Supporting Yourself and Others with Post-Pandemic Stress

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Pandemic stress takes many forms

- Workplace challenges
- Childcare issues
- Missed opportunities
- Loss of loved ones
- Decision making around risk
- Dealing with uncertainty
- Interpersonal difficulties
- Isolation
- Limited availability of support
Anxiety: The “What if” Monster

- Everyone experiences stress
- Some stress is normal and even helpful
- Excessive stress leads to breakdown
- Anxiety myths:
  - Worrying helps me to prepare
  - Worrying helps me to prevent bad things from happening
  - Worrying will protect me emotionally if bad things do happen
  - Worrying shows that I care about people
What can I do to manage my stress?
Decrease things that make you vulnerable to stress

• Sleep deprivation
• Doomsscrolling
• Substances
• Hunger / poor nutrition
• Isolation
• Avoidance
Establish your routine

• Many people broke their routines during the pandemic
• Return to work is likely to force changes in routines (both positive and negative)
• Routines are important for mental health and help to maintain your circadian rhythm

• Routines include:
  – Sleep/wake times
  – Eating
  – Physical activity
  – Social interaction
Practice your portable coping tools

• Find strategies that can come with you wherever you go
• Find strategies where brief bursts can alleviate stress
• Try something several times before you decide if it works for you
• But if something doesn’t work, move on to the next thing!
• Ideally, come up with a few things that help
• Important to practice these skills when you are NOT stressed
How do I help others with their stress? Especially when I have my own?!
How to support others: The Don’ts

• “Should” all over the person
  – Instead, ask questions!

• Minimizing
  – This often starts with “at least…."
  – A person’s experience is valid even if there are others who have it “worse”

• Compare stressors / make it about you
  – Stress is not a competition!

• Make assumptions
How to support others: The Do’s #1

*Validate their experience*

- Seek to learn about / understand their experience
  - What is/was that like for you?

- Validate emotions
  - That must have been ______
  - I can understand why you feel ______

- Normalize reactions
  - Anyone who experienced what you did would feel this way
  - It’s natural to ______ based on what you experienced
How to support others: The Do’s #2

Express empathy and caring

• 4 components of empathy
  – Perspective taking
  – Staying out of judgment
  – Recognizing emotion in other people
  – Communicating that emotion

• I’m here for you
• “How can I best support you?”
How to support others: The Do’s #3

Build hope

• That things can get better with time
• That they are capable of coping
• That they have people who care about them
• That there are ways of getting help
How to support others: The Do’s #4

Share resources

- Online resources
- Professional options – it works!
- Support groups
- Crisis support

myStrength offered free by UCI

http://www.wellness.uci.edu/SSIHIWellbeing.pdf
Questions?

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