

Pause for Prevention Module 8

Caring for Yourself During an Infectious Disease Outbreak or Pandemic

An infectious disease outbreak or pandemic creates a stressful working environment for the entire healthcare team. The following are some actions you can take to reduce stress:

- Make plans for meals, childcare, and other activities of daily living ahead of time.
- Stay informed about the situation using reliable resources like local health department websites, CDC, and through your facility's internal communication.
- Take care of yourself by making sure you know how to use coping methods, eat healthy, get enough sleep and recognize when to get help for stress that interferes with work, sleep, and a healthy lifestyle in general. Learn more about maintaining health during an emergency by accessing the QR code.



When you feel pressure, hit the “pause” button to reset your thoughts. Taking a break to clear your head may reduce the effects of stress. Try mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness is a word that describes many actions you can use to de-stress including breathing and meditation. Learn more about mindfulness and other tips for reducing stress by accessing the QR Code.



Eat healthy meals and snacks to maintain energy and overall health. Eat meals at regular times each day as often as possible. For more information on healthy eating, access the QR code.



Get as much sleep as possible. When shifts are long, “bank” extra sleep hours on days off. To learn more about the importance of getting enough sleep, access the QR code.



Understand your internal stress meter so you can respond to actual or anticipated stressors in a healthier way before the situation gets worse. To learn more about how to get help, access the QR code.



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Scripts for Role-playing Stress at Work

- 1. Jane (Nurse)** - Jane is an experienced nurse who has worked for several years at a skilled nursing facility near her home. As soon as Jane arrives at work on Thursday, she can feel tension. She learns that there has been an outbreak of an infectious disease that involves several residents. A few staff are gathered at the nurse's station, and Jane can hear the concern in their voices. One of the nurses is talking about what might happen if a lot of the residents (or staff) get the virus. Jane takes in what is being said, but instead of talking about what could happen, says, **"why don't we all focus on what is happening now and support each other as much as we can. What do we know about what is happening, and what do we need to do right now to take care of the residents and each other?"** Jane finds the supervisor to get the details of the outbreak and learn what needs to be done.
 - This knowledge seeking approach is the best way to:
 1. Identify what is happening
 2. Determine what needs to be done
 3. Avoid unnecessary stress by potentially sharing information that may not be accurate.
 - The team approach is an excellent strategy to reduce stress and improve confidence that the situation is being handled appropriately.
- 2. Blane and Susan (Physical Therapists)** - Blane is a physical therapist working in a large nursing home. He graduated last year. Blane and his wife just bought a new house. Blane is aware that the nursing home has had an outbreak of an infectious disease and as many as 10 residents have tested positive, as well as several staff. He is afraid for himself, but he is also afraid for his wife. He doesn't say anything to his co-worker, but finally she approaches Blane and asks if they can have a conversation. **"I'm worried about you. Before you don't seem like yourself today," Susan says. Blane expresses his concern, especially his concern for his wife; "I am scared that I'm going to take something home and make her sick. I've heard that the virus is in the air in our building"** Susan responds by saying **"I completely understand your concern. There are things that we can do to minimize the risk of staff and residents getting sick. We have been working on making sure all of our residents and staff have access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Hand hygiene is important (as you know) and so is wearing the masks that have been provided as well as wearing personal protective equipment when encountering any of the residents that have tested positive. The residents who tested positive are in one area and anyone entering that area will need to wear the appropriate protective equipment. We have also been told to try to keep distance between us as much as possible. The leaders have put together education about what caused the outbreak and expectations for all of us. The DON is working with our partners from the health department to ensure that best practices are in place as we work to move through this situation."**
 - Education is vital to educate all staff on what is occurring and expectations for their roles.
 - This approach is an example of using the right sources (leadership, health department partners) to provide education.

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Scripts for Role-playing Stress at Work (cont.)

- The observation made by Susan that her co-worker was feeling stressed demonstrates the kind of buddy/team approach necessary to keep everyone safe and healthy during an outbreak/pandemic.

3. Grace and Mason (Nursing Assistants) - The nursing home where Grace and Mason work as nursing assistants has been in outbreak status for 2 weeks. Residents who tested positive for the illness responsible for the outbreak have been quarantined and are currently in transmission isolation on a unit that is separated from the rest of the facility with barriers. Grace has worked 5 shifts in a row and is feeling exhausted and stressed. She is assigned to the isolation unit and is in the room where protective equipment is stored when she starts to cry. Grace thinks she is alone, but turns to see her coworker, Mason standing in the doorway. He looks concerned and says **"Grace, I can tell your upset, what can I do to help you?"** Grace responds, **"Nothing Mason, I'm okay."** Mason responds by saying **"Grace, you are not okay at the moment."** Grace sighs and responds, **"I'm tired. One of the kids didn't sleep well last night, so I didn't get a lot of sleep. I feel like this situation at work is never ending. I'm working as hard as I can, and I just feel like I can't keep up with everything that needs to be done."** Mason reminds Grace that she does a great job with the residents; **"Grace you are amazing. You take such pride in your work. We all must remember that we are not alone in this situation. Remember at the beginning of this we said we work as a team and that the teamwork would see us through? Let's talk to Beth [the supervisor] about changing the assignments, even if its just for today. You can work on a unit that isn't isolated, and I'll work with these residents today."** Beth smiled at Mason and nodded her head in agreement. **"Thank you, I think that will help."** **"Sure", replied Mason, "but you must promise me that when you are overwhelmed, you will share your feelings."** **"I will," said Grace, "TEAMWORK!!!"** Beth was willing to change the schedule and announced that the DON ordered lunch for all the staff in recognition of their hard work. Beth mentioned that she will be covering assignments as necessary to ensure everyone gets a break. Grace didn't remember to bring food today and is happy to learn that the staff is being treated to lunch.

- Mason's observation and action clearly made a difference in Grace's workday.
- The observation and change in assignment may have protected Grace and the residents from mistakes that are made when healthcare workers are exhausted and stressed. Donning and doffing of protective equipment in a manner that protects the user, and the environment is much more challenging in an exhausted state.
- The conversation between Mason and Grace also reminds us of the obligation to recognize and act in these situations to protect coworkers and residents.
- Leadership's actions (changing the schedule, ordering lunch) are important recognitions of the efforts of staff, and clearly have a positive impact.

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Guide for Leader

Supplies

- Several copies of Pause for Prevention Module 8 Flyer, Caring for Yourself During an Outbreak or Pandemic
- Enough copies of Module 8 Role Playing Script to provide each participant with a copy

Preparation

- Print and prepare enough copies of the Module 8 Caring for Yourself During an Outbreak or Pandemic Role-Playing Script for each participant to have one
- Gather staff in an area where the activity can be carried out without disruption.

Instructions for Leader

- Review the Module 8 Flyer: Caring for Yourself During an Outbreak or Pandemic
- Assign a role from each of the 3 scripts to each participant
- As the leader, read the introduction for the script and have the participant assigned to each role, read the words in bold in the script, acting out the assigned part
- Allow discussion and input from participants about each script. Broaden the discussion by allowing participants to speak about real experiences and opportunities to improve and/or applaud outcomes.

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