

Being a Caregiver During COVID-19

The Emotional Toll

Being a caregiver is challenging during the best of times. For example, it's been established that 25% of nurses will experience Posttraumatic Stress during their careers. And, that was *before* COVID-19.

In China – the epicenter of the pandemic – research shows that 71.5% of nurses reported some form of psychological distress. Anxiety, depression, and insomnia were the most common difficulties.

It's normal for healthcare workers to experience the following as they push forward through the pandemic:

- Fear that you'll contract COVID, spread it to Residents, or carry it home to your loved-ones
- Grief over the deaths of beloved Residents
- Feeling like a fraud when others call you a "hero" because, really, you're struggling just to get by
- Fatigue & irritability related to longer-than-normal work hours
- Feeling like you're not the person you used to be
- Posttraumatic Stress due to daily exposure to the suffering of others
- Financial concerns if a family member has lost work
- Emotional exhaustion and burnout
- Feeling distant from your family because they can't understand your daily struggles
- Significant stress & anxiety about the future

COVID Stress: Behavioral Coping

You'll likely need an arsenal of coping strategies, each of which helps just a little. Here are some ideas:

- Make sure you're up-to-date on your facility's safety protocols and observe them diligently. Proactively focusing on the things you can control will reduce your anxiety a little.
- Talk about your struggles. Expressing difficult feelings – or, *catharsis* – is known to alleviate stress.
- Try to take your breaks. You might be tempted to skip them, but it's worth the time to step outside, take off your mask, and breathe some fresh air.
- Make the most of your off-time. Eat, sleep, socialize, & laugh!
- Read articles on progress toward a vaccine. They're getting closer every day! Keeping up-to-date will help you see the light at the end of this tunnel.

COVID Stress: Cognitive Coping

- Accept compliments and take them to heart. Even if you feel like you're failing, you're not. Every time you mask-up, it's a small victory over COVID.
- Think of things you can look forward to at the end of each shift. Even if it's just a phone call with a friend or a good meal, look for the joy in the little things.
- Remind yourself that your role is to *help*. COVID is not a problem you can *fix*.
- Remember: this is temporary. Life will get back to normal.

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