Taking Care of Your Mental Health on the Frontlines of COVID-19

Remember that anything you're feeling in this moment is ok.

Working with the public during this time can cause anxiety and fear, especially if customers or patients are panicked and scared. You probably are too. Service jobs like cashiers, custodians, customer service agents, pharmacists, and nurses don't get enough credit - and you guys are the ones running our world during this crisis. We see you, we're grateful for you, and we know that your jobs are daunting right now.

When you're working on the frontlines, remember that any anxiety, fear, stress, or overwhelm you're experiencing is likely also being felt by your patients/customers and colleagues. It's a challenging time for everyone, so patience and empathy will go a long way. Empathize with your fellow frontline heroes, but also be patient and compassionate with yourself. Thank yourself for the hard work that you're doing - don't shrug it off because you're "just doing your job." Give yourself the credit you deserve.

Calm your body in times of overwhelm

Practice box breathing. When you're feeling panicked or overwhelmed, visualize a rectangle or find one in the space around you - a window, table, etc. Follow the shape with your eyes, breathing in as you follow along the left side of the box, and out as you go across the top. In again down the right side and out across the bottom. Hold briefly between each breath to ground yourself even more. Use this quick and easy technique to help you calm down, find your breath, and feel grounded.

Use the 3 Bs:
- **Be quiet** when you start to panic or feel like you will snap at someone. Sometimes this will mean stopping mid-sentence.
- **Back away.** Leave the setting you're in and find a quiet place where you can calm down. In hospitals or medical centers, this might be a single

bathroom stall. Get to a place you can close your eyes and find your stillness.

- **Breathe.** Find your way back to regular breathing patterns. Box breathe if you need to, until you can breathe normally and are feeling calmer.

Establish meaningful self-care

During this time you are doing integral work that many others are depending on. To protect yourself, you need to create meaningful self-care practices that help you stay strong and resilient. Bubble baths and walks in nature are great, but here are some other options that may get longer-term results:

- **Set smart boundaries**. If you have colleagues, friends or family members who are doing things that are wearing you down, set limits. You call the shots here. If you want them to call you more, call you less, drop off groceries, leave you alone, etc. tell them exactly what you need. The more you set limits, the less the same irritating things will happen and keep grinding away at you.
- **Nurture your relationships**. Just because you're supposed to socially distance yourself when you're not at work doesn't mean that you have to neglect quality time with your friends and loved ones. Your social time might just look a little different for now - book virtual coffee dates or happy hours with friends and family. Whether you use Skype, Facetime or any of the other fantastic video call options out there, this is a great way to reconnect and refill your bucket.
- **Take advantage of any free time or extra family time you have.** Chances are, your family members are going to be at home a lot more than normal for the foreseeable future. Make sure you're getting the rest that you need as best as you can, but try to use the opportunities where you're all home together to do things as a family that you typically don't have time to. Tackle that puzzle that's been collecting dust in your closet, or find some creative release by doing crafts or tackling some DIY home projects. Though we're living in a scary time, try to take advantage of your downtime and get your mind off of work.

Create moments of joy

Life is heavy right now so we need to carve out our own opportunities to feel bursts of happiness that help boost our spirits. Whether you're at home after a crazy day, or taking a short break at work amidst the chaos, here are some suggestions to create little moments of joy to keep you going:

- Search for funny videos on YouTube - whether it's cats, babies or general fails, taking a moment to laugh can help release tension and give your mind a break.
- Tour a museum – or 12! – from your device. These [famous museums](#) have virtual tours available online so you can dig into a world-class cultural experience whenever you need a culture break.
- Get moving! Mark Kanumera – aka @mkik808 – is running daily dance parties live on Instagram at 2PM PST daily. When it's over, he shares videos of other people from around the world who were all dancing with you. If doing this live doesn't work for you, he also posts the party on his story so you can do it anytime.
- Watch a concert from the comfort of your own home. Check out [this list](#) of free, virtual concerts across all different genres. Some of the shows you can catch include: Ben Gibbard, Indigo Girls, and the Vienna Opera! Coldplay's Chris Martin and singer John Legend also hosted their own Instagram Live concerts called #TogetherAtHome, linked [here](#) and [here](#).
- Watch a movie or TV show with friends. [Netflix Party](#) allows you to start watching a show with others while you're in separate locations and have a group chat. This is a fun way to hang out with friends while social distancing.

If you're feeling guilty about being sick …

Doctors, nurses, and pharmacists don't need to be told how contagious this virus can be. You know that coming to work while sick will do more harm than good in the long run - *even if your calling in sick puts temporary pressure on your unit to find your replacement.*

Frontline workers in helping professions want to do just that: *help*. Coming to work while sick, around others with compromised immune systems, puts people at unnecessary risk - the opposite of what you want to be doing.

You are doing the right thing by being home, even if you feel guilty about the extra strain being put on your colleagues. The strain is temporary, but the sickness you might transfer to someone else if you were to come in could be life-ending.

Most importantly, listen to yourself.

If you're struggling, reach out to others for support. Ask your employer what resources are available to you. We need to protect each other physically, but it's also key to protect our mental health during this challenging time.