

# Tip Sheets on Nursing Home Staff Support and Mental Health 12-12-2020

## CORE PRACTICES TO CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING NOW

- Encourage staff to reflect on their experiences through idea boards on each floor, small reflections, artwork or music. These personal stories or ideas may be anonymous if staff wish. Nursing homes may compile these reflections into a small book along with staff and resident art and even song lyrics. These reflection books may be distributed to staff so that they can read and reflect and know that *they are not alone* in what they have felt and witnessed during the pandemic, and that their voices have been heard and appreciated.
- Help staff prioritize each day. So many new tasks are being added to already overwhelmed people and everything takes much longer than usual. It can be really hard to figure out what needs to come off the ‘to do’ list in order to accommodate new asks or requests. This often requires discussion and negotiation. Leaders can be proactive and ask staff if they would like to talk about reorganizing their day and deciding what tasks can be eliminated or postponed. Not everything can remain ‘high priority’ on our lists! Centralizing where staff members can easily access updated information is essential.
- Use daily ‘check-in boards’ where staff can share their level of stress.



- You may have heard the expression, “Stockpile Compassion!” Encourage all to be forgiving and gracious, both with themselves and with others. The more we can do so, the more we can overcome the moments when people may not act as they normally would due to the stress of experiences during the pandemic.
- Create a psychologically safe workplace in which staff can speak up when they are overwhelmed or struggling; no judgment, no retaliation.

- NORMALIZE asking for help. Many healthcare staff struggle with admitting they need help, especially if they know that everyone else feels as stressed as they do. *A safe space to speak up and ask for help needs to be part of nursing home culture.*
- Creating rest spaces is also important. Staff may worry about enough space to eat meals because break room spaces may not be created with “physical distancing” in mind. Staff may be nervous about being without masks eating near their colleagues. In response, some centers have posted schedules for other larger open spaces indicating when they are available for staff to use. Centers have posted infection control processes for using the space next to the schedule and provided sanitizing wipes so that people can feel even more comfortable that spaces are safe to use.
- While taking time off may not be realistic right now, look for opportunities every day for staff to take five or ten-minute breaks, or to leave ten minutes early with a gift card (grocery store, pharmacy, coffee shop). Make sure to include ALL staff, not just nursing staff.
- Consider discussion sessions with employees hosted by senior leaders to provide an open forum to simply recognize that this is hard. Express to everyone that this is tough and we are all having a hard time. Have a goal to normalize discussion of the challenges and recognize that people may not feel like themselves. Promote the idea of “See something, say something” as it relates to recognizing peers that may be in need.
- Sleep hygiene, sleep hygiene, sleep hygiene – ask people how they are sleeping and provide resources if indicated and desired by the staff person.
- *Ask staff what they need!!* Try to provide what they need and if it can’t be provided, consider if there is a suitable alternative. If it simply isn’t possible, talk with staff about why it’s not possible and brainstorm about other options or supports.
- Use mantras and/or grounding statements. For example:  
 “This will not last forever.”  
 “I am resilient.”  
 “This, too, shall pass.”  
 “I can ride this out and not let it get me down.”  
 “May there be joy in this day, may I bring joy to others.”  
 “A hard moment does not mean a hard rest of the day.”  
 “I am choosing grace in this moment.”
- Incorporate mindful breathing throughout the day, every day. Pair a breathing technique with a task/action that staff does multiple times a day such as answer the phone, walk through a doorway, etc.
- Post important resources like those in the slide below. Normalize mental health care, remove the stigma.

## Important Resources



- Explore free mental health services for staff and provide that information. If possible, partner with an organization that offers free or very low-cost counselling for staff.
- Implement a “buddy” program where people have a partner to help support them during the day. Another person may be able to offer words of encouragement, positivity and lend a hand if needed.
- *Validate staff for the work they are doing and all the tasks they accomplish each day.* It is so easy to focus on what didn’t get done and we forget to acknowledge all that was done!
- Celebrate the good. In a time when so much is difficult, take time to celebrate small moments and small victories. Celebrate a birthday, share a card of recognition, acknowledge a teammate. Consider a positivity board or “Shout Out” board where teammates can recognize other teammates. These small moments can do so much to build morale and stronger teams.
- If possible, partner with a local organization or volunteers that could donate food for the staff, which often gives comfort.
- Identify points of control for staff. A big source of anxiety can be the feeling of a loss of control. Identifying specifically what staff members can control may be calming, and may enhance their overall sense of self-efficacy, which also lessens anxiety.
- One of the most important things is for leaders to role model the ideas and practices above. Staff take their cues from leaders and make decisions on what is acceptable, safe and expected in their culture.

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