

A man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a red and white checkered button-down shirt, is smiling and talking on a black mobile phone. He is holding the phone to his ear with his right hand. The background is a textured, greyish-blue wall.

Connect Psych Services.

Supporting Supporting Mental
Health Challenges within your
Frontline and Clinic Staff

Supporting teams during COVID-19



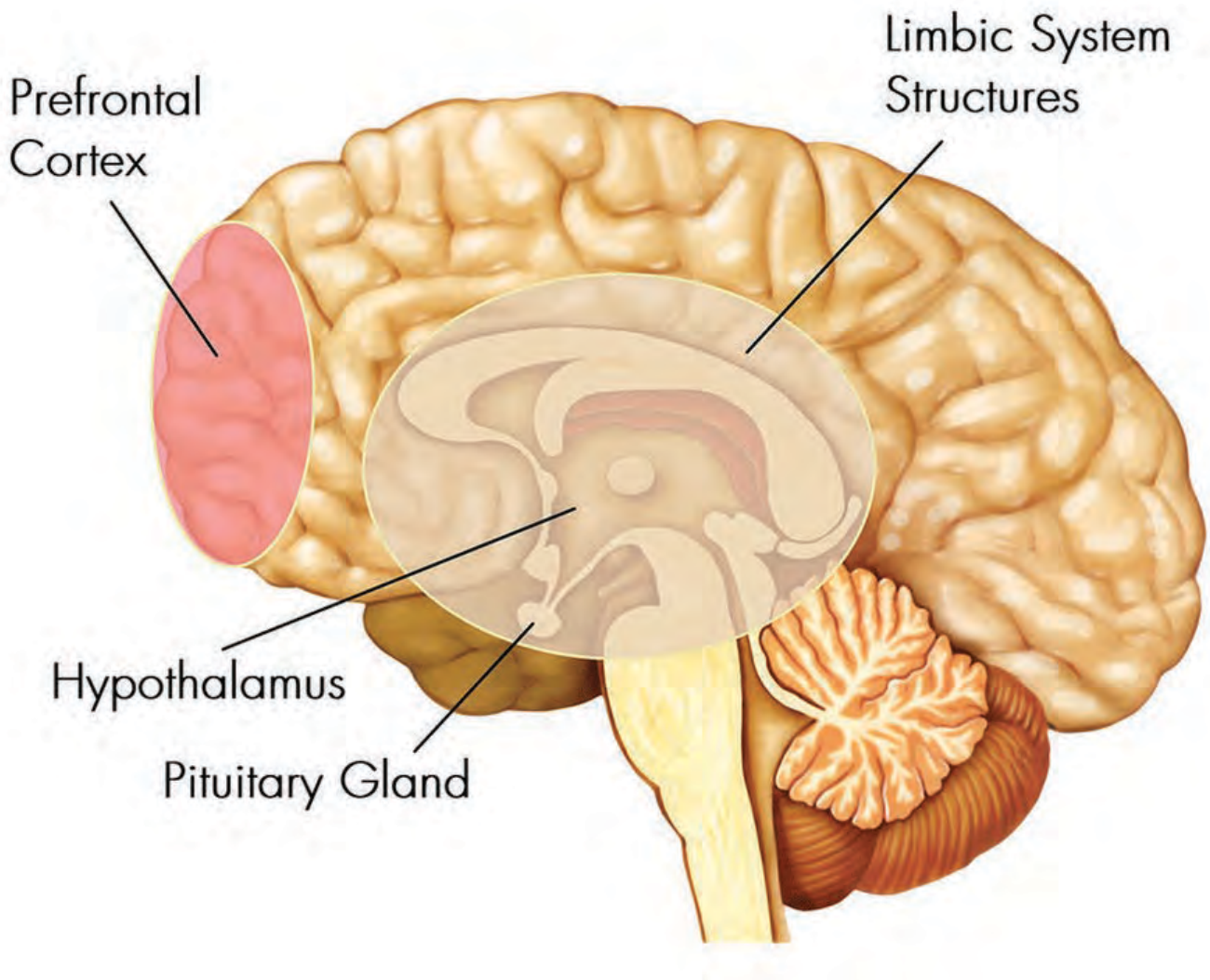
Let's chat about how front line leaders can provide appropriate support and create an empathic space to ask their team R U OK?

As the weeks have trudged on, employees have been left feeling burned out, anxious, stressed, isolated, lack confidence, decision fatigue and problem-solving skills. As a front line leader, focussing on the outcome of work performance can be linked to an employee's current ways of coping with their own situation. It's important for leaders to check in with their teams in a manner which is thoughtful, empathic and understanding and the pathway they can take to explore and encourage self-care activities.

And we are always here to listen; anytime, anywhere.

Nat & Pasha x

The Stress Response



STRESS - The body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. "fight-or-flight".

ANXIETY - The body's natural response to stress. It's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what's to come.

Continual state of stress (limbic system activated however it de-activates the pre-frontal cortex). This is where we are seeing across the board poorer productivity, decision making, concentration, adrenal fatigue.

Signs of struggle

APPEARANCE - An unhealthy or unkempt appearance/abnormal appearance: difficulty to maintain appearance and may have poor hygiene habits, dress inappropriately at work/online, etc. Looking tired and drawn.

ATTITUDE - Mood swings, emotional rollercoasters, and erratic behaviour: mood swings and inconsistent emotions, where there may be extreme highs and lows. Could be tearful, disengaged. Behaviours may seem strange and/or turn unusual quickly as well. Out of character, flighty and they may state underlying irrational statements.

THOUGHT PROCESSES - Moments of confusion/distraction or an inability to solve a problem, issues with focusing, solving problems, or is easily getting confused.

NEGATIVE NARRATIVE - "I have too much to do, I'm never going to get all of this done" notice the use of absolute language. On its own this statement may not be a sign but if you notice that these types of sentences are more the norm than an anomaly it may be a sign that they are struggling or not coping. In addition to this people that may be struggling may not receive solution focused strategies all that well, for example you may suggest some solutions to help and are met with repetitive reasons as to why they will not work. These can be signs that someone is depleted, feeling overwhelmed and/or feelings the signs of significant stress.



Behaviour Change

DECREASE OR LACK IN PRODUCTIVITY - Whether it's because of fatigue, lack of sleep, anxieties, or something else, mental health issues make it hard to focus and be productive. Further, excuses may fly around as to why they can't turn on their camera for Zoom meetings, showing up late constantly, don't engage in the project conversations.

WITHDRAWAL FROM SOCIAL SITUATIONS, ESPECIALLY WITH CO-WORKERS - Employees who seem withdrawn from co-workers and the social culture at the company may do so as a symptom of mental illness. Many people with mental health concerns suffer from isolation, loneliness, and self-loathing.

EASILY IRRITATED, FRUSTRATED OR ANGERED - The anxiety and stress associated with signs of struggle mean many employees get frustrated or irritated easily. This can be noticed in how they approach projects, react to co-workers, etc.

R U OK? steps



Taking Action

1. **Self-check in** how are you feelings? Check in on your energy before embarking on asking someone else you are concerned about how they are.
2. **Pick an environment** where the employee will feel comfortable and neutral so you can talk without distractions.
3. **Start with your objective observations** "I've noticed that you are not participating in group discussion as much as you were"; "I've noticed that you have been missing deadlines for projects lately." Open questions with evidence provides an avenue for the employee to answer without becoming defensive.

"Are you OK?"

4. **Use active listening** to really understand the employees position and put our own views aside. **Acceptance** – even though the other employees's views may be different to yours, it is essential that we respect and accept them. **Genuineness** – your body language matches what you say in order to show the employee that what you say is genuine. **Empathy** – Imagine yourself in their position in order to truly feel what they are feeling.

Taking Action

5. **Verbalising nurturing statements** exhibits that you deeply care about their current mental status and you will find them the support they need; they are not alone. "I'm here for you"; "I can see this is a really hard time for you" "What can I do to help? Tell me how." Ask them to be honest about how you can help them. This may be reducing their workload, allowing them to go home early, moving their desk or working in a different environment.

6. **Be mindful of your own boundaries to avoid a power imbalance**- "even though I can be a listening ear, I'm not an expert in this area." Provide the relevant crisis support numbers and know that your organisation has a reliable EAP to provide accessible and professional support.

7. **Check in** - objective observation and an open ended questions will provide you with some insight - "I noticed that you are more engaged with the team meetings and are overall more cheerful. How is everything going?"



Taking Action



"Please place the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others."

Normalise Mental Health Challenges - Talking about stress management, self-care, and mental health in meetings and in email communications can reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

Lead by example. That way if an employee comes to you for support you can suggest or encourage them by letting them know what works for you. Provide a level of insight into how you manage stress and show self-care will allow your team to see mental health as 'normal' and will trust that you won't judge if they came to you with a mental health issue.

Recognise employees for their work and accomplishments. In general, people like to know what they do well. It's comforting and affirming. Leaders have the ability to lift the confidence of employees by giving them recognition in a way that means something.

Connection

The importance of checking in with your team and friends -

Research provides evidence of the significance of connection through epidemics. Make plans to e-meet on a regular basis and share creative ways you've adjusted to the new situation. Everything takes proactive effort. Call your colleagues and friend/family frequently just to say hi and see how they're doing. Let them know you still care about them even though you're not physically working in the same location. Further, follow-up notes/actions/minutes and decisions from meetings held can assist with solid comprehension for future tasks and also provide clarity to any potential miscommunication. Create that buddy system as a 'reciprocal relationship' to download difficult days or weeks.



Positive perspective

“THIS TOO WILL PASS” - Try to see this unprecedented time as unique and different. It's not only you who is feeling negative and disempowered emotions. Creating a list of what is in your control and what is out of your control makes it easier to accept the current situation. Use positive language and self-talk which will elicit positive emotions; in turn creating positive behaviour. Tell yourself you are **forgiven** and allow you to move on. Your greatest power is your perspective.

Positive Self- Talk - Research supports the notion that positive self-talk leads to success, reduction in stress, higher confidence and an overall happier life. Start taking note of your self-talk. Is it more self-deprecating? If you constantly say “I can not”, you can easily convince yourself that this is true. **Challenge each thought pattern and replace with a positive statement.** Write down those statements and stick them in conspicuous places to help maintain that mindset.

Further, don't forget to remind yourself to- · Acknowledge your accomplishments, no matter how small· Never compare yourself to other people· Tell yourself you are forgiven and allow you to move on· Give yourself grace when things get tough· Avoid those toxic people in your life who get you down and create negative thinking·be realistic about what you can accomplish during the day

Gather evidence of your successes each day in a journal before bed.

Decision Fatigue

Develop routines that reduce decisions – The average adult makes around 35,000 decisions each day. Time and time again, studies of high-performing individuals show that much of their success relates to successful routines. Not only do routines help create consistency for you and your family, but they can also reduce the total number of decisions that have to be made throughout the day. Design a morning routine that includes a balance of self-care activities like meditation, exercise, yoga, or spiritual practices and personal care activities like eating breakfast and preparing for the day. Design a bedtime routine that helps you wind down from the day, shutting off technology and preparing for the upcoming day.

Make tougher decisions early in the day, and quit while you're ahead - individuals tend to make better choices for themselves and others earlier in the day. If you're evaluating a difficult decision or making a significant lifestyle choice, dedicate the time right after you wake up in the morning or early in the day. The closer we get to the end of the day, the closer we get to our threshold of the capacity to make good choices. Avoid making critical decisions and life choices late at night, or when you know you're tired.

Evaluate shopping and meal preparation to reduce decisions- Consider one to two trips to a supermarket for your weekly grocery shopping. Further, every Sunday, get the whole family involved in choosing the weekly dinner menu which you can place for everyone to see.

Self-Care Strategies

Break it down – Especially for those juggling parenting, the Pomodoro Technique is making a comeback. The technique encourages employees to work with the time they have-rather than against it. Using this method, you break your workday into 25-minute chunks separated by five minute breaks. Obviously, this will not work when in online meetings however is a great technique to use for those days where document content needs to be written. Take a longer break of about 15 to 20 minutes.

Switch off – It's important to protect your boundaries and clock off at a reasonable time. Make a to do list for the next day's work, attach it to your office 'desk' and walk away to relax and recharge those batteries. After work hours, enjoy other areas of your home: watching a good movie, reading a book, or cooking a fun meal.

Actively manage your wellbeing - by maintaining routines where possible, staying physically active (at least 30 min per day) , eating nutritious foods high in protein, vitamin B, C and E and seeking additional online positive psychology and relaxation techniques such as mindfulness meditation. Headspace or Smiling Mind are great tools to investigate for 'taking time out and being present' moments.

'I like to move it move it'- Exercise is a must to release those feel good chemicals in the brain and increase problem solving. There are many online classes such as yoga, HIIT, spin or strength-based training. Not only does exercise keep blood, glucose and oxygen levels high, feeding the brain, it releases endorphins into the body giving your mood a boost and increase your motivation and self-confidence.

Being vulnerable is scary, but it's often the first step on the path to growth. Therapy means being vulnerable. But it also means that you've recognised that you want to take every chance to be the best version of yourself and live your best possible life. And what's braver than that?

At Connect Psych we are all about YOU, we bring the therapy to YOU in the comfort of YOUR chosen environment, at the time of YOUR choice and on a communication platform of YOUR choice (voice, video, live chat). The Connect Psych platform cleverly matches you with one of our practitioners who specialise in your challenges; eliminating time and disappointing sessions with other practitioners.

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