

Peer Support Fundamentals During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Outreach by email:

In the initial email, don't explain the program, just let the clinician know you will be contacting them by phone, can ask if there is a good time to call and for the best number.

Email subject line: Touch base

Email body: Hi. I am reaching out as a peer supporter. I will be calling you to give more details, please let me know if you prefer a certain time of day and your best contact number

Components of the peer support conversation (phone or face time)

Outreach call- normalize the outreach, explain the program, emphasize confidential nature of the conversation

Hi. I am one of the peer supporters at 'x hospital' reaching out to some of physicians on the front line of this crisis who might be experiencing higher stress levels. We've found that most of us appreciate talking to a colleague because it is hard for people outside medicine and outside of your role to know how this feels. All of us are experiencing stress, concern for ourselves and our families and friends, guilt and grief to various degrees.

Invitation/opening/listen – Provide an opportunity for the clinician to talk openly

How are you doing with all this?

Reflect/Normalize/Honor –

Experts in the field know that the spectrum of emotions range from mild stress to severe depression and PTSD. The fact the you are experiencing 'x' demonstrates that you are a normal caring and committed clinician. I know you get some recognition from the public for being on the front lines of this pandemic, I wanted to say, as a colleague, that you deserve all that recognition and more for your service in the time of this medical crisis

Coping – Give a menu of standard recommendations/ elicit their personal coping strategy

There are some things that the experts believe we all should try to do:
(From National Academy of Medicine)

1. **Meet Basic Needs:** eat, drink, sleep and exercise regularly
2. **Take Breaks:** whenever possible, give yourself a rest from patient care with comforting, fun, or relaxing activities (**ask what activities that is for them**)
3. **Stay Connected:** Give and receive support from your colleagues, partner with a colleague to monitor each other's stress ('the buddy system'). Stay in touch with family and loved ones. Avoid isolation
4. **Stay Updated:** rely on one or two source of trusted information, avoid overload with news or social media
5. **Perform self check-ins:** if you notice prolonged times of sadness, difficulty sleeping, intrusive thoughts or hopelessness, reach out to some of the resources provided
6. **Honor your service:** Be kind to yourself and remind yourself and others of the important and noble work you are doing. Avoid criticism of self and others

Ask “**what have you done in the past that has helped you through difficult times?**”

Screen for poor coping behaviors (constant reliance on alcohol/drugs/thoughts of self harm/harm to others)

Resources/referrals

Provide local and virtual resource sheet (by email or mail)

Closing

I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me. Remember all the good you are doing