

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF COVID-19
**Workplace Trends, Resources, and Strategies:
Disaster Cascade and Long-Term Recovery Management**

Behavioral Health Strike Team

Agenda



**The Behavioral
Health landscape
for the next few
months**



**Understanding
and managing
burnout and
exhaustion with
a note on grief
and loss**



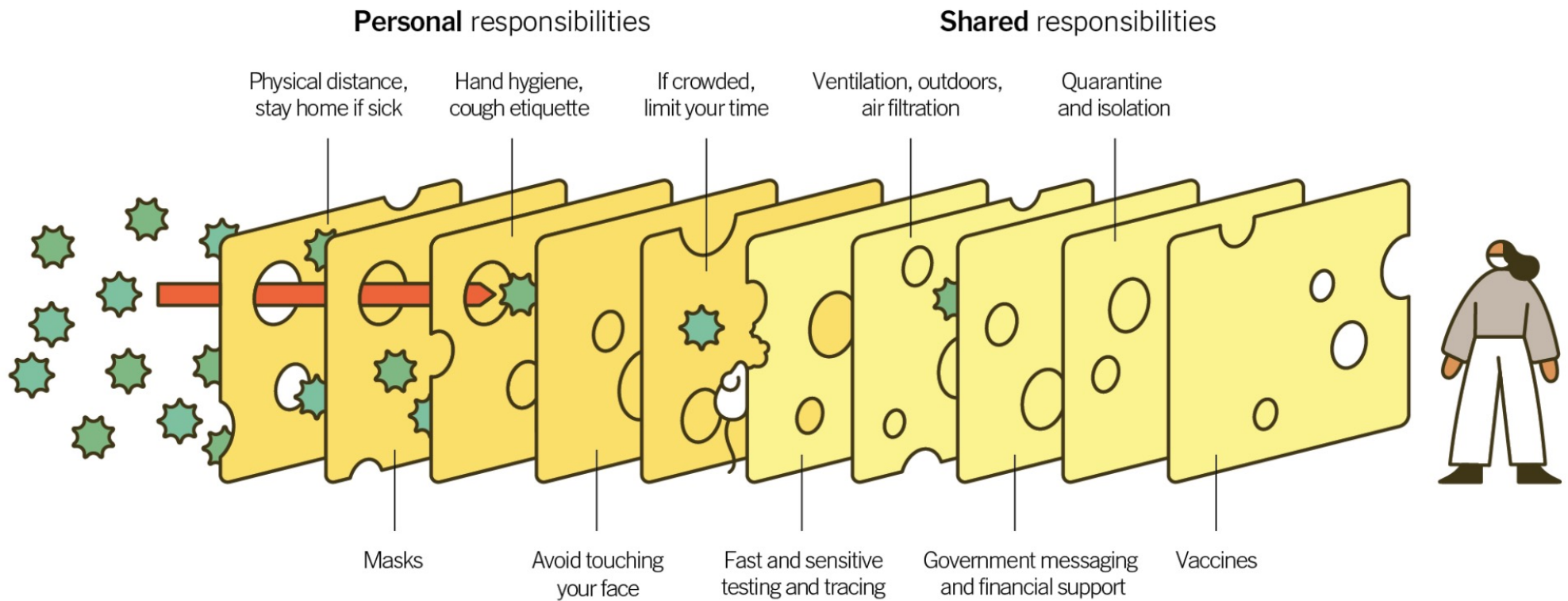
**Workplace
considerations:
Communication and
Social learning**



**Making
resilience work
for you in 2022:
THRIVE**

Multiple Layers Improve Success

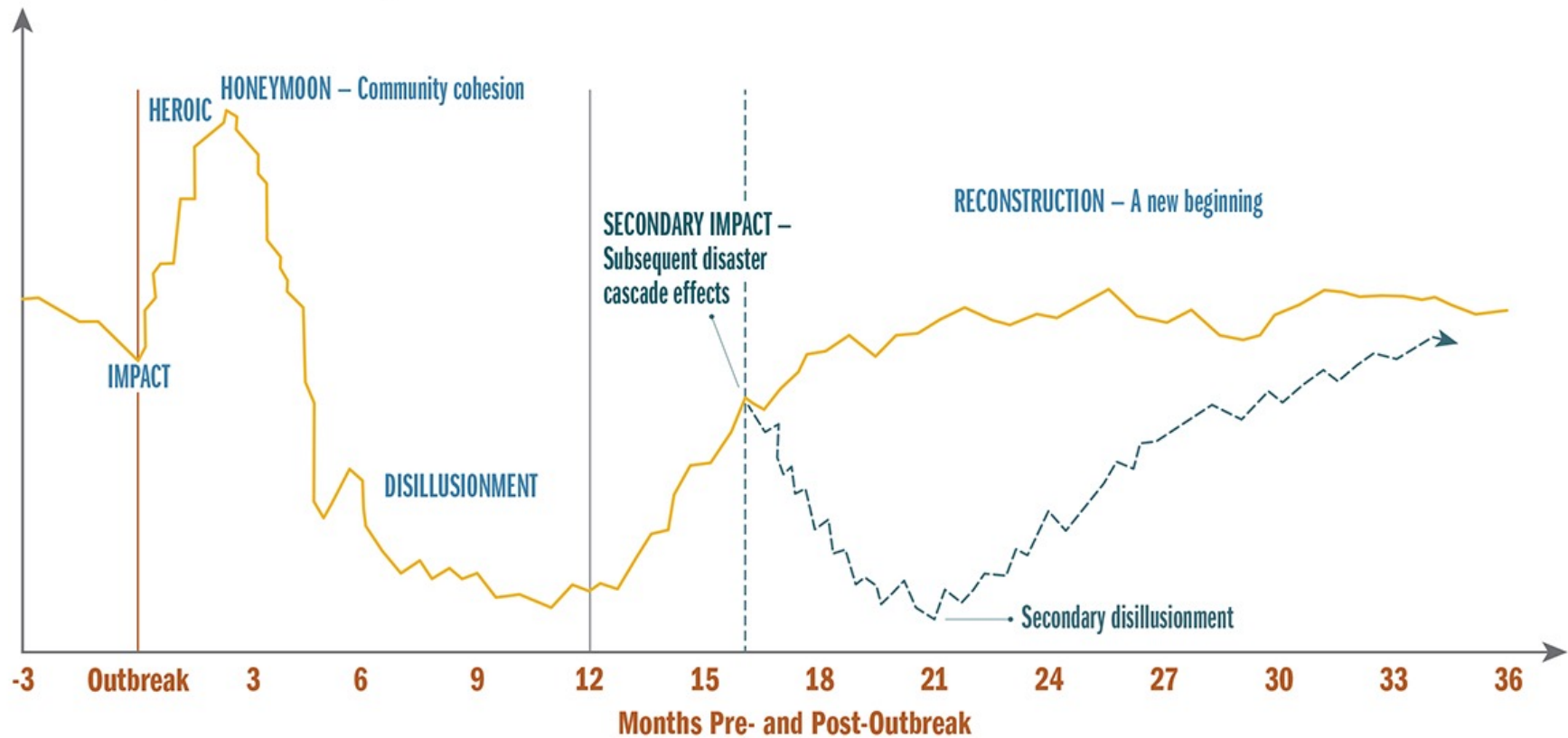
The Swiss Cheese Respiratory Pandemic Defense recognizes that no single intervention is perfect at preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Each intervention (layer) has holes.



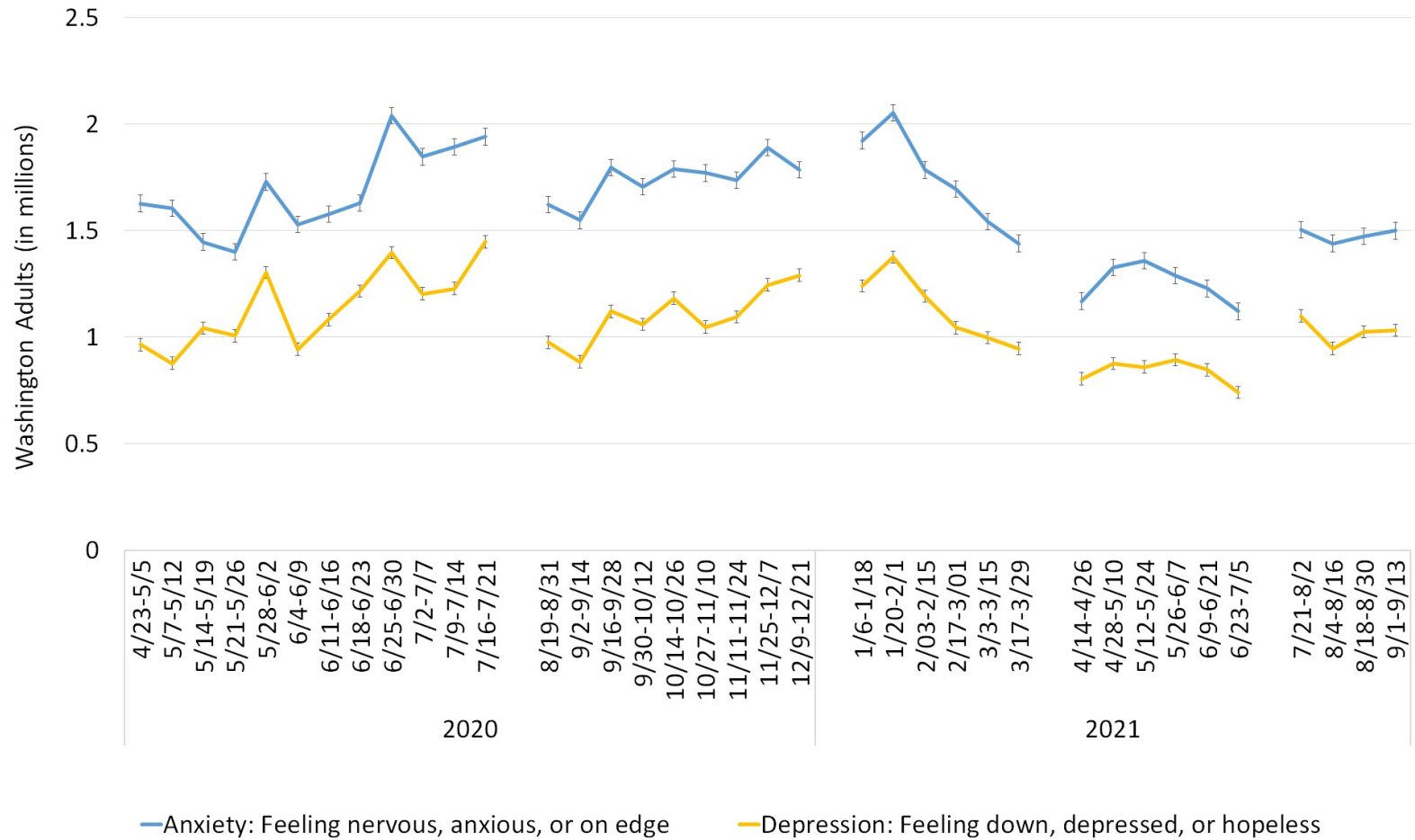
Source: Adapted from Ian M. Mackay (virologydownunder.com) and James T. Reason. Illustration by Rose Wong

Reactions and Behavioral Health Symptoms in Disasters

Emotional Response – Lows to Highs



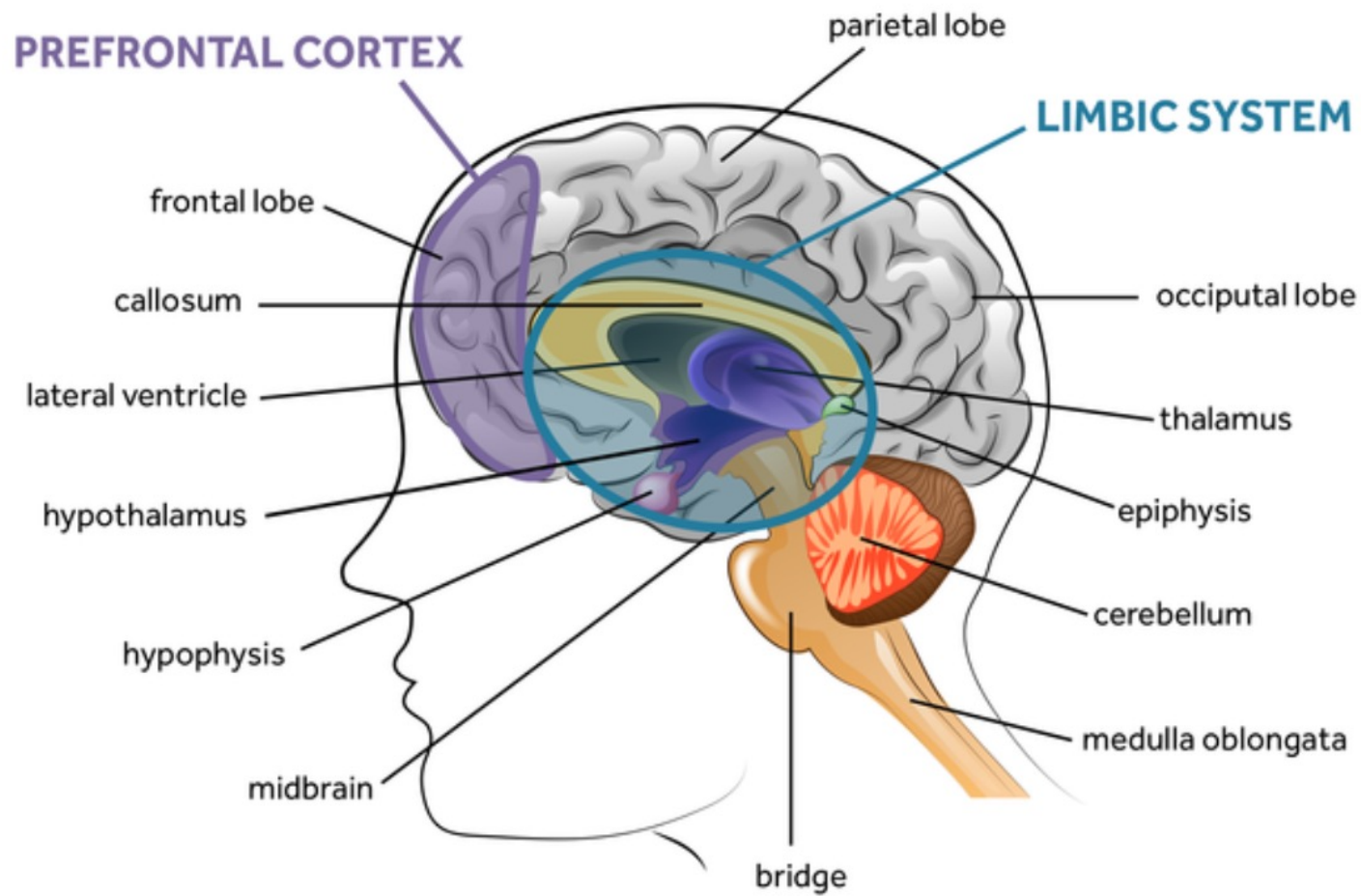
Anxiety and Depression- WA Adults



Disaster Cascade effects

Delta and the impacts of this variant are resulting in the **experience of a “disaster cascade” in some form for most people heading into fall / winter.**

- A disaster cascade is defined as the experience of multiple disaster “Impacts” within a 12-18 month time frame (multiple waves of the same disaster, or different types – floods, hurricanes, etc)
- ***Disaster cascades further tax already depleted emotional, physical, social and economic resources.***
- As a function of the cascade effects, risks related to increased behavioral health symptoms go up for many people.
- Experiences of burnout for healthcare providers, educators, those in public health and those in “response” to the pandemic, including other ‘front line’ and essential workers are more likely now than at any other point in the pandemic so far. This includes higher risk for new incidence of behavioral health disorders including PTSD.
- Even as we see infection rates and hospitalizations start to decrease, seasonal affective conditions may start to increase. People are more likely to have a stronger reaction to seasonal shifts due to limited coping resources.



Areas of Focus

Areas of focus for October 2021 for Youth and Families:

- Associated youth surge (there was no summer “slump” in Behavioral Health patterns for youth and adolescents)
- Potential for school anxiety / refusal, behavioral acting out, withdrawal, regression
- Parental / Caregiver anxiety about schools closing again, or having to balance work and childcare with quarantine rules due to exposure

Areas of focus for October 2021 for Businesses and Workers:

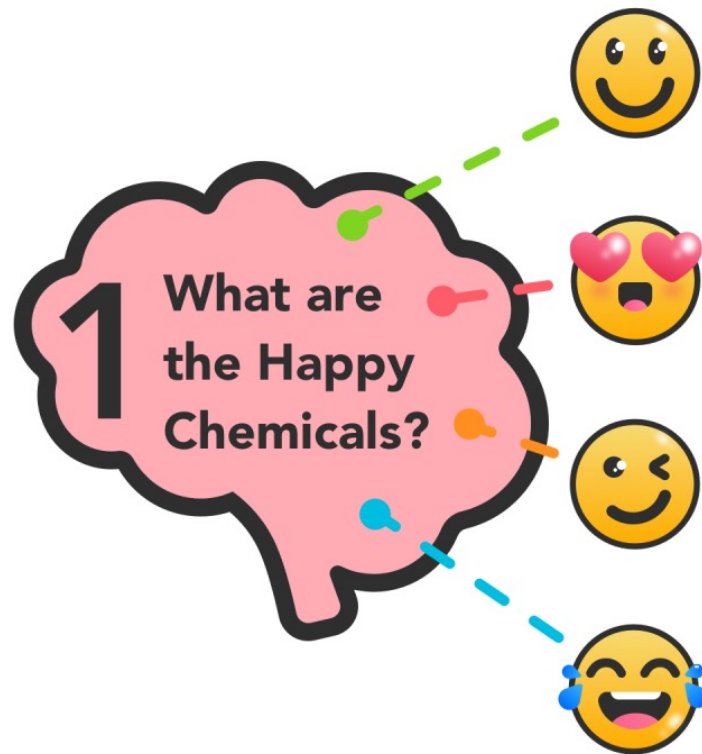
- Vaccine mandates and deadlines for vaccination will be influential in shifting group dynamics in the workplace, communication patterns amongst co-workers and friends.
- For companies and agencies where employees are leaving, there may be significant shifts in workloads, job roles and other responsibilities that may contribute to intense emotional and behavioral responses for some.
- “In-group” and “out-group” or “us / them” thinking may also influence behavioral choices, sense of cohesion with others in the workplace.

Key Takeaways

- The potential for violence and aggression increases with “hardening” of opinions, impulsivity, and sense (accurate or not) of being threatened (by changes, uncertainties, mandates, expectations, etc) in the workplace and in social settings.
- “In-group” and “out-group” or “us / them” thinking is likely to result in a loss of social and workplace cohesion.
- Communication challenges will be significant due to general dysregulation: we all have difficulty interpreting others’ motives and meanings.
 - De-escalation and active listening continue to be highly recommended techniques for supporting others.
- Planning, thinking through, and considering options ahead of time is a valuable part of the process as we move into the fourth quarter of 2021 and into 2022. Planning and identifying alternative options ahead of time reduces the likelihood of making impulsive, risky choices.

GET YOUR DAILY HAPPINESS CHEMICALS

The happy brain chemicals that make you feel good



DOPAMINE

- Enables motivation, learning, and pleasure
- Gives you determination to accomplish goals, desires, and needs

OXYTOCIN

- Feeling of trust, motivates you to build and sustain relationships
- Known as "Cuddle or Love Hormone", plays a role in bonding

SEROTONIN

- Feeling significant or important among peers
- Calm form of accepting yourself with the people around you

ENDORPHINS

- Releases a brief euphoria to mask physical pain
- Response to pain and stress that alleviates anxiety and depression

How Deficiency Affects You

- procrastination
- low self-esteem
- lack of motivation
- low energy or fatigue
- inability to focus
- feeling anxious
- feeling hopeless
- mood swings

- feeling lonely
- stressed
- lack of motivation
- low energy or fatigue
- disconnect of relationships
- feeling anxious
- insomnia

- low self-esteem
- overly sensitive
- anxiety/panic attacks
- mood swings
- feeling hopeless
- social phobia
- obsession/compulsion
- insomnia

- anxiety
- depression
- mood swings
- aches and pains
- insomnia
- impulsive behavior

DOPAMINE

OXYTOCIN

SEROTONIN

ENDORPHINS

How to Increase Happiness Levels

- meditate
- daily to-do list
- long term goals
- food rich in L-Tyrosine
- exercise regularly
- create something:
writing, music, or art

- physical touch
- socializing
- massage
- acupuncture
- listening to music
- exercise
- cold shower
- meditate

- exercise
- cold showers
- sunlight
- massage

- laughter/crying
- creating music/art
- eat dark chocolate
- eat spicy foods
- exercise/stretching
- massage
- meditate

Burnout, Compassion Fatigue and Moral Injury

- **Burnout:** Exhaustion of body, mind, and motivation due to exposure to prolonged and unresolved work stress or frustration. Burnout is often a consequence of perceived disparity between the demands of the job and the resources that an employee has available to them.
- **Compassion Fatigue:** Emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others, also described as secondary traumatic stress.
- **Moral Injury:** Strong feelings of guilt, shame, or anger due to not being able to provide the kind of care or service you want and expect to provide.

Resilience: The process – involving behaviors, thoughts, and actions – of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress. Can be developed by focusing on connection, purpose, and flexibility/adaptability.

How to Manage and Reduce Burnout



Bottom line up front:

Burnout is widespread in the context of a disaster.

Our energy is more limited right now.

Healthy, clear boundaries between work and time off are essential for reducing burnout.



What do DO:

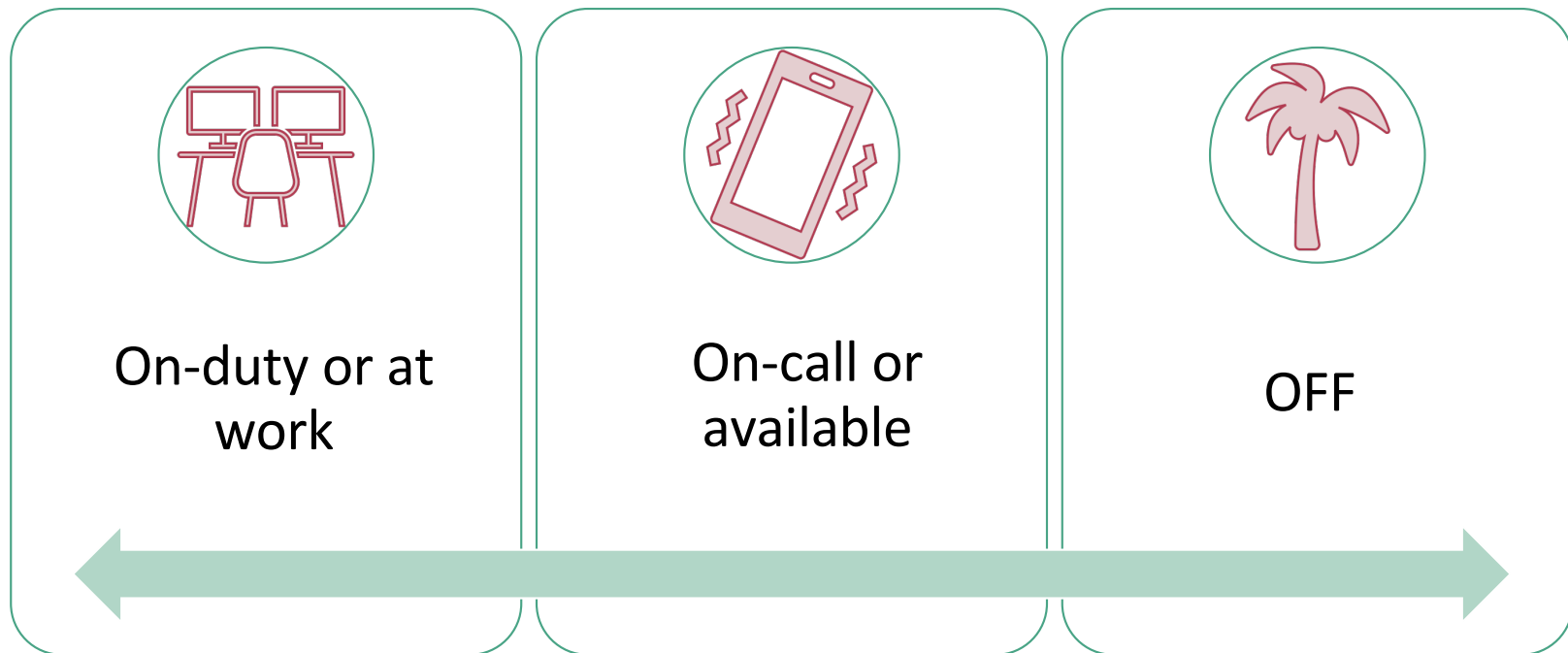
- Establish your “off time” boundaries. Hours, days or segments of time that are **unavailable** for work-related tasks.
- List things you can do during time off that are completely unrelated to work (e.g., re-watch your favorite show, teach yourself a new hobby using online resources, get lost in a book).



What to avoid:

- Professional and social isolation
- Saying “yes” when you need to say “*sorry, no, I don’t have the capacity to do that right now*”.
- Feeling guilty for taking some mission critical time off.

Individual Level: Work/Time Boundaries



How to Manage and Reduce Compassion Fatigue



Bottom line up front:

Compassion rewards are the antidote for compassion fatigue. Take time to recognize the impact your work is having on others and celebrate victories when possible (even little ones).



What to DO:

- Offer verbal support for colleagues (active listening is great! – *when you have the capacity!*).
- Call out and attend to the wins, the successes and the “good stuff”.
- Engage with others socially



What to avoid:

- Unhealthy coping practices (eg drinking too much alcohol)
- Focusing on what “didn’t get done”.

How to Manage and Reduce Moral Injury



Bottom line up front:

- Moral injury is triggered by environmental circumstances, not personal failures. If you experience this, try to focus on external causes that can be addressed, not internal blame.



What to DO:

- Create a schedule, try to add just one small thing each day you enjoy doing. Mindfulness practices (e.g., meditation and breathing practices) can be helpful.
- If you have a personal history of trauma, consider professional care services to help process your experiences.



What to avoid:

- Ignoring or not attending to strong emotions related to your work experience.

The collective experience of Loss

- Any loss right now is likely to touch on a deep well of loss that we all have experienced to some degree over the last year and a half.
- Emotional reactions and responses may be proportionally stronger to ANY loss right now.
- Emotion regulation is already a challenge when the brain is exhausted.
- There is no right or wrong way, or specific timeframe for people to process grief and loss. Increasing resilience and moving forward with recovery will also differ for each person.
- Focus on authentic reactions with the intention to support someone in pain, not to make them “feel better”.

Considerations for working with (or experiencing) grief, loss and bereavement

- Facilitate problem solving and decision making to **prevent impulsive or risky decisions** (e.g., precautionary health measures, burial decisions);
- **Modify coping plans** if traditional strategies aren't possible (e.g., gathering with family to grieve through facetime);
- Identify connections (relationships) of support for the person who is grieving
- Focus on engaging in the simpler, more concrete tasks and activities that are uplifting so that the effects of self-efficacy can grow.
- **ACTIVE LISTENING** is the recommended and preferred “intervention” to support anyone struggling with grief and loss.

Communication Basics

- **Zones of Regulation:** Neurological influences on our ability to perceive, process and respond to others.
- **Active Listening:** a strategy or technique used to further understanding and caring.
- **De-escalation:** use the SAFE model to help others process their distress.

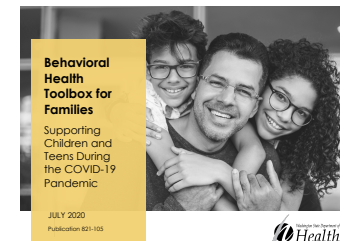
Communication

Zones of regulation

- Remember how our pre-frontal cortex is influenced by stress.
- ***No-one can have a logical 'problem-solving' oriented talk when they are 'flooded'.***
- Take extra time to talk.
- Get space from difficult conversations rather than continuing to push the issue.
- Check in on levels of rest / tiredness before pursuing important conversations.
- Think about how this plays out in families, at work and socially.

Table 4: Zones of Regulation

| Color | Level of Alertness | Feelings |
|--------|----------------------------|---|
| Blue | Low state of alertness | Bored, tired, sad, disappointed, sick, depressed, shy |
| Green | Perfect state of alertness | Happy, positive, thankful, proud, calm, content, ready to learn |
| Yellow | Higher state of alertness | Excited, silly, annoyed, worried, embarrassed, confused, nervous |
| Red | Too much alertness | Upset, angry, aggressive, mad, too excited, terrified, out of control |



Active Listening



Clarify

Ask open ended questions



Reflect

Summarize what you think you heard



Express Empathy

Listen with the intent to Care,
not problem solve

Working with Anger and Hostility: **SAFE Model**® for De-Escalation

Many people are expressing distress about the pandemic in an external way. This often manifests itself as anger. In order to de-escalate yourself and others, the **SAFE model** provides key concepts to keep in mind:

- **Self:** monitor your own reactions, non-verbal messages, tone, wording and physical space
- **Area Awareness:** Be aware of resources, help, exits other things in your physical space
- **Feelings:** Use active listening to try to uncover the source of the anger; in disasters often the things people are angry about are not the same thing as the underlying causes.
- **Engagement:** Engage support for yourself if you have an encounter with an angry person, don't just ignore it or pretend it didn't happen.

Self

- Tune in to yourself.
- Be aware of your own reactions; the tone of voice you use, your body language, and your choice of words.
- Monitor yourself in order to stay calm and to not take the situation personally, even if the words become personal.
- **Non-verbal messages are particularly important.**
- Be aware of the non-verbal things that you are 'saying' to the other person.

Area Awareness

- Pay attention to your physical area.
- Notice the space and people around you.
- Your general physical area includes people, exits, (potential) weapons, available help, and other resources.
- If you know you may have a confrontation, ask a friend or colleague to check in on you.
- ***Don't position or keep yourself between an angry person and their exit.***

Feelings

- Employ active listening techniques to identify what the angry person is feeling UNDERNEATH the anger.
- **Remember that anger is often a “bodyguard” against feeling anxious or worried about something.** By listening for feelings underneath anger, you can identify the cause of the emotions at the center of the issue.
- It is easier to empathize with someone who is angry when you understand what they may be worried about.

Engagement

- If it is safe to do so, connect with the angry person by **engaging** to understand their story.
- Don't dismiss them or their concerns. Identify and **engage resources or other people or information** that may be able to address or help solve their problem or concern in some way.
- **Engage support for yourself** when you are in the position of dealing with an angry person or people.
- Don't keep a hostile interaction inside; share it with others to get the support you need after dealing with a difficult person or situation.
- **Build your own connections (among friends, family, social networks)** to increase your resilience.

Other Active Coping Techniques



Anxiety

- Sensory interventions:
 - Frozen orange, ice
 - Music
 - Shower
 - Fuzzy slippers
- Apps
- Breathing = calming



Exhaustion

- Sleep hygiene
 - Same bed and wake times
 - Alcohol and sugar considerations
 - Notepad (not phone or laptop)
- Apps
- Boundaries



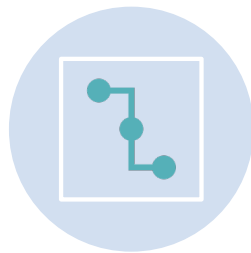
Depression

- Behavioral activation: Small steps
- Get a “this makes me feel better” list made on a good day
 - 5 minutes to 5 hours
- Movement of any kind
- Connection and support from others

Resilience



Purpose



Connection



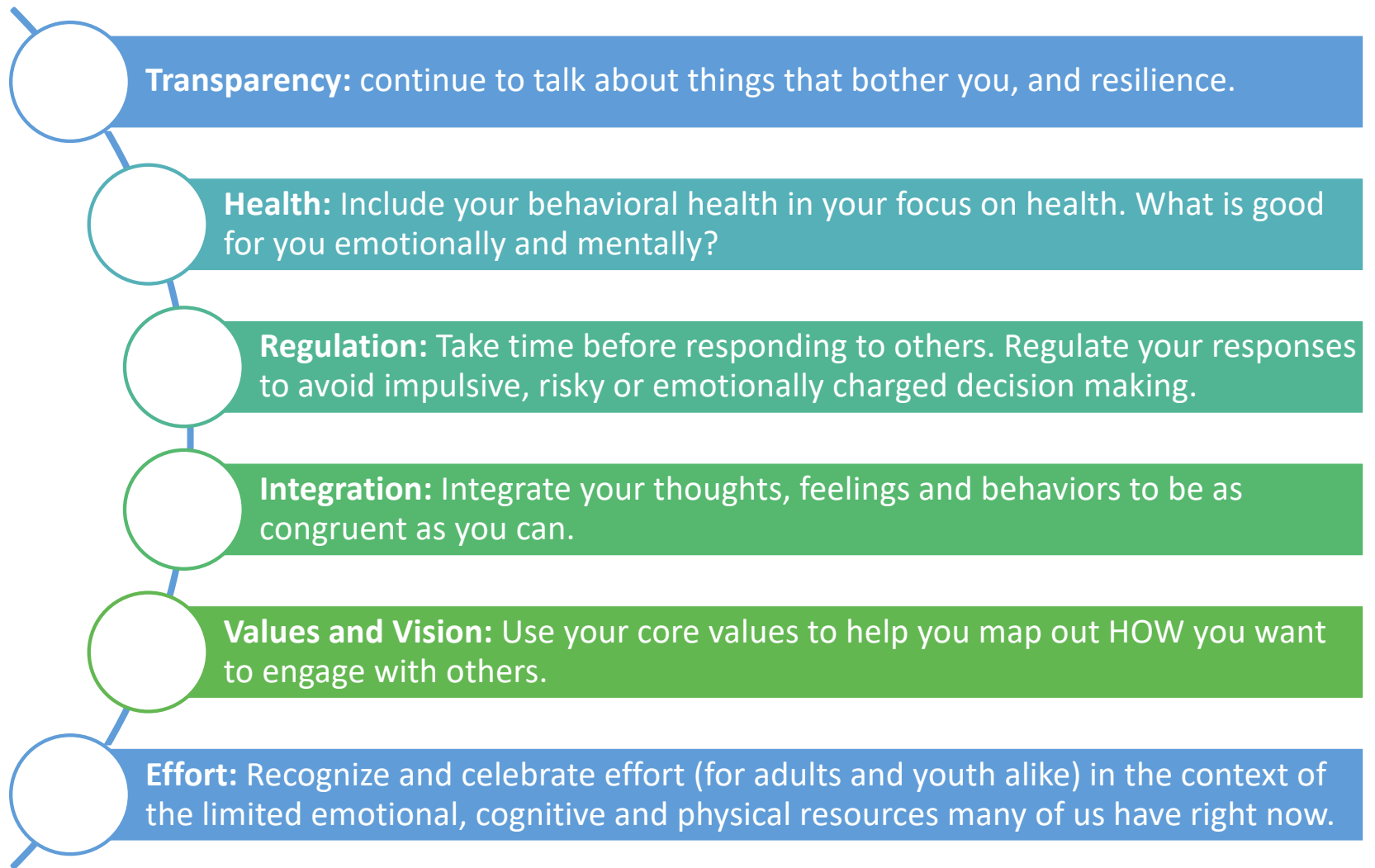
Flexibility/
Adaptability



Hope

THRIVE

with a
focus on...



What works for you?

- Identify things that have helped you before
- Be willing to try new things
- Don't dismiss outside time- especially in the fall and winter months
- Any physical activity will help neurologically
- Try to engage in active coping strategies as much as you can (rather than passive / avoidant coping, such as substance use).

Key takeaways

- Take time and pause before responding (via email, text, in person)
- Develop awareness of your personal physical response to unexpected, negative events; regulation can start with this insight.
- Resilience is a process, not an accomplishment or a badge to be won.

Resources

Training:

- Health Support Team (including train-the-trainer)
- PsySTART-Responder (frontline healthcare only)

Resources:

- MEDIC, REST, SAFE, and PEACE Models
- [Behavioral Health Group Impact Reference Guide](#)
 - Healthcare and behavioral health providers, outreach teams, post critical care individuals, etc.
 - Unique challenges and considerations
 - Support strategies (organizational, supervisory, and personal)
- Children and families: [Behavioral Health Toolbox for Families: Supporting Children and Teens During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#); Back to Classroom THINK toolbox for parents, teachers, caregivers and mentors: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/821-148-BackToClassroomToolbox.pdf>
- Businesses and workers: [COVID-19 Guidance for Building Resilience in the Workplace](#)

Resources (continued)

Webpages:

- DOH – Forecasts, situation reports, guidance, and other resources:
 - [Behavioral Health Resources Webpage](#)
 - Children and families: [Behavioral Health Toolbox for Families: Supporting Children and Teens During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- State – General mental health resources and infographics:
 - [Mental and Emotional Well-Being Resources](#)
 - [Infographic Library](#)
 - A Mindful State: <https://amindfulstate.org/>

Looking for support?
Call Washington Listens at
1-833-681-0211



Questions?



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