A Message From Your Peer Support Team (PST): Lydia Newlin and Shawn Yurick

3.19.2020
12:00 Noon

Peer Support has received many questions and concerns from our colleagues. As a reminder, we are available to our staff to field the questions and concerns from staff. Please continue to reach out to our team if we can help. We can be reached at Peersupportunit.doc@state.mn.us or 651-361-7110.

The most common questions we are getting are specific to child care and specifically, childcare for preschool aged children. As the questions come in, we are forwarding immediately to the agency IMT.

The PST met with MMB this morning and have identified child care related questions and concerns as our priority need specific to EAP support at this time. MMB is working with our provider to create a process to provide information and resources about child care availability. We have expressed the importance of having “real time” information and availability for staff that reside in Minnesota as well as our neighboring states.

Staff that are or believe they could be impacted by childcare related needs or leave, please refer to Commissioner Schnell’s 3.19.20, 9:52 AM email which directs staff to complete a survey ASAP. This survey is critical in determining needs of staff as well as overall staffing planning during the COVID-19 planning and response.

The PST has also received a request to be available to support staff that have been or will be sent home during the screening process. The Peer Support team is absolutely available to talk with staff in these situations. Additionally, business cards are being delivered and will be available at each of the screening sites at each facility and will also be sent to Field Service offices, Central Office and MinnCorr.

COVID-19 does not eliminate the other day to day needs staff have when it comes to needing support. The PST will continue to be available for staff that need support or navigation related assistance in addition to providing staff support related to COVID-19.

The attachment “Coping” tip sheet is from your EAP-Work/Life Counseling resource which is available 24/7 by phone (800-657-3719; 651-259-3840) and online at www.mn.gov/eap.

The following is some information that is specific to First Responders. Although this is not specific to Corrections, it might be helpful. The PST will continue to identify and provide information specific to Corrections as it comes available.

(Source: https://www.policeone.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/protecting-the-mental-health-of-first-responders-during-a-pandemic-U1LTkVxHYf09u8QI/)

HOW THE PAN(DEM)IC AFFECTS FIRST RESPONDERS

There are several ways COVID-19 will affect first responders related to mental health and well-being.
First, you’ll be interacting with people (just like you do already) whose personalities and experiences cause them to react somewhere on a scale between cynicism and annoyance, all the way to extreme panic and fear.

As a first responder, you will be seen as someone who should have the answers, and so you’ll get regular questions from people looking for information and trying to figure out how they should be reacting. Other people’s fear and panic can easily start a chain reaction, causing more fear and panic. As a responder, you’ll be interacting with this intense fear, and you need to know that this constant bombardment can have a negative effect on you.

The flip side is the cynicism and annoyance of people who aren’t prone to panic or fear, who may even be dismissive of the risk and are annoyed at all the fuss being made over the novel coronavirus. The comments can be negative rather than optimistic and hopeful. All of that negative talk can take its toll on a responder who hears it continually, especially when you’re having to converse and interact with these individuals.

The best way to care for yourself through the barrage of negativity – be it cynicism or fear – is to be as educated as possible about the risks, symptoms and precautions, and then stand your ground. Do everything you can to counteract the negative and the fear through finding positivity in your own life. Think about what you are grateful for so you can outweigh the intense "downward" thoughts people are having.

**EXTRA RESPONSE MEANS EXTRA EXHAUSTION**

Responding to other’s fears means you’re going to be working a lot harder. This may mean more calls on your regular shift, or it may mean extra shifts and longer hours. You already know this can cause exhaustion, so remind yourself you need to put extra effort into self-care.

Do what you can to get good sleep and **focus on healthy eating and hydration**. Taking care of yourself is not an extracurricular activity, it’s a necessity so you can keep taking care of others.

**ANSWERING OTHERS WHEN YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

You’ll be seen as the source of information and answers to those who have fears, but how do you fill that role when you have so many questions yourself? Take the time to review **factual information about COVID-19**. Answering your own questions will prepare you to answer others. Being in a position to provide answers will give you a sense of control that a pandemic can easily take away.