

## Traumatic Stress and Nurses During COVID-19

Traumatic stress involves both mind and body responses. It is our natural and healthy way of coping with extreme stress and overwhelming feelings. Right now, nurses and other healthcare professionals are experiencing acute and post-traumatic stress from working with patients who are critically ill, becoming permanently disabled and dying.

Acute traumatic stress responses follow the immediate aftermath of exposure to traumatic events and may involve anxiousness, tearfulness, irritability, and anger and/or at times feeling avoidant, flat, shut down or distant. Signs of posttraumatic stress (PTSD) include repeated, disturbing images or thoughts of the trauma; loss of interest in usual activities you enjoy; becoming easily startled or jumpy; feeling distant from others; avoidance or feeling numb; worrying about the safety of self or loved ones; and persistent arousal such as heart palpitations, sweating and/or sleep disturbances.

Getting help and support can help reduce traumatic stress responses. Focusing on both mind and body approaches can help increase healing from trauma.

### Support for Nurses

#### The HELPING NURSES Referral List

The Helping Nurses Referral List was started by therapist Katie Lynch, LICSW who listened to the needs of her nurse friends and colleagues and wanted to find a way to support nurses facing traumatic stress during and after the pandemic that is easily accessible.

- Confidential, professional support available to nurses currently working in some capacity with those directly impacted by COVID-19
- Composed of over 100 independently licensed, mental health professionals from 8 states (most in Massachusetts; others include NY, NH, ME, MD, CA, TX & WA) who have committed to providing short term, pro-bono therapy via telehealth to any nurse who is in need of mental health support
- Services will come with **no cost** and requires **no insurance information**

Interested in receiving a referral to a therapist ready to help? Please email [helpingnurseslist@gmail.com](mailto:helpingnurseslist@gmail.com)

#### Greater Good Online Institute for Health Professionals

A **free** program to explore stress, resilience with science-backed techniques for individuals and teams. **May 2-3, 2020**. CE and CME Credits available.

[https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/what\\_we\\_do/event/greater\\_good\\_institute\\_for\\_health\\_professionals](https://ggsc.berkeley.edu/what_we_do/event/greater_good_institute_for_health_professionals)

#### Headspace Plus App

Offering **free** access for one year of Headspace Plus to all US healthcare professionals working in public health settings and all NHS healthcare professionals.

## **Resources to Manage Traumatic Stress, Anxiety and Depression while Developing Resilience**

In these difficult times we are all facing, it is essential that we actively manage our feelings by taking care of ourselves. It's important to remember that it is natural to have strong feelings of fear and sadness at this time. We may also be feeling other difficult emotions such as grief, anger, frustration and irritability in the face of uncertainty and loss. Here are some suggestions to manage these feelings and develop resilience:

1. Take time for yourself and practice naming or acknowledging your feelings throughout the day - every feeling is okay and valid.
2. Establish and maintain a routine that feels good for you.
  - Consider how you want to spend the first half hour and last hour of each day and find some enjoyable activities that you would like to commit to doing daily
3. Try to limit news and social media to a brief check-in each day.
  - Be mindful of what media you are exposing yourself to as well. Is the information coming from a reputable source? How does reading this make me feel and is it necessary that I continue? There is lots of good news out there as well!
4. Exercise daily by walking, stretching, yoga, running, dance, strength training, tai chi, etc.
5. Participate in activities that bring you joy.
  - Play games, cook, garden, read books, draw/color/paint, clean out a drawer or closet, spend time with your pet, listen to music, learn a new skill.
6. Maintain a sleep schedule that works best for you.
  - Having trouble sleeping? That's normal in times like these! Try practicing deep breathing exercises or listening to a sleep or body scan meditation. Remember that your sleep is regulated by light: stay off screens and dim the lights an hour before bed and spend time outside or next to a window when you wake up. If insomnia persists, please talk to a clinician.
7. Use this time to develop your spiritual life and/or relational skills – practice patience, offer kindness, express generosity, increase compassion towards yourself and others, work toward social justice.
8. Stay connected to family and friends through messaging and/or video chats - we're all in this together!
9. Remember to breathe! Three slow deep breaths with a deep inhale and longer exhale signals to your body that it is okay to relax.

**Additionally, if you or someone you know is in danger of hurting themselves or in a potentially dangerous or harmful interpersonal situation, please utilize the hotlines listed below:**

**National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255**

**National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**

**Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a Crisis Counselor**

## **Recommended Resources**

### **Good News Network**

A daily dose of good news stories that can create better balance with all the bad news right now:

<https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/>

### **Meditation/Stress Management Apps**

Insight timer

Free or by subscription meditations, courses, yoga and music to manage anxiety, depression, sleep, stress.

Headspace

Free or by subscription meditations and movement for anxiety, depression, sleep and relaxation.

Calm

Free or by subscription meditation and sleep stories along with breathing exercises, stretching exercises and relaxing music.

### **Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley**

Offers science-backed activities, tips and tools to increase well-being, manage anxiety and provide support in our relationships and as parents. Weekly newsletter, monthly calendar, podcast as well as wonderful online courses and events.

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

### **Rick Hanson, PhD – Just One Thing Newsletter**

Rick is a psychologist and senior fellow at the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley. He is the bestselling author of Resilience, Hardwiring Happiness, Buddha's Brain, Just One Thing and Mother Nature. He offers an excellent website, podcast and newsletter with effective resources, tips and tools that are free on his website and backed by neuroscience.

<https://www.rickhanson.net/>

### **Dr Judson Brewer**

Dr Jud is a well-respected psychiatrist and researcher at Brown University's Center for Mindfulness. He has developed several apps that are very helpful for managing anxiety, quitting smoking and encouraging mindful eating. During this difficult time, he is offering discounted programs along with scholarships as needed.

<https://drjud.com>

### **The Awake Network**

This group offers outstanding events related to mindfulness and meditation. They have developed an excellent list of free online resources for this difficult time from all the leading organizations and trusted individuals who teach mindfulness and meditation with links.

<https://www.theawakenetwork.com/free-online-meditation-resources-for-the-time-of-social-distancing/>

### Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Online Classes

MBSR was developed to help individuals work with difficult circumstances and establish healthy ways of coping. The research is very strong that mindfulness can help us to manage and reduce anxiety, depression and PTSD. Classes are all online now and offered by several reputable organizations. Many classes are starting in April and May - this may be a great time to take such a class:

East Coast Mindfulness

<https://www.eastcoastmindfulness.com/>

Brown University Center for Mindfulness

<https://www.brown.edu/public-health/mindfulness/home>

UMass Memorial Medical Center – Center for Mindfulness

<https://www.umassmemorialhealthcare.org/umass-memorial-center-mindfulness>

### Mindful Self-Compassion Online Classes

We can be very hard on ourselves. Self-compassion is an evidence-based skill to learn that helps us not only be kinder to ourselves but much more compassionate toward others. Online classes are starting in April and May:

Center for Mindful Self-Compassion

<https://centerformsc.org/>

Center for Mindfulness and Compassion – Boston

<https://www.chacmc.org/>