



Supporting Staff During the Coronavirus Pandemic

May 11, 2020

People throughout the world are facing challenges during the coronavirus pandemic. But depending on where you live, work and play, your circumstances are unique, and solutions will vary. This COVID-19 brief is designed to provide chapters with general information about supporting staff during this pandemic. In acknowledgement of the heroic efforts of Direct Support Professionals, several strategies are included.

From Leading Authorities

These websites have information about how to recognize the signs of stress and how to manage them.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html>

The Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/in-depth/mental-health-covid-19/art-20482731>

Center for Workplace Mental Health

<http://workplacementalhealth.org/Employer-Resources/Working-Remotely-During-COVID-19>

National Institute for Mental Health

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2020/supporting-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.shtml>

Grief and Loss

American Hospice Foundation

<https://americanhospice.org/learning-about-hospice/managing-stress-for-hospice-professionals/>

A blog called *Managing Stress for Hospice Professionals*

Hospice Foundation of America

<https://hospicefoundation.org/Continuing-Education/Self-Care-for-Clinicians>

A webpage with self-care tips for clinicians working with people who are sick or dying

Hospice Foundation of America

[https://hospicefoundation.org/Grief-\(1\)/Support-Groups](https://hospicefoundation.org/Grief-(1)/Support-Groups)

A webpage describing the importance of support groups. Links to national support groups are included

Cleveland Clinic

<https://consultqd.clevelandclinic.org/how-to-help-healthcare-providers-cope-with-covid-19s-psychological-toll/>

A blog called *How to help healthcare providers cope with COVID-19's Psychological Toll*

Especially for Direct Support Professionals

Given the nature of their assignments, Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) may have greater burdens compared with other chapter staff. These strategies may be appreciated by all staff but are designed with DSPs in mind.

National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals

<https://nadsp.org/covid-19resources/>

NADSP offers several videos for DSPs on the topics of self-care in a crisis, meditation, grief and loss, and the role of DSPs during Coronavirus

Deliver Chapter Leader Messages

- Invite Board of Director members and senior administrators to, in their own way, acknowledge the efforts and sacrifices of DSPs
- Identify ways to thank DSPs (gift cards, homemade goodies, phone calls thanking them for their commitment, etc.)
- Create a process for collecting suggestions for improvement – and implement them whenever possible
- Be flexible and accommodating with workplace rules
- Never forget the obstacles that many DSPs are facing (low wages, limited/no employment benefits, long shifts, lack of childcare, unreliable transportation, losing people they care deeply about, etc.)
- Remember that many DSPs are afraid of getting sick or, if they are asymptomatic, spreading COVID19 to others, including their own families

- If procedures permit, visit DSPs at their workplace. And don't forget to follow the same rules they've been asked to follow (wearing masks, gloves and social distancing, etc.)
- Connect with other chapters that employ DSPs. Design a process where DSPs from different chapters doing the same work can meet and support each other using electronic devices

Provide Heartfelt Support

- We've seen news stories with teachers parading in their cars to greet their students. Is a drive-by parade by chapter leaders greeting residents and DSPs at residential settings in your future?
- If your chapter has a residence that's supported by neighbors, maybe they'd enjoy posting homemade signs on their doors and windows thanking DSPs
- A little thank you goes a long way. Handwritten thank you notes, videos and photos from families to DSPs are sure to be appreciated
- Create a safe place where DSPs can share their stories and feelings about working on the front lines. Whether chapters provide a conference call number, Zoom account or other communication option, setting up opportunities for DSPs to voluntarily connect with others who have similar experiences is priceless
- Many colleagues with the luxury of working from home are asking "What can I do to support DSPs?" Invite them to sew a mask, bake cookies, bring games, art supplies, fitness equipment, etc. to the residence. Drop them off while saying thank you and maintaining social distancing
- Has your chapter converted facility-based programming to online classes? Invite chapter leaders to attend a class and provide lavish praise to the staff who re-tooled services with minimal planning
- Host a celebration with refreshments and music once we return to work

Use Social Media

- Create a hashtag and invite everyone to use it, for example #DSPLove
- Post photos of DSPs doing great work on your social media accounts
- Give DSPs access to chapter video conference accounts (Zoom, WebEx, etc.) so they can keep in contact with other DSPs during work and family/friends after work
- Set up a video conference social hour for DSPs. What a wonderful platform to get to know each other and have some virtual fun

Inform the Public

- Pitch a story to your local radio station about the great work of DSPs
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper reminding them that DSPs are another group of health care professionals that deserve our appreciation
- See if a DSP would like to share their superhero story with a local TV station

- Confirm that businesses offering discounts to hospital healthcare workers are extending their generosity to DSPs too. Advise chapter DSPs about these big-hearted offers
- Invite DSPs to use their creativity to write a poem, record a rap, author a newsletter article or create an art project that describes their fears, heartbreaks and victories. Share these projects in various ways (create an art exhibit or host a poetry slam once we return to work, include an article in your blog or newsletter, etc.)

This brief is not intended to provide professional advice. Chapters are encouraged to consult local mental health professionals if desired. The ideas in this brief are offered for consideration by chapters of The Arc.