



Guide to supporting care home staff during and post Covid-19

with



Mountbatten

About this guide

Welcome to our guide on supporting care home staff during Covid-19 and beyond.

We wanted to provide some simple guidance to help managers support their staff during the coronavirus pandemic and also into the future.

It also contains some information and simple strategies to help individuals (both staff and managers) look after their own wellbeing.

We recognise that many people often try to keep their feelings hidden and carry on as best they can. The chances are you are not alone in how you feel.



“

Speaking to someone and sharing how you feel - and knowing how others feel - will help you know you are not alone.

”

Jane Hazeldine
Director of
Psychosocial Care

Tier 3

Professional support

For mental Health and trauma support:
Speak to GP

Primary care mental health –
call 531860

Crisis line – call 111 or 522214

Community Safe Haven –
call 520168

Mind charity –
[mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

Tier 2 Peer support and reflection

Peer support – encouraging openness and support for each other, making sure people know they are not in this alone.

1-1 or group supervision sessions – set up within the organisation

Group debriefings (Mountbatten 217346)

Refer to 'Understanding Bereavement' Guide

Individual bereavement referrals (refer to Mountbatten 217346)

Tier 1 Team work and self care

Managers check in with teams daily

Think of three positive things before leaving work

Reflection 'rounds'

Refer to Calmness and Resilience Guide for coping with stress

For meditation and relaxation practice, refer to <https://www.headspace.com/> or <https://www.calm.com/>



Tier 1

How to look after your staff

Be visible – many of the workforce will be working remotely, whilst self-isolating and it is important that managers remain visible and make sustained attempts to achieve this through virtual platforms, in order to maintain daily contact with their teams.

Be available – it is important staff know how to contact their manager or who to contact in their absence and that this person is available and will respond in a reasonable timeframe. It is helpful for a manager to consider what is realistic and discuss this with their teams, so that everyone knows what to expect and what the plan is. This in itself can feel containing.

Listen - it's important to be able to listen carefully and fully understand and respond to workers and let them speak without being interrupted by phones, email or others.

Say thank you - a simple 'thank you' from a line manager can boost feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy in employees. Always make sure you are specific about what you are saying thank you for so it's clear you have noticed what they have done well.

Give time and space - making sure there is time to adjust to the new circumstances and time for readjusting when 'normality' resumes.

Check on basic needs - Consider if individual staff members' basic needs are being met – are they getting enough sleep? How might you notice work-related fatigue? Are they paying attention to their food and water intake? How much essential contact are they having with their friends and family?

Be mindful of other life challenges that may be affecting individuals – financial, domestic violence, childcare issues, elderly parents or partners with co-morbidities, who may be at high risk of contracting the disease or who are unwell.

Promote coping strategies - Educate to improve resilience in the immediate and short-term – for example; provide guidance on the possible psychological impact and coping strategies.

Encourage individuals to recognise and use their coping strategies - ask them what coping strategies they use when they are feeling stressed. Be mindful of your limitations and when and how to signpost staff to specific services such as counselling or employee support services.

Promote self-care – Actively ask staff to share what they are doing to attend to their self-care needs and maintaining a good balance, this might be exercise or other activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, art or crafting, starting a garden project or listening to music.



Model empathy, compassion and kindness – when people are working in pressurised conditions, the risk is that they may become less compassionate and empathic. It is important to be able to notice in yourself and others when this may be a risk and take action to demonstrate small acts of kindness. Amongst the crisis, it is even more important to remember to give encouragement and positive feedback to staff.

Increase supervision opportunities – good supervision is more important now, than ever before, as issues such as managing risk and making decisions become more complex and challenging. The role that supervision plays in providing emotional support and containment for staff is essential at this time and they would benefit from shorter and more frequent opportunities for one-to-one conversation, with prioritisation given to space for them to express their feelings and for you as the manager to listen.

Promote connectedness - Share with your team that this is a 'group human experience and not one we are going through alone' – this is important for promoting social connectedness and for lessening feelings of distress, anxiousness and isolation. You could consider having a team 'check in' for ten minutes each morning, in order to keep in touch and for everyone to share what they have planned for the day.

Promote learning – the current pandemic will no doubt create learning for us all, particularly related to decisions and cases linked to COVID-19. Consider setting up peer support network groups for staff and for managers which draw upon expertise from those with professional mental health or pastoral experience. These could be virtually via safe social media or video conferencing platforms for example.

Mental health awareness - For those with a pre-existing mental health condition, this may be exacerbated and heighten any emotions, anxieties or compulsive behaviours (WHO, 2019). Social isolation and physical distancing measures may well impact upon usual support systems and can intensify a person's sense of vulnerability. Ensure that you demonstrate your awareness of these factors and make a point of asking staff about their mental health.

Share information – there is a lot of information circulating about the pandemic and the global impact of this. Whilst you cannot control what people read or access, it is important that reliable and up to date information, relevant to your service area, is shared regularly with staff. This will provide containment and ensure that they are informed.

Containing the container – for managers directly supporting staff, it is particularly important that you think about your own emotional needs and what you need to support and maintain your own wellbeing at this time. Take care of yourself. Be honest and compassionate with yourself in how you are feeling. Despite wanting to be there for your team, recognise that all good leaders need to have a break and get some rest. Have others relieve and support you. This also models good selfcare to your team and psychologically permits them to rest when stood down too.

Covid-19. Guidance for the support and well-being of Adult Social Workers and Social Care Professionals in a pandemic crisis. The Tavistock and Portman NHS (2020).

Calmness and Resilience for coping with stress

During the COVID-19 situation many things will feel out of control and leave you feeling anxious and worried. However, there are still things you can control.

We would like to share some tools for helping to keep our sense of calmness and manage anxiety at this difficult time. These are simple things you can practice in the moment and try to put into your daily routine.

Kindness – we all have the ability to be kind - do something kind.

Remember your basic needs - healthy eating, exercise and sleep can all reduce stress.

Three-minute mindfulness of breath exercise:

- For three minutes sit comfortably, close your eyes (or look at a blank spot on the wall or floor) and focus your attention on your breathing.
- Don't try to change your breathing in any way - just notice how it feels as you breathe in and out naturally.
- If you become distracted notice the distraction whether this is an external distraction like a noise or an internal distraction such as aches in your body or thoughts in your mind. Just notice the distraction and then return your attention to your breathing.
- Continue for three minutes.

Grounding practice:

- Pause/stop what you are doing
- Push your feet to the ground and notice your connection with the earth
- Look around you – name three things you can see
- Listen – notice three sounds around you
- Take three slow natural breaths

7/11 breathing:

- Pause
- Breathe in gently and calmly to the count of seven (if seven is too hard count to three)
- Breathe out gently and calmly to the count of 11 (if 11 is too hard count to five)

Remember the bigger picture - we are all in this together and this will end at some point.

Optimism and positivity - notice all the good things that you and others are doing during this difficult time. Notice how communities are working together, that there is a sense of shared purpose and connectedness.

Think of three positive things that have happened in your day.



Limit your exposure to negative social media and news footage about COVID-19 and do something else instead.

Make the most of time at home - reconnect with pleasurable activities and hobbies, such as reading, a jigsaw puzzle, sketching, a board game, listening to music, gardening, watching a comedy show, playing a musical instrument, baking, cooking, phoning a friend, a crossword puzzle, learning something new, etc.

Remember - it is normal during times of stress and uncertainty to feel anxious and worried.

- If you are feeling worried or anxious speak to someone.



**National service providing emotional and mental health support for frontline staff:
Text FRONTLINE to 85258 (24/7).**

Further resources:

There are also many useful apps available to help with calmness that use relaxation strategies and meditation practice, such as:

- Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com/>
- Calm: <https://www.calm.com/>

Please find below a comprehensive guide to managing anxiety during this time and government guidance for mental health and wellbeing as well as guidance for parents on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing:

https://www.psychologytools.com/assets/covid19/guide_to_living_with_worry_and_anxiety_amidst_global_uncertainty_en-gb.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

Tier 2

Peer support and reflection

Sharing stories and feelings with compassion and empathy is really valuable when coping with a crisis. The benefits include:

- Decreased sense of loneliness and isolation
- Increased understanding and compassion for others
- Better team working and communication
- Decrease sense of stress and therefore burnout
- Better sleep and sense of well-being
- Improved emotional support



You can:

- Provide informal and formal peer support
- Introduce supportive supervision sessions for individuals and teams
- Come together to share experiences at certain times in the day e.g. handover or beginning or end of shift
- Ensure inexperienced staff are paired up with more experienced staff
- Introduce a positive reflection at the end of the shift where staff identify three things they have done well that day.

In addition:

For some individuals, particularly, if they have experienced a recent bereavement or significant stress additional external support would be beneficial.

- Individual bereavement support can be accessed from Mountbatten or other counselling services such as Cruse.



Free counselling sessions can be accessed from key link workers.

<https://www.keylinkcounsellors.co.uk/>

Understanding Bereavement

How will I feel when someone dies?

Bereavement is a natural response following the death of another person. The death of a friend, relative or someone you have cared for can be devastating and can at times seem unbearable.

Grief is what we feel when someone dies. There is no right and wrong way to grieve. However, there are some common feelings people may experience:

Shock: It can be hard to believe that someone has died. Shock can leave you feeling numb and confused. It may take some time to be able to make sense of a person's death and to realise that they are not coming back.

Physical feelings: People can experience physical changes to their appetite or sleep routine and can experience physical illness and pain.

Sadness: Sadness and, at times, a depressed mood are common experiences. The meaning previously found in life can be lost for a time and people can even feel like they want to die too.

Loneliness: People can feel completely alone, partly because of the loss of the person and the role they had in their life, but also because they feel others do not understand or are expecting them to recover and carry on with living.

Guilt: At times, people may wish they had spent more time with the person who has died, or wish they could have done something to alleviate their pain or suffering. You may find yourself playing over the events leading up to the death in your mind and wondering if things could have been managed differently. Guilt can also be experienced if someone has had a difficult or confusing relationship with the person who has died.

Anger: This can be experienced when it is hard to make sense of the circumstances of someone's death, or when the death seems unjustified or unfair. People can feel angry with themselves, other people, the person who has died, or the world in general.

Longing: Longing to have the person back is a common experience. At times, people may think they have seen or heard the person who has died. These experiences can be comforting, frightening or confusing, but they are a way in which the brain is trying to process and make sense of the death.

Relief: Sometimes people feel relieved that the person who has died is no longer suffering.



All of these reactions are part of a process of making sense of, and adjusting to, the loss (the death). You may feel some, all, or none, of these emotions. They may come and go at different times. You may feel calm and then all of a sudden feel overwhelmed by a strong emotion.

Strong emotions may pass quickly or stay with you for a while. Sometimes these ups and downs in emotions are referred to as 'waves of grief'.

Looking after yourself after someone has died

Remember a wide range of emotions are expected and part of a process to help in the adjustment following a death. Remind yourself that there is no right or wrong way to feel.

Remember the 'waves'. Strong emotions will pass. Sometimes it can help to visualise yourself looking at the sea and imagining your emotions coming in and rolling out again with each wave.

Keep connected and talk to others about your feelings.

Try to maintain routine in your day.

Keep busy with enjoyable activities.

Use relaxation and mindfulness practice.

Remember your basic human needs; Sleep, exercise, and healthy eating.



If you need more help or support

Speak to your manager if you feel able to or contact Mountbatten Bereavement Service on 01983 217346.

Tier 3

Signs of trauma and how to manage it

It can be understandable to experience symptoms of traumatic stress following a disturbing event, whether it's the coronavirus pandemic, or a sudden and traumatic event.

Common emotions include: intense shock, confusion, and fear, or feeling numb or overwhelmed by a host of conflicting emotions, sometimes all at once.

Traumatic stress can shatter your sense of security, leaving you feeling helpless and vulnerable. You may feel physically and emotionally drained, overcome with grief, or find it difficult to focus, sleep or control your temper. These are all understandable and common responses to abnormal events.

Often, the unsettling thoughts and feelings of traumatic stress, as well as any unpleasant physical symptoms, start to fade as life gradually returns to normal over the days or weeks following a catastrophic event or crisis. But there's also a lot you can do to assist in your recovery and better come to terms with the trauma you've experienced.

Emotional symptoms of traumatic stress include:

- **Shock and disbelief:** You have a hard time accepting the reality of what happened, or feel numb and disconnected from your feelings.
- **Fear:** You worry that the same thing will happen again, or that you'll lose control or break down.
- **Sadness or grief:** Especially if people you know died or suffered life-altering consequences.
- **Helplessness:** You may feel vulnerable and helpless, which may even trigger anxiety or depression.
- **Guilt:** Or a feeling that you could have done more to help.
- **Anger:** You may be angry at the situations or others you feel are responsible, or be prone to emotional outbursts.
- **Shame:** Especially over feelings or fears that you can't control.
- **Relief:** You may feel relieved that the worst is over, that you weren't as badly affected as others, or even hopeful that your life will return to normal.



Physical symptoms include:

- Feeling dizzy or faint, stomach tightening or churning, excessive sweating.
- Trembling, shaking, experiencing cold sweats, having a lump in your throat, or feeling choked up.
- Rapid breathing, pounding heart, even chest pains or difficulty breathing.
- Racing thoughts, being unable to rest or stop pacing. You may also have difficulty concentrating, memory problems, or confusion.
- Changes in your sleeping patterns. You experience insomnia or nightmares, for example.
- Unexplained aches and pains, including headaches, changes in sexual function.
- Loss or increase in appetite, or excessive consumption of alcohol, nicotine, or drugs.

Strategies to cope:

For most people signs and symptoms of trauma will fade over time and no additional support will be needed. However, this will take time and there are strategies that can help:

- Remember there is no “right” or “wrong” way to feel. People react in different ways to trauma, so don’t tell yourself (or anyone else) what you should be thinking, feeling, or doing.
- Don’t ignore your feelings — it will only slow recovery. It may seem better in the moment to avoid experiencing your emotions, but they exist whether you’re paying attention to them or not. Even intense feelings will pass if you simply allow yourself to feel what you feel.
- Avoid obsessively reliving the traumatic event. Repetitious thinking can overwhelm your nervous system, making it harder to think clearly.
- Partake in activities that keep your mind occupied (read, watch a movie, cook, play with your kids), so you’re not dedicating all your energy and attention to the traumatic event.
- Re-establish routine. There is comfort in the familiar. After a disaster, getting back— as much as possible — to your normal routine, will help you minimize traumatic stress, anxiety, and hopelessness. Even if your work or school routine is disrupted, you can structure your day with regular times for eating, sleeping, spending time with family, and relaxing.

- Put major life decisions on hold. Making big life decisions about home, work, or family while traumatised will only increase the stress in your life. If possible, try to wait until life has settled down, you've regained your emotional balance, and you're better able to think clearly.

When to ask for help:

- If symptoms do not resolve over time
- If symptoms are interfering with daily living
- If you feel unable to return to work or failed attempts to return to work
- If you cannot move on and you still talk about the stress as if it were yesterday.
- If you experience ongoing anxiety
- If you have persistent difficulty in completing work tasks and staying focused
- If you persistently avoid any reminders of the events your use of alcohol or medication
- If you have persistent mood swings or low mood

Where to refer to:

- GP
- Primary care mental health – Tel no: 531860
- Crisis line – Tel no 111 or 522214
- Community Safe Haven 520168
- Mind Charity – mind.org.uk



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