



Increasing Adaptive Coping for Helping Professionals During COVID-19: Guidelines for Senior Leaders

Our communities are currently experiencing a high level of stress in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Illness and changes in daily routine, including social isolation, and the wearing of masks, are occurring across communities. Helping professionals are finding themselves working to help support others, while managing stress and change in their personal life. *Organizations can help increase coping for their staff by providing opportunities for staff to implement adaptive coping strategies:*

- Be mindful of and validate the extra stress that staff may be experiencing right now (i.e., the abrupt transition to telework, child care issues, and having to make decisions about the safety of outside child care).
- Provide staff education on how to monitor their stress levels and on ways they can increase healthy coping. Remind staff that the same social emotional skills we are teaching our clients apply to professionals as well.
- Consider providing an in-service on mindfulness techniques or coping skills that can reduce stress. Practice these techniques when appropriate at meetings. Leaders in organizations should encourage the use of these techniques (i.e., the best way to model this is by talking about your own use which generally helps people be more open to trying strategies themselves). Remind staff that using these adaptive skills is a good way to prevent burnout.
- Send the message that self-regulation is essential now more than ever. Provide education and resources on ways staff can improve their self-regulation (i.e., learning mindfulness, using apps like COVID Coach, deep breathing, taking an inventory of their self-care practices and developing new self-care goals).
- Consider having staff take turns sharing in meetings self-care or self-regulation ideas that are positive and healthy. This normalizes these practices and sends the message that it is everyone's responsibility.
- Provide staff information on ways they can attain professional support through their Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If an EAP is not available, provide other resources in the community.
- Encourage virtual connections among staff in creative ways (i.e., acknowledgment of birthdays or other milestones). Connection is a major component of reducing the impact of adversity and stress and promotes resilience. When the need for social distancing has been eliminated, these activities can be continued face-to-face.
- Check-in with staff when you have concerns about their well-being. Encourage your organization to use accountability partners.

(Clemans, Eslinger, & Sprang, 2020: STSI-OA Organizational Change Package, Center on Trauma and Children, CTAC publication #STSPL 20001).