

Supporting Crisis Center Staff in Response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Overview

The nation's response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) is an emerging, rapidly evolving situation. Below are some suggestions and resources that may be useful to crisis center leadership as you think about how the coronavirus situation may affect your staff and/or volunteers. Make sure you are staying up-to-date on the newest information and updated guidance offered by the CDC:

[Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Situation Summary](#)

Support Staff in Clinical Interactions with Callers:

- Share the Lifeline's tip sheet on [Supporting Callers-Chat Visitors Concerned About the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), available on the Network Resource Center ([networkresourcecenter.org](#))
 - If you have trouble accessing the NRC, please email us at lifelineinfo@vibrant.org for assistance
- Remind and reassure your team that they are not expected to be experts on coronavirus. Make sure they have access to reliable, vetted information, and ability to make referrals (or warm transfers) to medical experts when needed

Logistical Considerations to Support Staff:

- Sanitize workplaces frequently, especially phones, headsets, desks, keyboards, doorknobs
- Make cleaning supplies available to staff for use during shifts
- Make sure tissues are available for anyone, along with places to properly dispose of them
- Ensure there are plenty of resources available to wash or sanitize hands frequently (hand sanitizer with at least 65% alcohol, hand soap and single use options for drying hands)
- Reinforce that sick or potentially exposed staff should stay home
- Collaborate with Lifeline's operation team on maintaining capacity at your center (email lifelineinfo@vibrant.org with questions, concerns, updates) and consider options such as:
 - Allowing remote work if technically possible
 - Reduce the number of in-office staff if at all possible

Internal Communications:

- Make your center's response a team effort by requesting staff input in your center's preparation and response plan
- Communicate your plan to your crisis counselors. Frequent updates on anything that could impact staff are strongly encouraged. Even if nothing changes, it can be important to keep staffing feeling "in the know" to mitigate their own anxiety
- Consider small group meetings (perhaps using virtual meeting options, like Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.) with staff to hear their concerns and adapt accordingly
- Follow local news to be aware of new closings and advisories in your area that may affect staff's ability to work or caller referrals

- If you have to cancel team building or social activities, consider moving them to a virtual space such as Zoom or Skype if possible in order to maintain connection between team members and create opportunities for enjoyment

Managing staff stress and anxiety:

- Encourage staff to take breaks. A reasonable time frame is a 10- to 15- minute break every two hours. When possible, allow staff to get away from work space for a few moments
- Encourage staff to eat and drink well. Drink plenty of water. When possible, have healthy snacks available for staff
- Support staff in considering alternatives to their usual coping strategies in case there are limitations or disruptions in their usual routines
- Support and role model taking breaks from or rotating responsibility for monitoring media coverage as needed
- Remind staff to rely on colleagues and family for support. Talk about things other than the coronavirus situation with colleagues on your team and your family. Call colleagues who understand your work and can offer encouragement
- Offer recognition and positive reinforcement. Receiving recognition from individuals in supervisory positions can make it easier to stay enthusiastic about doing the difficult work that needs to be done
- Encourage taking appropriate time off. The high intensity and stress related to disasters may create a need for more frequent time off or shorter shifts to avoid burnout or compassion fatigue
- Give frequent reminders to breathe deeply. People often hold their breath when they are tense or working in stressful situations. Offer quick tips on deep breathing and other relaxation techniques.
- Remind crisis counselors about their access to support programs such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Provide community mental health resources and consider working with another center to provide anonymous crisis line service to staff if extra support options are needed