

SELF-CARE IN A CRISIS

Fear and anxiety about a pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, people working in homelessness service settings have been worried about their own health and the health and well-being of those they serve. They have also been worried about their long-term stability in relation to job security or the stamina of their organization. We must learn to take care of ourselves. It is important to have strategies to address physical, mental, and emotional wellness.

Everyone Reacts Differently

Amongst others, how you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community where you live.

Potential signs of stress or distress in yourself or others:

- Increasing or heightened levels of fear and worry
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns, energy and activity levels
- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, or upsetting thoughts and images
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
- Feelings of numbness, disbelief
- Headaches, body pains, stomach problems, and skin rashes
- Anger or short temper
- Guilt about being able to work or support clients, or not being able to do so in the same way
- Difficulty with attention or concentration
- Avoiding activities that one would normally enjoy
- **In younger children:** excessive crying, irritation, or reverting to previous behaviors
- **In teens:** irritability or “acting out”

Things You Can Do to Support Yourself

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media.
- Take care of your body. Stretch often, [meditate](#), use [grounding techniques](#), or try [progressive muscle relaxation](#). [Eat healthy](#), [be purposeful about improving sleep](#), and [exercise regularly](#).
- Ensure you have time in your day to unwind and do activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others, talk with people you trust about your concerns or feelings.
- Identify a credible source of COVID-19 information, such as the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), to understand and share information about the actual risks to yourself and others.
- Seek help if the distress is negatively impacting your daily life emotionally for several days or weeks.

- Make a [self-care plan](#) by listing things you can and can't control, and activities to have on-hand when you are feeling overwhelmed. More examples of self-care and resilience plans are available in the Mental Health Commission of Canada's [Self-Care and Resilience Guide](#).

If you are a parent, here some ways to support your child:

- Take time to talk with your child or teen about the COVID-19 outbreak. Answer questions and [share facts](#) about COVID-19 in a way that your child or teen can understand. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand.
- Share how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn how to cope from you.
- Try to keep up with regular routines. If schools are closed, create a schedule for activities.
- Help them to keep active. Set a target of a minimum 30 minutes of physical exercise a day.
- Exercise the brain. Continue with schoolwork or consider www.khanacademy.org.
- Stay calm by talking to parents or other adults, or by contacting [Kids Help Phone](#).
- Check out some more ideas to [Help Children Cope with Emergencies](#).

Resources and Ideas for Practitioners

- Check out the [Self-Care for Front Line Workers Toolkit](#) by St. Mungo's and the City of Westminster.
- It is important to solicit clear feedback on whether services and offerings from staff are working. If they aren't working, consider changing approaches that might be more effective.
- Practice [mindful self-awareness](#), optimism, countering isolation, and/or holistic self-care: [Guided meditation exercise](#) (9 minutes); [Reflective Inventory for Individual Processes of Self-Healing](#); [15 Fun Self-Care Ideas for Daily Living](#); [Stress and Resiliency: Challenges of 21st Century Living](#); [Holistic Nourishment for Healing and Resilience: What feeds us is not always on our plate!](#); [Meditation for Emotional Wellbeing: A Self-Care Strategy](#); [Go for a \(mindful\) walk](#).
- The 519 in Toronto lists several [resources for emotional self-care](#), available in multiple languages.
- "Our sustainability is connected to knowing and believing that our work matters." ([Reynolds, 2010](#))
- In [Resisting Burnout with Justice Doing](#), Reynolds (2011) stresses the importance of We-Care vs Self-Care: "We are sustained in the work when we are able to be fully and relationally engaged, stay connected with hope, and be of use to clients across time." Some indicators that this notion is present in organizations include taking scheduled breaks and respecting boundaries; variety in work day and work life; organizing around mutual ethics; participating in compassionate critiques of oppressive practices or systems; and celebrating and centering success/victories.
- Check out this [two-part video by National Geographic Live](#), where neuroscientist Richard Davidson speaks about how happiness is something we can cultivate and a skill that can be learned ([Part 2](#)).
- Use the [T.H.I.N.K. acronym](#) to communicate kindly with others during the pandemic and recovery.

Disclaimer: This document is a collection of resources and/or ideas compiled by the team at CAEH. Please follow [Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines on COVID-19](#) as the primary resource for all health-related concerns.

CAEH will continue to update this resource as new information or ideas become available. Please refer to the CNH3 website Resources page at cnh3.ca/resources for additional information. If you have an idea or resource to share or are seeking further support, please contact us at info@caeh.ca.