplace flexibility.

Here are a few suggestions on how to manage the enormous task of taking care of children while remaining productive and performing your day to day obligations.[1]

1. **Be upfront about expectations.** Proactively communicate with your employer. Inform them that your children are at home and note you cannot guarantee your work or work calls will be interruption-free. This applies to your children as well. Explain that working from home means you have responsibilities that require your attention.

2. **Split the work.** Where possible and permissible, if you have a partner or spouse you may consider taking shifts. For instance, one person watches the kids in the morning while the other works, and vice versa in the afternoon.

3. **Prioritize your schedule.** Arrange the most engaging and reliable activities for the kids during a time when they can be on their own and when you need to be most productive.

4. **Take mini breaks.** Consider temporary changes to your work style. Instead of dedicating three consecutive hours to a project, break up the day, allowing you to give your children the attention they need. Recognize their attention spans are short and the potential need to continue working after hours or earlier in the morning.

5. **Be creative with your office space.** Try to find a space with a door that can be closed. Creating physical boundaries can help reinforce the message that you need to be working and to ensure calls are uninterrupted.

6. **Set up virtual babysitters.** Reach out to relatives, friends, babysitters, and teachers. Where possible, arrange and schedule virtual playdates. They can talk, read, play games, sing, and engage in other online activities.

7. **Stress less about screen time.** Under normal conditions, many parents limit screen time. Consider increasing their daily screen time allotment. Remember to explain that it is a temporary adjustment.

8. **Reward good behaviour.** Working from home with kids means maintaining harmony where possible. Consider a reward system for good behaviour and completion of work and chores where applicable.

It goes without saying however, having a good plan, creating structure, and allowing for creativity and flexibility can help you to create an environment that meets the needs of everyone in the household. There is no secret or defined formula, each family unit is unique and diverse in terms of composition and personalities. Here are a few considerations:[2]

• **Communicate a family plan**
It's important to be realistic about your working situation and the willpower needed to remain successful. Take time to explain what's happening. Be transparent about schedules and when you're off limits. Scheduling is vital. However, don't try to mimic a typical workday in the office. Create a daily plan for the family that includes work and school schedules, and make it visible to everyone. For

households with younger children, consider early morning shifts before scheduled 'school hours' begin.

• **Swap in and out with your spouse or partner**
Many of us are navigating our first attempt at homeschooling while monitoring the latest developments and fitting in how to keep the household functional and fed. Create a window for productivity. As the saying goes, divide and conquer, break the day into blocks of time that allow one parent space and time away from the children. Set realistic goals for both the home and work parts of your life, and don't be afraid to let things of less importance slide. If you need to be available for your children throughout the day, focus on your most important tasks first and don't overload your schedule.

• **Remember, enjoy your kids**
Making the best of the situation, rather than dwelling on its challenges, may also make you more productive. Multiple studies have shown links between happiness and productivity. Through physical distancing and stay at home protocols, that may result in finding time to share experiences, increase play and sneak in a few extra hugs throughout the day.

Where possible, adopt flexible working hours that afford you the opportunity to meet or follow your children's schedule. Communicate virtually with your peers as needed, you'll find you share similar experiences and challenges. Don't pre-occupy yourself with children being present. The reality is we are gaining insights into the private lives and homes of our colleagues through virtual meetings and minor distractions during conversations. Remember not to judge yourself. We are all adjusting to new norms and the challenge to remain productive.

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Additional resources...

Wellness Together Canada:
Mental Health and Substance Use Support

Homewood Health Webinar:
Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on Your Mental Health

SECTION 5

Articles and Newsletters

The following section contains several articles on a range of topics which have both direct and indirect relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please feel free to share these articles as desired.

Healthy Habits:
Positive influences on mental health and addiction

Being in recovery can sometimes feel like you have been placed into a remote location, amid unfamiliar surroundings, with the added complexity and challenge of finding your way back to civilization. Recovery can be lonely, scary and often confusing, with an array of mental and physical obstacles. The path ahead of you doesn't run in a straight line. It's important to recognize and take inventory of the skills and tools you have acquired, and to know how and when to use these strategies to help you navigate your recovery journey. Acknowledging that factors like dedicated time, heartfelt commitment and focused attention are keys to recovery sustainability, you'll need to keep your eyes open to spot all of the resources in your environment that will support you on your journey. As you look at your path each day, you'll discover new self-care supports that may surprise you in their simplicity. No matter how insignificant they may seem, allowing yourself to see the good in every day, appreciating the beauty of natural surroundings, and reaching out for help, or helping others, can be powerful daily additions as you build strength and resilience.

It's easy to rush through your days with blinders on. Sometimes, we're so internally focused that it can be exhausting, leaving us more susceptible to negative thinking. In many instances, we pay more attention to the "bad qualities in others rather than the good ones: the things that worry or annoy us, or make us critical."[1] With a "negative bias" for the "bad, or at best, [looking at] neutral qualities in others and only a sprinkling of good ones you naturally feel less supported, less safe and less inclined to be generous or [to] pursue your dreams."[1] Developing the ability to move outside of a cycle of negative thoughts and observe the positive in other people can do a lot of good. We learn a lot from other people, and this learning increases and broadens our mental and emotional perspectives, which, in turn, makes us more resilient.

Reflecting on positive moments observed during each day can help you change habits: you can see new ways to fix mistakes and solve problems. Throughout your lifetime, your brain catalogues all of your experiences. The science of neuroplasticity shows us that our brain

structure can be changed and adapt to build resilience, form new connections and take control of reorganizing itself.[2]

So how do you start retraining your brain to see the good in every day? Start with small observations by, "seeing the good in others. It's a simple but very powerful way to feel happier and more confident, and become more loving and more productive in the world."[3] When you inevitably reflect on challenges within your day, don't spend all of your time on negatives - be sure also to find at least one good thing. Remember, it doesn't need to be something big. It could be as simple as a smile you offered while you held the door for someone.

It's important to recognize that the good you see in others is also in you. You couldn't see that good if you did not have an inkling of what it was. You, too have positive intentions, real abilities and virtues of mind and heart. Those qualities are a fact, as much as a fact as the chair you're sitting on. Take a moment to let that sink in. You don't need a halo to be a truly good person. You are a truly good person.[3]

Another essential tool for self-care is developing an appreciation for the beauty of natural surroundings. Research points to the benefits of spending time outside where you can get a boost of happiness and feel better connected to the world. "Well-being increases if people simply take time to notice the nature around them."[4] The examples in the study showed that nature can be "anything not human-built: a houseplant, a dandelion growing in a crack in a sidewalk, wildlife, or sun through a window."[4] Participants were asked to take a photo of the natural object they encountered and write a short note about it. It's important to note that "this wasn't about spending hours outdoors or going for long walks in the wilderness, it was about the tree at a bus stop in the middle of a city and the positive effect that one tree can have."[4]

Being in natural surroundings can allow you to be more open to multi-sensory experiences where you awake more of your brain through the sights, smells, tastes, touches, and sounds to create associations that form strong memories.[5]

Go ahead, exercise – go outside for a walk. Look around at your physical surroundings and forget for a moment or two about "your needs, worries, regrets or desires for the future."[6] You'll not only benefit your mental health but also your physical health by spending time in green space. In one study, "Forest bathing", where people spend time sitting, lying down or just walking around in nature, lowered blood pressure, reduced heart rates and decreased stress. In addition, research suggested that people who spent time outdoors had a lower risk of developing Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease than those who did not spend any time outside. Spending time outdoors also increased how long research participants slept.[7] Give it a try – take off your shoes and walk barefoot in the grass. You'll feel more grounded as a result.

Not only can immersing yourself in nature bring significant benefits, but surrounding yourself with positive, supportive people can make a big difference in helping you to keep moving forward on a sustainable recovery pathway. Interestingly enough, this can go both ways. Reaching out and helping others who are just starting their journey through recovery can be a highly effective, positive therapy because it can, "take the attention off yourself... assist the other person in making progress and [you may] receive gratitude for your efforts" which, in turn, can give you perspective, boost your sense of purpose and make you feel happier.[8] Being able to recognize earlier challenges that you faced and overcame, and speaking with others about it, helps develop strength and gives you a chance to reflect upon how far you have come in your recovery.

Recreation therapy programs help in similar ways. People work to regain control over their lives and actions, relax their minds and bodies, and rebuild social skills, self-esteem and confidence through the connections they make to other people in their community. They can participate in, "exercise groups such as yoga, and other physical activities such as active games, creative arts, woodworking and crafts."[9]

While these all help, it's also important to remember some of the most important things that will help during recovery:

1. Taking time to take a break when you need it.

2. Remembering how important exercise and proper nutrition are to your strength.

3. Staying connected to your social circle for support and encouragement.

Having a greater awareness of what it's like to feel well from positive influences will mean that you can develop a sense of the symptoms you may experience if you are feeling unwell. Recognizing those symptoms and using these tools is a supportive way to help you stay on course as you recover, and help you learn when you may need to call for targeted, professional care.

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Healthy Habits: Actions to recovery

When we feel safe, secure and well connected to our families and people within our communities, we develop a sense of belonging and an understanding of who we are. These attributes allow us to have confidence in our actions and enable us to live our lives in ways that are satisfying and meaningful. In short, we create a baseline for what good mental health feels like. In contrast, when we're overwhelmed and/or looking to solidify our relationships and roles, we can experience mental health challenges that create further disconnectedness and detachment. Treatment and therapy are a key component of the critical support needed to re-establish the baseline of feeling well, which leads to healing, but there are also actions we can undertake to compliment and encourage sustainable recovery.

The process of recovering your mental health helps you find the parts of yourself that were lost; helps you learn about what makes you strong and where you are most vulnerable; encourages you to accept support from people who care about you; and shows you ways that you can create a life focused on positive interactions. Recovery from a period of poor or challenging mental health isn't instant, and it's something that will always be with you: "It is important to remember that recovery is not synonymous with cure."[1]

Remember to be kind to yourself along your journey and include, "hope, dignity, self-determination and responsibility."[2]

What does recovery look like?

For recovery to be successful, you need to embrace actions that will help you heal. The personalized care you receive is going to help you learn about and create a positive sense of self. There is no single service or solution, therapy or treatment that will improve everyone's mental health, because everyone is different. There are however, things you can do to help find what feels right for you:

- Accept and understand that you are receiving personalized care that is going to help you create a "positive identity outside of being a person with [a mental health disorder]."[3] Developing an understanding that you are not defined by the labels of any diagnosis you receive: you are a whole person, which embodies all of your characteristics and traits surpassing those tied to your medical diagnosis.

- Be willing to accept help, recognizing that your current health, your social interactions and quality of life can be improved.

- Be prepared to trust that the people developing your personalized recovery plan see you as an individual and will be putting supports in place that will help you given your individual situation and needs.

- Find and hold onto hope. It's an essential part of recovery that helps to keep you motivated and focused during recovery.

• Recognize you will be involved in making choices that support your best recovery path and allow yourself to take responsibility for as much as you can in your life.

- Be willing to learn and accept that you will regain control in your life. Part of your treatment may help you identify things that have been harmful in your past and acknowledge how these may not be helpful as a part of your recovery. Instead, you may be encouraged to try new things with the support of the professionals and people who care about you. You'll enter into the healing process with insight and begin to develop definitions to build self-worth and self-esteem. You will see how you fit into the world, your contributions, and understand how and why you matter.

- As you recover, you will begin to recognize warning signs that indicate you may be moving backwards or reverting to previous harmful actions and behaviours. Identify your behaviours and moods that signal a shift in how you are thinking. With time, you will learn to see and acknowledge signs that you need to seek help and guidance, which will allow you to avoid risks that may result in a crisis.

Here's a small list of common warning signs that many people experience when faced with mounting mental health challenges. It's important to note that warning signs will differ between individuals. The signs noted below may also be attributed to physical health concerns. If you notice things starting to break down, you may want to consult your primary care physician or a counsellor:[4]

1. Being angry at people who you care about

2. Confusion, forgetfulness or thinking that is not clear

3. Crying and not being able to stop

4. Experiencing physical symptoms that are not usually present (excessive tiredness, lack of appetite, heart palpitations)

5. Feeling overwhelmed and that you can't go on

6. Lack of motivation

7. Wanting to withdraw and avoid people

Recovery doesn't happen without your input and involvement

Your involvement in defining your recovery journey is key because it is so personalized. The professionals who are supporting you are only one element. Your mental and physical health are often affected in some capacity, and treatment options will look at all aspects of your health. A combination of mental and physical treatments are the best approach to securing and maintaining achievements during recovery. That means your care may involve pharmacological treatment, psychological therapy and physical care (exercise and diet).

• As you acquire knowledge and an understanding of the help being provided, you will contribute to the creation of how you want to define what feeling well means to you, which, in turn, allows you to offer insights and choices about your care.

- Think about the kinds of activities you enjoy when you are well. Do you like to cook, read or exercise?

- Determine what feels meaningful with respect to the activities you feel comfortable participating in during your recovery.

- You may want to work with your caregivers to create a personal plan for mental health to help your caregivers understand when they should intervene, what your care preferences are during a crisis, and how and when to recognize that you feel comfortable in resuming full control. Having a documented plan can make things more transparent for everyone involved and ensure your wishes are articulated during times when you may need more help.

• During recovery, it's import to have the right attitude towards sharing information, communicating and embracing care partnerships.

- There may be some hesitation; however, sharing relevant information will help the people who are caring for you understand what your wants and needs are during recovery and will ensure synchronized and well executed transitions of your care requirements.

- Be willing to learn more about yourself, your strengths and vulnerabilities, your family relationships and your friendships. Observe and identify how these interactions relate to your mental health when you are well and when you are in need of more support or are ill. This knowledge creates valuable meaning that can help you address your past and can help you define and reinforce positive choices in your care plan.

• Another important action is your willingness to regularly re-evaluate where you are within your recovery journey with honesty and courage.

- There are many tools you can explore to help you with this aspect of recovery. Review questions and contemplate scenarios that help you assess how you are feeling and set goals for yourself that allow you to track your progress.

- Realize that your recovery effort is ongoing. The work needed may diminish with time, however it will never finish. Recognize this is a positive thing. Looking at your adversities through a recovery

lens will help you find balance and a fulfilling life. As you gain more insight and the ability to recognize your signs of crisis, you will learn when you need to invoke a different degree of care. You can regain control of and manage your mental health.

Some questions you may ask yourself to assess your current mental health and help set goals[3]

1. What keeps you going?

2. How would you like your life to be different?

3. What are your dreams now? How have they changed?

4. How have you previously moved through tough times in your life? What was helpful? What would you have done differently?

5. What positive ways have you changed or grown as a person?

6. What things have you done or how have you behaved that made you feel really proud of yourself?

7. What would give your life more meaning and make it more enjoyable?

8. When did you last have fun?

9. What would someone who knew you really well say about you? What would you like them to say?
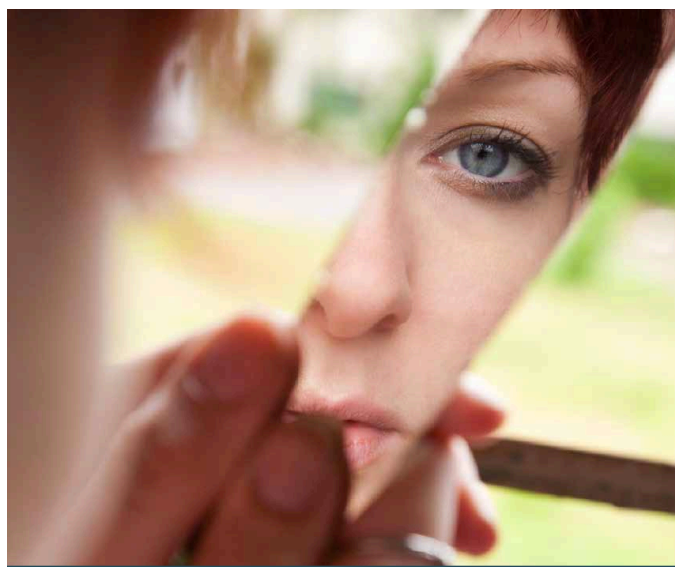
The Principles of Recovery

There aren't a prescribed set of steps to follow for mental health recovery. Instead, it's based on self-discovery, acceptance, personal growth, working through occasional setbacks and learning from all of these experiences. Having a "holistic, person-centered approach to mental health care," where recovery focuses on every aspect of your life is crucial.[5] That means looking at you (both mind and body), your spirit, and your community. Knowing that "It is possible to recover from a mental health condition and the most effective recovery is patient-directed"[5] helps provide a framework for how you can live your life fully and successfully. Working to build upon your strengths and define your purpose with respectful, responsible and supportive care, plus receiving positive reinforcement through social relationships, support groups, family and friends will help you develop confidence and become more comfortable over time. Don't rush and don't look at repeating steps as defeat. It's all part of a healthy recovery experience.

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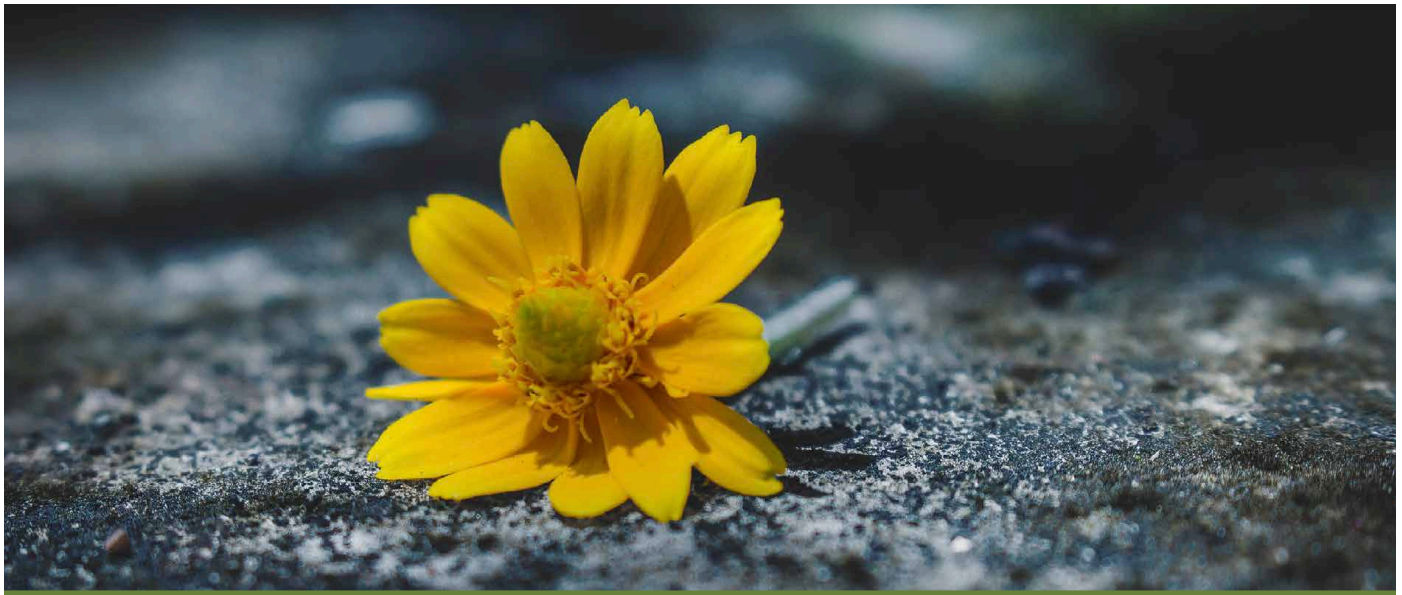
Surviving grief

In every type of job, eventually, we will experience significant loss either personal, professional or both, and therefore, grief. The grief may result from death in an individual's family, or it may be the death of a coworker or employer. It may be the loss of employment, either from a single dismissal or a significant restructuring and lay off of workers. Whatever the source, the resulting grief can end up being problematic and disruptive to the ecosystem of the workplace.

Types of loss and grief

Some of us only associate grief with the death of a significant other or pet, but people can experience pain after any consequential loss that affects their life. Different types of loss include that of a job or relationship, and in some instances, after the diagnosis of an illness or other major health problems.

There is no one way, or right way, to grieve. However, there is a singularly effective way to receive and empathize with the grieving of others. Brené Brown, author of *Daring Greatly*, distinguishes between the disconnecting properties of sympathy and the connection we gain through empathy. She refers to nursing scholar Theresa Wiseman, whose research

shows empathy to be: *the capacity to recognize others' perspectives as their authentic experience, to understand others' emotions and articulate them, and to avoid judgment.*[1]

Within today's work environment, there are multiple cross sections of cultures and religions. Each culture has a set of beliefs that describe how the world works and people's roles in the world, including their roles in the grieving process.[2]

It helps to remember that each culture has particular and often unique views about the meaning of life and what happens after we die. In general, ideas about the meaning of death help people make sense of it and cope with its mystery.

Some cultures believe in life as a cyclical rather than linear phenomenon; that we return to life after each death. Others believe that the spirit of someone who has passed directly influences the living family members; after death, the spirit of the individual watches over them.

In each culture, death is associated with a set of rituals and customs to help people with the grieving process, offering ways to process and express their grief. In some

cases, a person's experience of grief may differ with cultural norms; for example, in the case of someone who is quiet and reserved and not quick to cry or express their grief. Some may have a level of despair that feels out of step with the norm, but despite those norms, we need to allow individuals the space to grieve in a way that feels right to them. Although another's rituals may seem foreign compared to those of our own, these routines provide a means for communities to support the bereaved. People often adopt the beliefs and values of their culture to meet their unique needs and circumstances. As a result of this, grief responses within a culture can vary from person to person. A family with members from more than one cultural background may develop unique rituals and customs, combining elements from several cultures.

A person who is bereaved can often feel lost in the sense of chaos and confusion. Regardless of where they come from, rituals and customs provide a sense of routine and normalcy. They provide direction and structure at a time when the chaos of emotion could easily prevail. Consider the following when a co-worker is grieving:

- What are the bereaved family's beliefs surrounding death?

- What emotions and behaviours are typical for the bereaved person's culture?

- Who should attend certain ceremonies, and how are attendees expected to act and dress?

- What types of offerings, material or emotional, are expected?

- Are there appropriate verbal or written condolences?

Consider talking with someone who shares that same cultural background, or you can start with internet resources if that feels more comfortable. Being ignorant of the cultural differences of grief could cause undue conflict or misunderstanding in the workplace; however, showing compassion and acceptance will create connections and help in the moving forward phase. Here are a few considerations:

When the person returns to work:

1. At the first opportunity, express your condolences (if you have not already done so).

2. Make it as normal as possible. Try not to change your facial expression and tone of voice when speaking with your co-worker.

3. Carry on with normal work routines. If you typically eat lunch together, continue doing so.

4. Try to be sensitive in your conversation. If you are unsure what to say or how to treat them, acknowledge that, and ask them if they wish to discuss the loss, or instead wish to concentrate on workplace tasks. They will tell you what they need and don't need, and you should respect their wishes.

The following examples illustrate things you should avoid saying when trying to support someone who has recently experienced a loss.

What not to say:

1. *"I know how you feel."*
   Each loss is different. You could, instead, ask how he or she feels, but only if you know they are okay with talking about the loss at work. Also, don't share your own story of loss as a sign of empathy.

2. *"It's part of God's plan" or "It is God's will."*
   This can make people angry and they may respond with, "What plan?" For some, religion may not come into play.

3. *"Call if you need anything."*
   They aren't going to call. It is much better to offer something concrete, such as: "I have some free time, and if needed, I would like to come over and help where possible."

4. *"He/she is in a better place now."*
   These clichés can be hurtful as circumstances may be of a sensitive and/or difficult nature.

5. *"It's time to get on with your life."*
   We all grieve in our own way and our own time. It is not your place to suggest what length of grieving is warranted.

Stages of grief

We know now that there are five stages of grief that most individual tends to go through, but how those stages play out in a person's life will be unique and probably full of nuance, involving emotions that come and go, in a seemingly cyclical fashion. [3]

The five stages of grief

- Denial

- Anger

- Bargaining

- Depression

- Acceptance

People experience grief in many different ways, often in a unique mix of sadness, shock, anger, fear, or anxiety. Some feel numb, while others feel relief or peace after a loss. Some can even feel removed from the world and disconnected from daily life, including work. In all of these cases, support is necessary to move on and forward.

In order to heal, you have to acknowledge the pain and allow yourself the opportunity to grieve. Unresolved grief can lead to complications such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health problems. Exploring your feelings and thoughts through writing, painting, music, or other forms of creative expression can be a powerful ways to help heal. And remember, crying is a natural way to help release the hurt.

Be aware that some coworkers may not have experienced a significant loss, and do not have the psychological tools or experience to support their peers. For them, it is vital to have an established plan for supporting their colleagues without becoming consumed by the situation.

How to move forward

Grieving a loss can sometimes feel endless and unbearable, and yet we eventually must return to some daily routines. Although some of those routines may have changed, the need to work often remains constant. What happens then? Moving forward doesn't mean forgetting; it's merely making new connections so we can thrive. Being conscious of our distressing emotional thoughts can be the impetus to moving forward in our own lives, but how do we become the kind of support for a grieving colleague if and when required in their time of need? [4]

Through our work, we have found that employees have a dual responsibility. First is the responsibility to the employer; second is the responsibility to keep the work environment running like a healthy ecosystem, part of which is taking a reasonable amount of interest in the well-being of coworkers. Almost all of us will spend the better part of our working lives surrounded by people who are not considered to be our friends. While we may spend more time with them than with our family and/or social friends, the interactions are typically communal and on the surface, rarely run deep. Coworkers and supervisors are often at a loss as to how to react in the wake of a personal and significant loss. It's difficult to know what to do or say, what not to do or say, and how long the uneasiness will last. [5]

We form well-intentioned comments out of care and concern, yet may convey unknowingly a lack of sensitivity to one's grief experience. The bereaved may take this perceived reservation to mean that it's time to "snap out of" their sadness though they have little control over their emotions and may lack the ability to regulate their attention. Workers whose jobs take high concentration may experience distracting thoughts about the deceased and may make mistakes that they wouldn't typically make. Added to the intense emotions they are experiencing is anxiety about how employers and coworkers perceive them. A bereaved person may have a fear of further loss, of their job, perhaps compounding the sadness and anxiety they are already experiencing. These are two ways you can support a grieving colleague; it is wise to find a compassionate middle ground where supportive actions and giving space are in balance. While it may seem well-intentioned, saying, "take your time" or "whatever you need" may be insufficient and may result in an uncomfortable void between colleagues. Where existing relationships permit and while ensuring you respect the right to privacy, you may ask about the loss during the course of related conversations.

At the same time, it's essential to remain respectful and aware of when the conversation becomes uncomfortable and the person is giving verbal and non-verbal cues of their need to stop the conversation. Grief counsellors suggest phrasing it authentically. For example, "I don't know what to say, but I care, and I'm here when you want to talk."

Remember that grief isn't linear, and it can be quite complicated. Feelings, thoughts, reactions, and challenges related to this type of pain are very personal. These thoughts or feelings can sometimes seem at odds with each other, with the intensity of grief changing over time. On top of this, it is not uncommon to feel like the grieving has reached an end only to be derailed by an unexpected trigger. Holidays, for example, are known triggers because they hold so much emotion, nostalgia, memory, and familial pressure.

What can you do?

Different strategies can help you to learn to live more effectively with this experience.

1. First, do not try to speed up your mourning, or the mourning of those around you. It is normal to need time to accept the loss.

2. Do not hesitate to talk about your feelings or reactions with people who may be close to you. Ask them for help. If you talk about your feelings, you will likely recover faster from the loss.

3. Be attentive to others experiencing the same loss. In this way, you will benefit from mutual support and understanding.

4. Take care of your physical health. It is possible that your grief will cause stress and sickness. Consult your physician if you are worried about your health.

5. Take time to reflect on other losses that you have suffered. You will likely discover similarities. This should normalize what has happened, and give you hope.

6. Gradually resume your favorite activities, particularly those that energize you or 'recharge your batteries.' Develop new interests, make new friends.

7. The loss of someone close to you is a painful experience. It often leaves us in a state of helplessness or confusion. Remember: it takes time to learn to live with such an experience. Also remember that many resources are available, should you need help.

8. If necessary, do not hesitate to call us. A professional from your Assistance Program can help you through your mourning period.

We all work through grief at our own pace. A workplace with a thoughtful and easy to follow a plan for dealing with pain over loss is going to have the best chance of mitigating bereavement-related losses while avoiding having grieving become problematic and disruptive.[6]

If you or someone you know have questions about grief and/ or bereavement options, speak to your employer, or contact your Employee Family Assistance Program for the options available to you.

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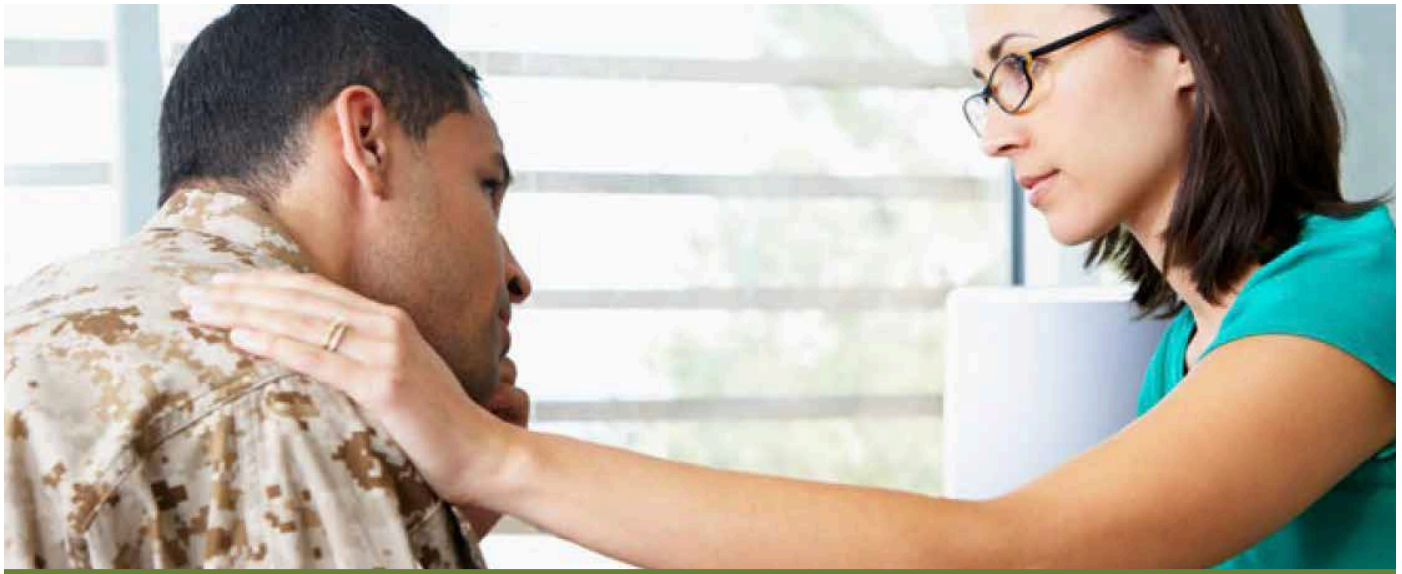
Understanding trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder

Recent statistics from the Ministry of Veterans Affairs indicate PTSD as the second leading mental health disorder within the Canadian Armed Forces, with incident rates doubling between 2002 and 2013. However, PTSD is not limited to our military and soldiers. It can affect anyone who has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event.

Trauma is the Greek word for "wound". While the Greeks used the term for physical injuries, trauma can also mean emotional and psychological wounds.

Trauma can refer to the traumatic event and the subsequent emotional and psychological injury. PTSD refers to a set of symptoms, which can be diagnosed as the condition of PTSD when the after effects of the trauma don't go away within a specific time period.

What is PTSD?

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the psychological reaction to emotional trauma. This could include responses to powerful one-time incidents or chronic/repetitive experiences.

Examples of One Time Experiences:

Accidents, natural disasters, crimes, surgeries, death, other violent events

Examples of Chronic/Repetitive Experiences:

Child abuse, neglect, military combat, urban or domestic violence

Who is at risk?

PTSD does not discriminate; it can affect anyone regardless of their age, gender or race. PTSD is brought on by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic, often life-threatening event. At particular risk are individuals who work in occupations where they are repeatedly exposed to trauma under high levels of stress. Also

at risk are people who experience trauma in childhood and people with a family history of mental illness and addictions.

Symptoms of PTSD

The ramifications of a traumatic event may be felt immediately, but PTSD is not diagnosed unless the symptoms last more than one month. Symptoms include:

- **Re-experiencing Symptoms**
  Often, people who suffer from PTSD will relive the traumatic event. This can present in different ways, including upsetting memories which can be triggered by a reminder. For instance, when a

combat officer hears a car backfire and it reminds them of gunshots, or when an assault victim sees a news report and is reminded of their own experience. Once triggered, memories can cause the sufferer to react in physical and emotional ways similar to those experienced during the original event.

- **Avoidance and Numbing Symptoms**
Individuals with PTSD may go out of their way to avoid certain triggers. They may not want to return to the site of the experience, and there might be sights, sounds or smells they will avoid. They may even stop watching TV programs that remind them of their experience. In order to numb themselves, people with PTSD may have a hard time getting in touch with their feelings or expressing them. They may isolate themselves from others, and stop taking part in activities they once enjoyed.

- **Arousal Symptoms**
People suffering with PTSD may feel they are in a constant state of emotional arousal. This can cause them to feel abnormally alert, resulting in difficulty sleeping, irritability and difficulty concentrating. They may feel as though they are "on guard" and searching for signs of danger at all times. This can lead to substance abuse to either heighten or dull their arousal.

- **Changes in Mood and Cognitions**
A traumatic event can result in people altering their beliefs about themselves or the world around them. People suffering from PTSD may start blaming themselves or others, and saying things such as "I should have done more" or "People in authority can't be trusted." They will have a persistent low mood and decreased enjoyment of things they once enjoyed.

## How can I support my loved one who suffers from PTSD?

When a family member or close friend suffers from PTSD, it can be overwhelming for family, friends and others close to the individual. It's hard to understand the changes in behaviour, and it may feel like the individual is less affectionate or angry with you. In turn, you may be frustrated taking on more responsibilities, when the individual suffering is unable to do things they use to do. Try not to take it personally, and remember these do's and don'ts for living with someone who suffers from PTSD:

DO
- ✔ Be patient
- ✔ Educate yourself on PTSD
- ✔ Be a good listener
- ✔ Express your commitment to your relationship
- ✔ Minimize stress at home
- ✔ Anticipate triggers and try to avoid them
- ✔ Watch for signs that your loved one is getting stressed
- ✔ Ask how you can help
- ✔ Give them space, if they need it
- ✔ Let your loved one guide you as to how they are feeling, what they can handle, and how they would like to handle their stress
- ✔ Call 911 if you feel you or your loved one is in danger of being hurt
- ✔ Make time for yourself
- ✔ Build a support system of trusted family and friends
- ✔ Set boundaries, know your limits and communicate them to your loved one, family and support team

DON'T
- ✘ Pressure your loved one to talk about their experience
- ✘ Stop your loved one from talking about their feelings or fears
- ✘ Trivialize or deny your loved one's traumatic experience
- ✘ Tell your loved one they are weak because they aren't coping well
- ✘ Offer advice, if you aren't asked for it
- ✘ Take their outbursts or need to isolate personally
- ✘ Get upset with yourself if you sometimes have negative feelings towards your loved one
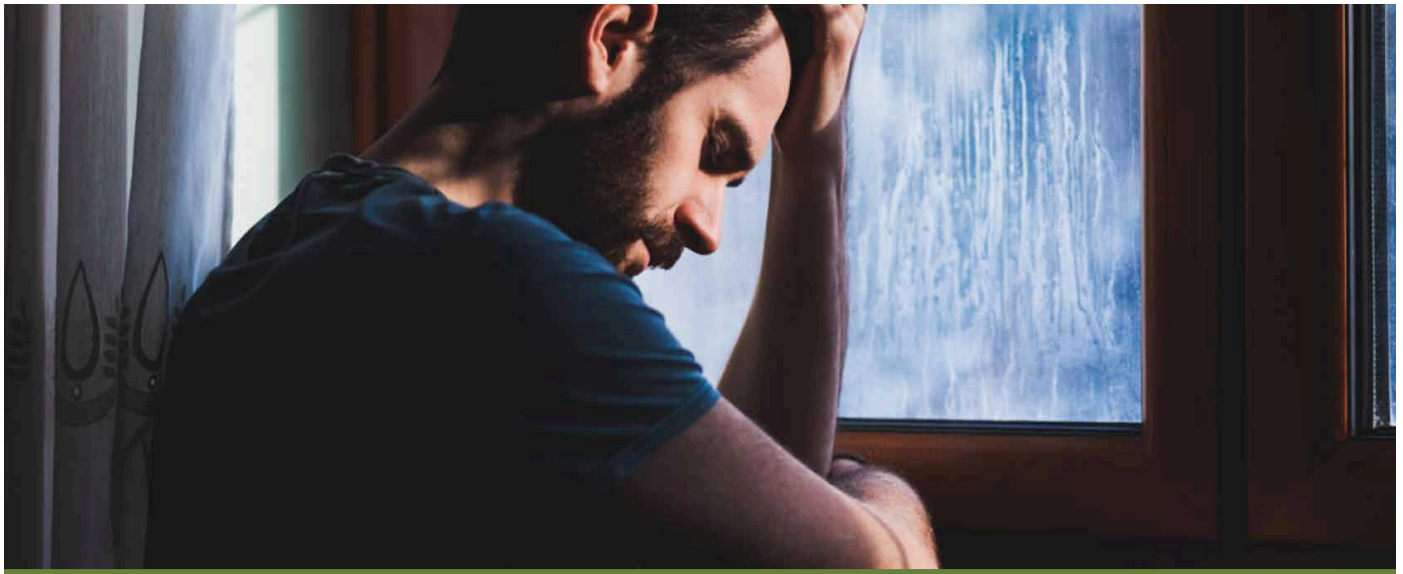
The many faces of PTSD

PTSD does not discriminate; it can affect anyone regardless of their age, gender or race. PTSD is brought on by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic, often life-threatening event. At particular risk are individuals who work in occupations where they are repeatedly exposed to trauma under high levels of stress. Also at risk are people who experience trauma in childhood and people with a family history of mental health and addiction disorders.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health disorder that may develop in individuals who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic or life-threatening event. The reactions and emotions that people experience after a traumatic event will vary, though many recover from these initial symptoms over time. However, those who continue to experience challenges and difficulty with returning to normal function and who have frequent incident related stress or fear in times of no present danger, may be exhibiting symptoms of and may be diagnosed with PTSD.

Although PTSD is commonly linked to traumatic events experienced by military personnel or first responders, PTSD symptoms can develop in anyone through a number of different ways:

- You directly experience the traumatic event
- You witnessed the traumatic event
- You learned someone close to you experienced or was threatened by a traumatic event
- You are repeatedly exposed to graphic details of traumatic events

Critical factors that increase a person's vulnerability, jeopardize their ability to stabilize after an event, and influence the development of PTSD:

- Perceives personal safety was threatened
- Unable to deescalate emotions and reactions after event
- Multiple stressors present in life, such as going through a divorce, or recent loss of a loved one
- Having a negative view of your reaction to an event
- Degree of perceived responsibility for the event
- Your are personally connected to, or can relate and identify with persons directly impacted

Resilience factors that may reduce the risk of PSTD:

- Seeks support from others, such as family, friends, or qualified medical professionals

- Joins a support group after a traumatic event

- Develops positive coping strategies, and adopts learnings and practices to overcome the event

- Is able to act and respond effectively despite feelings of insecurity and fear

As PTSD begins to become well-known in the non-uniformed workplace, more individuals are beginning to come forward with PTSD concerns. Over 70 percent of Canadians have been exposed to at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, and nearly 1 out of 10 Canadians may develop PTSD at some point in their lives.[1]

Although PTSD is a distinct disorder, it can be accompanied by other conditions. PTSD is often accompanied by anxiety, depression, and substance use as a coping strategy. PTSD can lead to impaired functioning and interpersonal difficulties. It also poses an increased risk for suicidal ideations.[1]

Katherine Sisak, MSW, RSW, RP, is the Trauma Therapy Specialist at The Homewood Clinics, Mississauga location. The Homewood Clinics offer immediate access to a multidisciplinary team of counsellors, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, psychiatrists and addiction medicine physicians, applying the latest evidence-based treatment care for PTSD, anxiety, depression, addiction and co-occurring conditions.

Sisak said the types of traumas commonly seen in patients include intimate partner violence (direct or witnessed), developmental trauma, neglect, single incident trauma, such as break-ins, intergenerational trauma issues, such as political / social persecution and immigration experiences, sexual assault, and occupational trauma.

"Some of the common symptoms among those suffering from PTSD include flashbacks, nightmares, interpersonal problems, avoidance, hyperarousal, and changes in beliefs about one's self, others and the world." Sisak explained.

Common symptoms of PTSD:[2]

- **Intrusive Memories** – such as flashbacks, bad dreams, or frightening thoughts, that may affect someone's everyday routine.

- **Avoidance and Numbing** – such as staying away from places, events or objects that are reminders, or avoiding feelings and thoughts related to the traumatic event.

- **Physical and Emotional reactions** – such as having angry outbursts, having difficulty sleeping, feeling on edge, and being easily startled. These affect daily tasks and are usually constant.

- **Negative Thoughts and Mood changes** – such as trouble recalling features of the traumatic event, negative thoughts about oneself, loss of interest in enjoyable activities, and unnatural feelings of guilt or blame. These symptoms can become progressively worse and can cause someone to alienate or detach themselves from friends or family.

Coping with trauma – a personal journey

Individuals suffering from PTSD may engage in self-coping mechanisms with limited improvement. They may continue to experience challenges with work and/or home life, and often feel like every aspect of life is regressing before seeking and accepting help. A former patient of the Homewood Clinics takes us through this journey.

The former patient explained their "symptoms began with sleep deprivation, which turned to nightmares, and eventually escalated to night terrors. I also experienced flashbacks and anxiety."

To try to cope, "I engaged in addictive behaviours", they said. "I was self-coping through addictions and alcohol. My work life and productivity was no longer the same. My work life fell apart. Even though my symptoms were identified as those related to PTSD, I didn't take the advice of those around me to get help."

"My family was destroyed. I no longer felt like life mattered – I felt numb. My thoughts and feelings were distorted from the shame and guilt I felt, such as feeling my family was better off without me. Things became progressively worse to the point where everything crumbled around me ... at this point, I contemplated suicide".

"Initially, I didn't take the advice of my doctor to get help. Only after I tried to take my life and I was placed on the mental health ward at a hospital where a psychologist told me about and referred me to Homewood Health did I then go."

"Going to Homewood was the best decision I made – Homewood Health saved my life." The former Homewood Clinic client shares some advice with those looking to attend or currently attending treatment, "There's always room for improvement. Be patient and hang on. It's a process – you won't be healed immediately. Keep advocating for yourself and trust those who keep advocating for your help."

PTSD and work impairment

People suffering with PTSD may show various symptoms at work.

	PTSD Symptoms	Work Impairment
Emotional	Anxiety Irritability Sadness	Conflict Family problems Isolation
Situational	Flashbacks Hopelessness Intrusive reminders Nightmares	Avoidance of triggers Substance use Unexpected reactions
Cognitive	Distractibility Impaired concentration Memory problems	Increased errors Loss of confidence Reduced productivity
Physical	Fatigue and pain Medication/Treatment Sleep changes	Missed days Problems working shifts Reduced endurance
Values/Beliefs	Loss of trust Stigma of mental illness	Disputes with employer Confidentiality concerns

Strategies to advocating for yourself and assisting colleagues with PTSD:[3]

1. Keep lines of communication open – communicate with your manager regarding any issues and be an empathetic listener to your colleagues.

2. Your individual challenges and symptoms are unique to you.

3. Suggest your workplace raise awareness of PTSD and its symptoms, so people can be more understanding of what those with PTSD may be going through and be more patient and sensitive when dealing with others.

Surviving PTSD

Although many find it difficult to take that first step in getting help, with treatment you can get better. Treatment may help improve symptoms by:[4]

- Teaching you skills to address your symptoms

- Learning ways to cope should any symptoms arise again

- Helping you think more positively about yourself, others and the world

- Treating other problems often related to traumatic experiences, such as anxiety, depression, or misuse of substances including alcohol or drugs

The former Homewood Clinic client shared some valuable personal advice. "Be 100% honest with yourself – put both feet in. You have to be completely vulnerable, remove any barriers or safeguards you have, this is how you truly rebuild. You have to open up and be honest, so that you and the Homewood team working with you know what you're working with and how to work with it." They also added, "You don't have to have a breakdown before getting help. Go early – even if you are only feeling anxiety. Go get intervention now before it escalates – don't wait for life to become unmanageable."

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PTSD in the workplace: Solutions and support

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is most often linked to combat occupations and first responders. So you wouldn't think of your everyday co-workers as prime candidates to encounter PTSD related symptoms. In most instances, our co-workers have always lived an ocean away, and then some, from an armed conflict. As day to day employees, we may never witness a crime scene or a deadly car crash.

So what could or does happen?

Although research has mainly focused on combat, rape and other types of assaultive violence as causes of PTSD, the sudden, unexpected death of someone you care about is often a leading cause of PTSD within the community, accounting for nearly one third of all PTSD cases.[1]

So yes, there is more to each of us as employees than meets the eye. Maybe someone has lost their mother, their best friend, or their partner / spouse. Or maybe it's something else they have lost, such as a work and/ or occupation related event. Trauma can manifest and surface in very different ways. The mind can become a conflict zone. How can one escape?

In this article, we'll be looking at:

- What is PTSD and what are its symptoms and signs?

- What are the occupational effects of PTSD?

- What solutions and supports have proven most effective?

To help shed some light on those issues, we've asked the expert advice of Dr. Sandra Primiano, a psychologist who serves as Homewood Health's Senior Director for the Homewood Clinics.

Redefining trauma

In terms of high-risk occupations, we immediately think of the military and first responders such as police, firefighters and paramedics. But, even if less frequent, many public facing positions are vulnerable to potential trauma. Assaults are not uncommon for occupations such as retail or bank clerks and taxi drivers, for example.

PTSD occurs in response to the direct experience of extremely traumatic/stressful events or being witness to people involved in them. The very concept of trauma has expanded drastically since being first introduced in the DSM-III in 1980. To meet the criteria, people no longer need to be survivors of life-threatening events or even

be present on the scene. The clerk who hears about a colleague being held at gunpoint on the night shift can qualify as a trauma survivor just as much as the victim whose life was at risk.[2] Vastly more people qualify for the PTSD diagnosis than in the past.[3]

For example, 60% of participants in a study on causes of PTSD in the Detroit community experienced the sudden death of someone they cared about. More than 14% of the participants developed PTSD. The conditional risk of PTSD following exposure to trauma, independently from the source, was 9.2%. In comparison, the highest risk of PTSD prevalence resulted from a person being physically assaulted (20.9%).[1]

PTSD is to mental illness what concussion is to physical health

The vast majority of people subjected to trauma will not develop PTSD. Depending on sources, it can be said that between three and five percent of the population is affected by PTSD, and approximately nine percent of people will be diagnosed with PTSD in their lifetime. Women are significantly more at risk of developing the disorder than men, by a two-to-one ratio.[4]

"What makes people more vulnerable than others? We know that one factor is having a childhood with a history of adverse experiences, like abuse (psychological, physical or neglect)", says Dr. Primiano, whose area of expertise is trauma and stress-related disorders and anxiety disorders.

"When you exercise, you feel pain at first but your body gets stronger, with PTSD it's the reverse. The more trauma you experience, the more vulnerable you become. The more you've experienced, the more susceptible you are to experience even more, as you've been primed to experience the world in certain ways, and then it accumulates. When you experience early trauma, you become more vulnerable towards developing trauma, stress and anxiety related disorders as you are pre-conditioned to similar triggers or traumatic events."

PTSD is a mental illness that needs the fulfillment of certain criteria for a minimum duration of one month before being diagnosed. It is not associated only with feelings of sadness, anxiety or shock after the traumatic events.

The list of symptoms fall under four categories:

- Intrusive memories: Can include recurring, unwanted, distressing memories of traumatic events. "The person is reliving the trauma event like it's happening right now through flashbacks or nightmares. There can also be emotional or physical distress reactions when something triggers the recollection of the events."

- Avoidance: One tries not to think about the events by avoiding certain places, persons or activities that bring the traumatic event to mind. "Some will also forget really important parts of the events."

- • Hyperarousal: It involves being on guard, feeling angry, irritable, aggressive and impulsive. "It can lead to selfdestructive behaviours, trouble to concentrate or being easily startled."

- Negative thoughts and moods: Self-blame, fear, guilt and distorted negative feelings about oneself, others and the world. "People will also tell you they don't feel anything anymore or that they're hopeless about the future. Some can socially withdraw and lose interest. It becomes hard to connect with people."

The disorder can develop immediately after experiencing or witnessing the event, or surge months, and in some cases even years, after the event.

Occupational effects of PTSD

When PTSD develops, it can become very difficult for employees to engage in work.

"Getting to or being at the workplace for the employee could be a trigger, says Dr. Primiano. It becomes too disturbing, stressing. Employee's may call in sick often, or just not show up and no one knows why."

In situations where an employee manages to make it into work, she says, co-workers maybe witness to occupational effects, such as:

- Having trouble concentrating or remembering things they're supposed to be doing because they're anxious and hyper-aroused.

- Taking more time to complete tasks than before. Managing time and scheduling can be an issue.

- Looking very tired. PTSD often comes with certain sleep-related issues, such as insomnia, because of nightmares and hypervigilance.

- Coming to work under the influence, as nearly half of individuals with PTSD use substance abuse as a coping mechanism and more than one-in-five also meet criteria for substance addiction.5

- Having angry outbursts because they're on edge and are easily startled, which can cause the amicable co-worker you knew to easily get into arguments.

- Having increased difficulty coping with stress.

When the red flag behaviours listed above manage to somehow stay under the radar, they most often come with a decrease in performance that, in many cases, will be noticed.

Solutions and support

What kind of help?

Talking about how you're feeling simply might not be enough. Depending upon the severity of the disorder, Dr. Primiano advises to seek evidence-based psychotherapy for PTSD, essentially meaning any therapy that uses cognitive, emotional, or behavioral techniques to facilitate processing a traumatic experience and in which the trauma focus is a central component of the therapy.[6]

"The reality is, some employees get better on their own with the passage of time, while other employees will not. It can be very difficult to return to your previous level of functioning, more so than with depressive episodes or having panic disorder, because PTSD really does change the perception of one's self, of the world, and of others including your co-workers."

Dr. Primiano, adds that the prognosis is more complex for employees who have experienced many traumatic events and/or have suffered from PTSD for a long time.

"It changes things about who you are, the way you think and interpret things. It's really hard to change that."

But trauma-focused (TF) psychotherapies do work.

TF therapies are almost three times as effective as medication in treating the severity of PTSD.[7] For every 100 individuals with PTSD, only nine percent will no longer have the disorder after three months without treatment but this figure rises to anywhere from 42% to 53% with TF treatment depending on the approach.[8]

She concludes by saying that, with proper care, one can really hope to return to a good level of functioning.

Sometimes talking to a professional can help you regain a healthy perspective regarding your ability to cope with aftermath of the traumatic event you have experienced.

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Supporting Successful Return to Work

As a manager, part of your responsibility is to ensure that work the employee would have performed is still completed while they are away.

With maternity, parental or even short medical leaves, the timing and reasons for an employee's extended absence are generally well understood and straightforward to accommodate. The entire team may rally around the employee, sometimes showing support with small gatherings making him or her feel valued. As a manager, the obligations may require you to hire a contract role to backfill for the employee who is away, or redistribute the workload to cover things off.

In scenarios where employees have been absent for extended periods resulting from treatments for addiction, mental health disorder(s), and/or physical injuries, the factors and considerations to take into account are often more complex and require careful planning on your part.

Employees with addiction and mental health disorders often go through their days with impaired thinking and functioning and this has a direct effect on productivity within Canadian businesses. Annual losses attributed to mental illness have been valued at $50 billion each year. Yet only 34 percent of employees report having access to services and tools at work that will help them with mental health issues. With 1 in 5 Canadians experiencing a mental health or addiction problem in any given year, employers play an important role in helping workers address their health.

– Statistics Canada

Challenges and fears: Why returning to work is different in these cases

Even though greater public awareness and resources to address addiction and mental health related illnesses increase each year, many workplaces are still lagging when it comes to developing effective supports for employees who are seeking treatment. Those who have access to a wider range of professional solutions that target all employees, including leaders, often have a greater success when re-introducing employees to the workforce.

It starts at the top, long before an extended absence occurs

The attitudes expressed in a company's culture greatly influence the decision-making and behaviours of everyone involved. Employees are seeking support from all levels of leadership as well as their co-workers. In some instances, observed behaviour and exposure to beliefs prior to an extended leave can affect how an individual feels about returning. As a manager, you need to be honest about the climate in your organization. Appreciate that your awareness of what the employee is going through and acknowledging how this can create anxiety prolonging their absence is important.

Although a person may have great appreciation for the time and support offered by the organization through

formalized programs including tools and resources, the thought of returning to work may still be unnerving. Individuals often encounter additional barriers when concerned with workplace rumours or assumed leadership perceptions.

As a manager you play an integral part in creating an environment of understanding, compassion and respect, and combating workplace frustrations, judgement and insensitivity. Your efforts illustrate and reinforce that addiction and mental health conditions are legitimate illnesses.

What managers can do

Exploring programs and resources and looking for tools that will help in creating a welcoming, respectful working environment is a great initial step. Confidence and knowledge will increase and improve the experience for everyone involved. Fundamentally, you must demonstrate and cultivate trust to make all employees feel safe, and express a willingness to discuss sensitive topics more openly. As a manager, you realise that each employee is unique and may gain comfort and trust at different intervals. Creating and conveying team goals and beliefs as a best practice forms a baseline from which all employees can determine when, where and with whom they are comfortable sharing things.

Important aspects to keep in mind:

- Keeping private information confidential – if you are unclear about whether someone considers something private, ask them. Each employee has a right to privacy and should have no doubt that their situation will remain confidential.

- Demonstrating respect and confidence in someone's abilities – not making assumptions, but rather, being supportive in the discussion with the person. A task you interpret as a stressor may be something that makes the employee feel valued and accomplished. So let them tell you how they feel about their work.

- Realizing that everyone has strengths and weaknesses – and those individual attributes – for all employees – should be considered to create a sustainable healthy workplace.

Here is an overview of the basic steps managers should take when preparing for an employee's return to work:

1. Create a file to capture notes, dates, times, readings and references. Document who the intended audience is for each piece to ensure you don't send sensitive information to an incorrect party.

2. Under the guidance and approval of the assigned person managing the employee disability absence, reach out periodically to the employee. Work with them to understand their perceptions so you can plan accordingly.*

3. Work with the employee on arrangements and accommodations, where medically appropriate.

4. Keep the employee's co-workers informed, but maintain the employee's privacy. Allow the returning employee to lead when determining what information is appropriate to share.

5. After returning to work, be sure to check in regularly with the employee. Continue to monitor and adjust, and look at the work group holistically, avoiding undue stress or attention on the individual returning.

A different perspective on accommodation

When employees ask for unique accommodations, it's an indication that there is a healthy level of comfort in open communication and conversation. Accommodation requests are a good thing! Think of them in the simplest of terms. At any time, an employee may need a certain type of chair, time off for care, or a special piece of equipment to help alleviate discomfort or strain. Having a discussion with that employee and arranging for medically appropriate solutions can make the employee appreciative and more productive over the longer term.

Similarly, employees returning from an extended absence for addiction or mental health disorders may share information about things that can help make them feel comfortable and reduce their stress.

These could be related to:

- Increasing or decreasing interactions with people or customers

- Removing or reducing exposure to certain tasks

- Avoiding consistent and prolonged repetition in tasks

- Carefully managing workload for a period to allow dedicated focus

- Trading tasks or getting support from colleagues

Be willing to listen and look at all options that can help foster success, show commitment, demonstrate understanding, and offer support. This helps create a positive environment that offers stability so they can continue to focus on their recovery and avoid a workrelated relapse.

Checking in to alleviate pressure

Managers need to understand the legislative obligations around assisting an employee in returning to work. Obtaining necessary information while maintaining the employee's privacy is important in ensuring you are protecting your company's interests. Resources such as the Government of Canada's Return to Work Plan are helpful tools in understanding employer and employees responsibilities.

When addiction and mental health is part of the focus of planning, sometimes managers need reassurance and additional information to be able to make decisions in the best interest of the returning employee and the business. Specialised assessment tools, such as one-on- one interviews between a professional clinician and the employee, psychosocial evaluations, rehabilitation counselling, substance abuse screenings and treatment recommendation reports, are a few of the services you may call upon to ensure a successful return to work for both employee and the organization. These will help protect the employee and employer, and can be used in situations where court involvement is required.

Once the employee has returned to work, one of the best and easiest things you can do is to offer encouragement, support, and kindness. Scheduling checkpoints every few days and asking "Is everything okay?" can help someone feel valued and listened to. Honest conversations about workload and addressing any concerns around challenges being experienced as the employee continues to recover, demonstrates your ongoing support and sincerity. This allows the employee the best chance to return to work feeling like the best version of him or herself.

*Review your company policies to ensure you are compliant before engaging with employee