



Stress First Aid *for* HEALTH CARE WORKERS

W O R K B O O K



Acknowledgements



This workbook was designed to be used individually or in brief discussion sessions to increase knowledge and understanding of how to apply the Stress First Aid model to both self-care and coworker support. It was developed by Patricia Watson of the National Center for PTSD, and Richard Westphal of the University of Virginia.

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For additional information on Stress First Aid, you may also review the Stress First Aid for Health Care Workers Manual, by Patricia Watson, Ph.D., of the National Center for PTSD, and Richard Westphal of the University of Virginia.

It is a civilian adaptation of the of the Stress First Aid for Pre-trial and Probation Officer Manual, which was adapted from the Combat and Operational Stress First Aid (COSFA) Caregiver Training Manual, developed by the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Department of the Navy, in cooperation with the Combat and Operational Stress Control, Manpower & Reserve Affairs, Headquarters Marine Corps, the Navy Operational Stress Control, Chief of Naval Personnel, Total Force N1 and the National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs.

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Use of This Workbook

This workbook was designed to increase knowledge and understanding of how to apply the Stress First Aid (SFA) model to both self-care and coworker support. It is to be used in conjunction with or after in-person training or after review of the *SFA for Health Care Workers Manual*. Self-reflection or discussion questions are included, as well as examples of actions for each core function of SFA, skill application, and quotes from those who have used SFA. These have all been included to help you reflect upon how SFA can best be used in your work setting.

As a reminder, SFA actions are to be used as needed with those who are experiencing either significant distress or impairments in functioning caused by stress reactions. SFA should be incorporated into departmental operations in a natural, seamless way, and implemented when needed. In most cases, it is not necessary to provide all the SFA actions. SFA functions along with a sampling of associated actions are provided in the table below.

SFA FUNCTIONS	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess current level of distress and functioning• Assess immediate risks• Assess need for additional SFA interventions or higher levels of care• Reassess progress (Re-Check)
Coordinate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decide who else should be informed of situation• Refer for further evaluation or higher levels of care, if indicated• Facilitate access to other needed care
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure immediate physical safety of stressed person and others• Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort• Protect from additional stress (ensure respite)
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce physiological arousal (slow down heart rate and breathing, relax)• Reduce intensity of negative emotions such as fear or anger• Listen empathically to the individual talk about experiences• Provide information that calms
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage connection to primary support people• Help problem-solve to remove obstacles to social support• Foster positive social activities within crew
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help mentor back to full functioning• Facilitate rewarding work roles• Arrange for retraining
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentor back to full confidence in self, leadership, mission and values• Help restore meaning or faith• Foster the trust of coworkers and family members in the individual



I. The Need for Stress First Aid

People in healthcare jobs often have common guiding ideals that draw them to those occupations, keep them in those occupations, and contribute to strong coworker bonds. These ideals can create both strengths and vulnerabilities that can either offset stress or become a hindrance to self-care. Review the following common ideals, strengths, and vulnerabilities in the table below to see which you recognize in yourself.

Strength	Guiding Ideal	Vulnerability
Placing the welfare of others above one's own welfare	Selflessness	Not seeking help for health problems because personal health is not a priority
Commitment to helping patients heal and supporting their families	Loyalty	Guilt and complicated bereavement after perceived failure or loss
Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint	Stoicism	Not aware of or acknowledging significant symptoms and suffering
Following an internal moral compass to choose "right" over "wrong"	Moral Code	Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to follow a moral code
Becoming the best and most effective professional possible	Excellence	Feeling ashamed and withdrawing from others when not living up to personal standards, or denying / minimizing imperfections

Which ideals do you most identify with?

Which vulnerabilities do you most identify with?

DISCUSSION: How have these ideals both contributed to and helped you with stress?



II. Obstacles to Self-Care and Coworker Support

The values and ideals that draw people to healthcare jobs can sometimes contribute to obstacles to self-care. Check the obstacles to self-care that you regularly experience.

Situational	Personal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Too many responsibilities on and off the job<input type="checkbox"/> Unexpected emergencies<input type="checkbox"/> Limited time in one's schedule<input type="checkbox"/> Always putting the job first<input type="checkbox"/> On-call or shift work<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of sleep<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of coworkers who could fill in if you need a break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> The feeling that if you say "no" you will be looked down upon<input type="checkbox"/> Concern about being perceived as weak<input type="checkbox"/> Self-criticism, not being able to modify high expectations under stressful circumstances<input type="checkbox"/> Never feeling that you can "unplug"<input type="checkbox"/> Wanting to be perceived as perfect<input type="checkbox"/> Always prioritizing others over self<input type="checkbox"/> Low morale
Attitudinal	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> "It would be selfish to take a break from this work."<input type="checkbox"/> "I'm okay, I'm fine, I'm not even tired."<input type="checkbox"/> "The needs of those I'm supporting are more important than my own needs."<input type="checkbox"/> "I'm not doing enough."<input type="checkbox"/> "I can contribute the most by working all the time."<input type="checkbox"/> "I don't want anyone to know how affected I am."<input type="checkbox"/> "Only I can do x, y, and z."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Working too long by oneself without checking in with colleagues<input type="checkbox"/> Keeping stress to oneself<input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring declines in functioning<input type="checkbox"/> Underestimating needs<input type="checkbox"/> Relying only on alcohol/substances to relax for extended periods of time<input type="checkbox"/> Becoming more disengaged/isolated<input type="checkbox"/> Overworking<input type="checkbox"/> Not doing enough self-care to balance out the demands of work<input type="checkbox"/> Not seeking help/expertise

Other: _____

DISCUSSION: What are the most common obstacles to self-care in your life?



III. The Stress Continuum

Stress responses lie along a spectrum of severity, and the Stress First Aid model acknowledges this with the Stress Continuum model.

Ready (Green)	Reacting (Yellow)	Injured (Orange)	Ill (Red)
DEFINITION			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimal functioning Adaptive growth Wellness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mild and transient distress or impairment Always goes away Low risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More severe and persistent distress or impairment Leaves a scar Higher risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clinical mental disorder Unhealed stress injury causing life impairment
CAUSES			TYPES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At one's best Well-trained and prepared In control Physically, mentally and spiritually fit Mission-focused Motivated Calm and steady Having fun Behaving ethically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any stressor Features Feeling irritable, anxious or down Loss of motivation Loss of focus Difficulty sleeping Muscle tension or other physical changes Not having fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wear and tear Loss Moral injury Traumatic stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTSD Depression Anxiety Substance use
		FEATURES	
YOUR ROLE			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access wellbeing resources Self-care Other care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternate exertion with rest Monitor your own well-being Offer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize stress injuries early Remember and use the 7 C's of Stress First Aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link into care Recover Return

The Green Zone indicates being at optimal functioning. Yellow occurs when expected or typical stressors create transient or mild stress reactions. Entering the Orange or Red Zones usually occurs as a result of accumulation of prolonged stress, exposure to traumatic events, grief or loss, or a sense of conflict between one's moral/ethical beliefs and current experiences.

The hallmarks of the Orange and Red Zones are more prolonged or significant distress or lowered functioning, a feeling of lessened control over one's emotional reactions, or no longer feeling like one's normal self.

DISCUSSION: Is Orange or Red Zone stress common in your work setting, and if so, what is likely to cause it?



Stress First Aid Model

IV. SFA: Check

The Check and Coordinate functions in SFA are ongoing, foundational actions for providing SFA. The Check function in SFA involves increased awareness about stress reactions in yourself and your coworkers in an ongoing way, whether they arise from stressors at work or at home.

DISCUSSION: Which of these stress indicators have you most commonly seen or experienced in the last few months?



The SFA Model is a framework that includes seven actions, the Seven C's. The cycle begins with the onset of stressors that are accompanied by distress or loss of function, and continues to wellness. Check and Coordinate actions are repeated throughout the cycle, and the other five C's are used as needed.

Physical	Emotional
<input type="checkbox"/> Aches and pains <input type="checkbox"/> Weight loss/gain <input type="checkbox"/> Indigestion/digestive issues <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disruption/sleeplessness <input type="checkbox"/> Immune system problems <input type="checkbox"/> Medical symptoms of undetermined cause <input type="checkbox"/> Stress induced seizures <input type="checkbox"/> Increased use of sick leave	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional extremes <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety/panic attacks <input type="checkbox"/> Crying easily or unexpectedly <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Short temper <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration <input type="checkbox"/> Increased drinking <input type="checkbox"/> Giving up <input type="checkbox"/> Hypervigilance
Mental	Social
<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of interest in things that once mattered <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease in the quality of work/productivity <input type="checkbox"/> Decreased motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Decreased patience <input type="checkbox"/> Increased work errors <input type="checkbox"/> Increased lateness/absenteeism <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness <input type="checkbox"/> Distorted thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced self-awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble keeping up with workload	<input type="checkbox"/> Marital/partnership stress <input type="checkbox"/> Increased isolation <input type="checkbox"/> Increased complaining <input type="checkbox"/> Less tolerance <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability / impatience / intolerance <input type="checkbox"/> Social engagement with others dropping off <input type="checkbox"/> Closed off body language <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced interpersonal boundaries <input type="checkbox"/> Less volunteerism <input type="checkbox"/> Uncharacteristic negative changes in social behavior

Other: _____



POTENTIAL CHECK ACTIONS

Self-Care Actions

- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
- Make a conscious effort to keep tabs on yourself
- Become aware of your own personal indicators of Orange or Red Zone stress
- When Orange or Red Zone stress indicators occur, take steps to mitigate them
- Inform key family, friends, or coworkers about your stress unique stress indicators and make a plan as to what to do when they occur

Checking on Employees

- Foster a culture that encourages employees to offer, receive, or ask for help, to make it easier for employees to check in on one another.
- Be approachable and authentic, to encourage employees to share their experiences.
- Set the tone by stating that it's natural to have stress in health care jobs and that it's important to look out for each other and to be self-aware about specific red flags.
- Monitor/check on staff needs regularly.

Checking on Coworkers

- Pay attention to changes in behavior, emotional tone, and work performance.
- Find the right way to check on someone (e.g., email / texting versus talking or calling).
- Offer basic resources like food, water, etc. to open a conversation
- Start a general conversation to get the person talking. Then look for verbal and non-verbal signs as to how they are doing.
- Start with something positive then reference specific concerns you have.
- Ask, "Is everything all right? I'm checking on you. I've noticed..."
- Reference the stress continuum model.
- Look for opportunities where there is safety, privacy and time to open conversations.
- Check in during known challenges, or on anniversaries of difficult events.





USE THE OSCAR TOOL TO HELP YOU CHECK IN:

Use the **OSCAR** tool to help you check in with coworkers:

O bserve	Actively observe behaviors; look for patterns.	Be on the lookout for changes in coworkers' behaviors or functioning (e.g., increased withdrawal / more mistakes).
S tate Observations	All attention to the behaviors; just the facts without interpretations or judgments.	"I have noticed over the past few days that you seem lost in thought and really quiet (frustrated/irritated)."
C larify Role	State why you are concerned about the behavior. Validate why you are addressing the issue.	"As a coworker (friend, supervisor) I am concerned."
A sk Why	Seek clarification; try to understand the other person's perception of the behaviors.	"Am I right? Am I wrong? Help me understand what's going on. I would like to help if I can."
R espond	Clarify concern if indicated. Discuss desired behaviors. State options in behavioral terms.	"Thank you for trusting me enough to share that (issue). I really do want for you to be comfortable in working together. I respect that you have a lot going on. I also respect your privacy. If not me, would you be willing to talk with (trusted resource)?"

DISCUSSION:

Which of these examples appeals to you for self-check and checking on coworkers?

What are some other ways you could check in with yourself or your co-workers?

What action can you take to check in with yourself or check on a coworker?

What will you do to overcome potential obstacles to this action?

(Examples: remind myself that self-care matters, put a plan to check in with a coworker in my mobile phone calendar so I won't forget).



Stress First Aid Model

V. SFA: Coordinate

Stress First Aid is a good step towards better self-care and coworker support, but it may not be enough. Like Check, the Coordinate function in SFA is an important foundational function of SFA because it allows you to gather and consider additional resources or assistance that might be needed if SFA actions are not a sufficient support.

POTENTIAL COORDINATE ACTIONS

- Set up a variety of resources in advance (e.g., local clinicians, mentors, coworker teams, chaplains, life coaches, hotlines, support groups and self-help groups).
- Share your own or others' experiences with help-seeking, and/or normalize help-seeking.
- Suggest why you think it would be beneficial for them to talk with EAP or other support.



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What are at least two trusted resources you would refer a stressed coworker to?

- Mentor/supervisor/coworker: _____
- Support group: _____
- Trained peer: _____
- Chaplain: _____
- Alternative healer: _____
- Employee assistance program: _____
- Human resources: _____
- Mental health: _____
- Medical: _____
- Other: _____



DISCUSSION

- What are some reasons you might self-refer or refer a coworker for additional care?
- What are some of the barriers or challenges to connecting with resources?
- What can be done about those challenges?

What action can you take to become more knowledgeable about possible resources for yourself or your coworkers?

(Examples: Talk with at least one EAP or HR person this month to find out what they have to offer. Ask a coworker if they know of any good resources for stress).

What I can do to overcome potential obstacles to taking this action:

(Examples: remind myself of the importance of knowing about good resources).



Stress First Aid Model

VI. SFA: Cover

To provide Cover means to ensure safety immediately or in a longer-term way.

Cover is needed when:

1. Someone is in immediate danger (e.g., is faced with a threatening person or situation; has frozen, panicked, or is not thinking clearly or making good decisions because of intense stress).
2. Someone has an ongoing sense of not being safe (e.g., feels overworked, not protected from potential harm at work, or unsafe because of trouble setting boundaries or fears about making any mistakes).
3. Others are in danger because the stressed person behaves in a way that impacts their safety (e.g., freezes or panics, puts others in harm's way).



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Use the examples on the next two pages to answer the following questions:

What are some ways that you can Cover yourself to increase your sense of safety?

What are some ways that you can Cover coworkers to increase their sense of safety?



POTENTIAL COVER SELF-CARE ACTIONS

Here are some Cover actions for making oneself feel safer.

- Amplify **safety plans and behaviors**:
 - Actively seek information that can help you feel safer
 - Get an accurate understanding of specific risks in order to better plan
 - Make a list of things that make you feel safer
 - When you feel acutely unsafe, distract yourself by focusing on something near you or your own breath or thought (e.g., counting)
 - Find those people, places, or actions that feel safe to you and call on them
 - Request help from supervisors (e.g., ask for case or job transfers)
- Set **healthy boundaries** for yourself:
 - Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
 - Reconfirm your value, priorities and rights regularly
 - Remind yourself that no one is perfect; everyone has strengths and vulnerabilities
 - Turn off your phone at times
 - Take breaks regularly
 - Say no if something is going to interfere with your priorities or health
 - Tell yourself it's not your responsibility to:
 - make sure others are responsible
 - rescue others from habitual drama
 - protect others from getting angry
 - always say yes when it doesn't work for you
 - think, feel, or live for others
 - stay in contact with those who are draining, abusive, or disrespectful
 - make everything okay for everyone all the time
- Include **family or friends**:
 - Let them know about work-related situations that might occur
 - Educate them about potential red flags that you might demonstrate if you are overly stressed, so they know when to support you and so they don't take them personally
 - Talk with them about ways you can help each other feel more safe
- Practice more **helpful ways of thinking** to foster healthy changes in behaviors. Here are a few examples of helpful thoughts:
 - "Taking a break from this work will help me be more effective."
 - "Even though I feel fine I need to take breaks regularly so I can continue to feel fine."
 - "I can better care for others if I also attend to my needs."
 - "I'm doing enough."
 - "I can contribute the most by pacing myself."
 - "Letting someone know how affected I am can help me."
 - "I can trust that others can fill in when it's necessary."



POTENTIAL COWORKER SUPPORT COVER ACTIONS

Here are a few Cover actions for coworker support.

Tailor Cover to the needs of the situation:

- Get to know your colleagues
- Maintain situational awareness to monitor for and assist in potentially threatening situations

Cover one another for personal issues

- Become more aware of and supportive during times when there are significant issues at home, in order to provide a safety net
- Check in and reduce high-risk behavior

Here are a few Cover actions for leaders to support their employees:

Work to make situations safer:

- Learn which situations feel unsafe to employees and work to improve their safety
- Have coworkers work in partnership
- Discuss lessons learned after unsafe situations and engage in problem-solving
- Train personnel on situational awareness and decision-making
- Give briefings before workers are involved in potentially unsafe situations
- Reduce exposure to potentially traumatic information as much as possible
- Reduce anxiety by taking a team approach to difficult cases
- If something goes wrong, take a lessons-learned rather than punitive approach

Improve boundaries:

- Mentor individuals who feel overwhelmed or overworked because of their trouble setting work boundaries
- Give time off for those needing a break
- Be more abrupt or directive if it is necessary to keep a coworker safe
- Be a good role model for setting boundaries for yourself or your coworkers
- Give permission and guidance about how to set boundaries and limits
- Allow people to go home if needed
- Find out what boundaries work best for employees
- Mandate workers to delegate or get coverage when they take time off, so they are not worried about their workload while on vacation
- Help workers make decisions at times when they may not make the best decisions for themselves
- Show vulnerability yourself
- Help people problem-solve solutions to situations in which they don't feel safe



VII. SFA: Calm

The goal of Calm in SFA is to reduce the intensity of physiological, emotional and behavioral stress. There is overlap between the actions of Cover and Calm, but the difference is that the primary goal of Cover is safety, while Calm actions may have no direct connection with safety.

Calm is needed when intense stress has interfered with an individual's ability to reduce their physiological arousal level. This can affect sleep, cognitive functioning, or healthy emotional expression (e.g., when someone is so overwhelmed with obligations or distractions that they "shut down," rendering them incapable of doing their job, when an accumulation of stress causes a person to feel regularly agitated or anxious, or when the loss of a patient causes insomnia and nightmares).

Stress First Aid Model



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Use the examples on the next two pages to answer the following questions:

What are some ways that you find calm for yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered calming actions?



POTENTIAL SELF-CARE CALM ACTIONS

Here are a few potential Calm actions for improving self-care:

- Spend time with family and close friends and let them know what is calming for you ahead of time so they can better support you when needed
- Take a break from stressful situations for a short time
- Get organized and problem-solve to tackle problems directly
- Try to see things from a higher vantage point to gain a broader perspective
- Focus on:
 - Whatever helps you to keep focused on the present moment
 - Being realistic — for instance, focusing on appraising situations, others, and yourself in terms of specific realistic descriptions such as “sometimes/lately” versus more polarized descriptions such as, “never/always”
 - Taking action to reduce stress reactions
 - Acceptance
 - What you’re grateful for
 - What you can control
 - Changing beliefs that don’t serve you
 - When/how pain temporarily eases
- Prioritize simple strategies to calm down, such as:
 - Breathing
 - Exercise
 - Yoga
 - Social support
 - Reflection/meditation/prayer
 - Actively identifying problems and creative solutions, then taking steps towards solving problems
 - Rewarding or pleasurable activities. While engaging in rewarding or pleasurable activities regularly may not result in feeling better immediately, over time it has been shown to be helpful in buffering stressful experiences. One analogy is that, like good nutrition, these activities can replenish or energize.



POTENTIAL COWORKER SUPPORT CALM ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions to calm coworkers:

- Educate:
 - Acknowledge possible stressors and the potential need for support in a matter of fact way ahead of difficult events
 - Make others aware of the importance of tailored self-calming strategies
 - Provide information about reactions and coping
- For immediate calm:
 - Reassure by authority and presence
 - Show understanding
 - Ask for help to empower and distract the person
 - If possible, get the stressed person to look at you for a minute, then be very specific and detailed about what you want them to do
 - Use the person's name and communicate exactly what is needed in a calm, methodical voice
- For long-term calm:
 - Validate concerns
 - Encourage the person to take brief breaks
 - Praise and give positive feedback
 - Allow the person to vent without judgment
 - Invite the person to meet outside the workplace, to give them a more confidential opportunity to talk away from work
 - Find ways to make meaning and memorialize together after losses
 - Help the person to prioritize and tackle problems directly
 - Foster a positive work environment by reducing gossip and negativity, not calling attention to a person's stress reactions, and acting upon employees' concerns



Stress First Aid Model

VIII. SFA: Connect

The Connect function of SFA involves restoring or increasing social support, such as asking for or providing support when you see Orange Zone stress in yourself or others.

Connect is important because organizational and social support have been shown to be more effective than self-care for work stress. Connect can be needed at either an individual or departmental level:

- When affected by stress, an individual can feel a sense of being alienated from themselves, like they are a different person. For instance, someone might withdraw from their coworkers after a difficult case because of shame, exhaustion or loss.
- At the department level, disruption of connectedness can be caused by blame, lack of confidence in coworkers or leadership, shame and stigma, overwhelming exhaustion, or loss.



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Use the examples on the next three pages to answer the following questions:

What are some ways that you have been able to connect with others that have been helpful?

What are some ways that you have offered, facilitated, or been offered social support?



POTENTIAL SELF-CARE CONNECT ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for improving the ability to connect with others:

- Know the value of good mentors and friends.
- Surround yourself with people who are genuine, authentic, and honest.
- Make friends with people you can be yourself with and talk with about what bothers you.
- Brainstorm with family and friends to find the best way to support you during difficult times.
- Educate family and friends about the potential experiences that can occur in this job.
- Communicate with family and friends when you are feeling upset, so they will not worry or take it personally.
- Discipline yourself to have conversations with people who are familiar enough with you to know when something is bothering you.
- Reprioritize your schedule to spend more time with those who mean the most to you.
- If conflict is occurring, use conflict resolution principles such as these:
 - Don't get involved unless you have to. Do a mental cost-benefit analysis to determine if the disadvantages of getting involved in a conflict outweigh the advantages. If they do, find ways to detach yourself, use humor, focus on other priorities, or remind yourself that it's not worth your time or energy to get involved.
 - If a conflict is unavoidable, begin with a positive approach. Try to establish rapport and mutual trust. Try to think of ways in which you are similar and focus on what you can potentially agree on.
 - Have a concrete strategy. Know what your needs and concerns are and anticipate how the other person will respond. How strong are your position and situation? How important is the issue? How important will it be to stick to your position?
 - Consider the other person's situation. Gather information about the other's interests and goals. What are the real needs? What is their strategy?
- Address problems, not personalities. Avoid the tendency to attack the other person personally. If you feel threatened, try to avoid defending yourself; it can make resolving the problem more difficult.
- Maintain a goal-oriented frame of mind. If the other person attacks you personally, try not to respond with an emotional reaction. Let the other person blow off steam without taking it personally. Try to understand the problem behind the anger.
- Emphasize win-win solutions. Even in what appear to be win-lose situations, there are often win-win solutions. Look for a solution that includes each person's needs. Create additional alternatives, such as "low cost" concessions that might have high value to the other person. Look for alternatives that allow the other person to feel their needs have been met.
- Negotiate on principles and results, not emotions or pressure. Try to find clear criteria that both sides can use to evaluate alternatives.
- To prevent conflicts, be proactively clear about your expectations and limits. For instance, if you have limited time to spend with someone, be specific about what works for you and set clear boundaries up front so the person knows what your time limits are and can plan accordingly. By doing this, you are less likely to become resentful because you're not letting the other person negatively impact you if they talk too much. And being clear about expectations and needs can help them have more explicit guidelines within which to adjust.



POTENTIAL COWORKER SUPPORT CONNECT ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for helping others Connect:

- Leaders can build a foundation amongst their employees that fosters social support:
 - Hold employees accountable for treating each other with respect
 - Encourage employees to make connections at trainings or conferences
 - Foster a team approach to problem-solve answers to challenging cases
 - Show validation and appreciation for employees
 - Foster opportunities for employees to socialize
 - Foster appreciation and support among coworkers
- Coworkers or leaders can make it a priority to connect after difficult situations:
 - If someone has retreated because of an incident, find ways to show them you're thinking about them and are available to talk if needed.
 - Include the person in projects and create collaborative opportunities with coworkers, to get them back into doing something meaningful.
 - With introverts, give them time to recharge in their preferred way before facilitating reconnection with coworkers.
 - If someone is stressed and resists getting support, don't be afraid to be more authoritative in getting them the help they need.
 - In the middle of intensive stress, get the person or team engaged in activities that facilitate either physical movement or talking while you do other things. For instance, have people briefly report out on successes, loose ends, or their plan for the next 24 hours while walking or attending to actions that require physical movement.
 - If someone is particularly stressed and isn't functioning well, foster understanding and support in coworkers.
 - If someone is having significant stress in their personal life, offer practical support if possible.





Here are some Connect actions for removing obstacles to potential social support for coworkers:

Action	Specific Intent	How to Do It	Examples of Phrases to Use
Assess social resources	Identify the best possible sources of social support for an individual	Identify who in the team is most trusted by the individual or has a positive attachment (this could be you). Identify members of the chain of command whom the individual most trusts.	"You let me know that this is a difficult time for you, and you are not sure where to turn. In addition to me, let's think about who else can help at work and away from work."
Assess obstacles to social support	Understand why an individual is not using all available social resources	Ask about how they perceive their own level of social involvement and connectedness. Find out what has changed in the individual that has led to isolation or alienation. Observe the individual interacting with others, looking for patterns of poor communication, respect, or trust.	"You told me about spending less time with family and friends. Help me understand how that works for you." "You said you are frustrated with people walking away from you when you are speaking. I notice that sometimes you sound very angry before they walk away."
Act to remove obstacles to social support	Overcome obstacles in the individual or in others to support better social connectedness	Lead group discussions of events in order to promote common perceptions and understanding. Look for and discuss situations that might interfere with two-way trust and respect. Confront and try to neutralize blame, guilt and shame.	To a team: "Orange Zone huddle. This is a tough situation and we need to get on the same page. This started because of (name event). What is your concern?" To a peer: "There was an error and we will work together to learn from this. What are you thinking right now about...?"



Stress First Aid Model

IX. SFA: Competence

The SFA function of Competence improves endurance through difficult challenges by enhancing and restoring previous occupational, personal and social capabilities, or facilitating the cultivation of new skills.

The need for Competence occurs in three different ways:

1. When an employee does not have the experience or skill level to address the demands of the position, which creates stress reactions.
2. When there is temporary or persistent loss of previous skills or abilities (e.g., mental focus, patience, emotional self-control) due to Orange Zone stress.
3. When there is inability to cope with newly emerging life challenges due to symptoms of Orange Zone distress (e.g., nightmares, intrusive thoughts).



The SFA Model is a framework that includes seven actions, the Seven C's. The cycle begins with the onset of stressors that are accompanied by distress or loss of function, and continues to wellness. Check and Coordinate actions are repeated throughout the cycle, and the other five C's are used as needed.

Use the examples on the next two pages to answer the following questions:

What are some ways that you have been able to increase a sense of competence in yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered support to increase sense of competence?



POTENTIAL COMPETENCE SELF-CARE ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for building Competence:

- When you are having a difficult time, use positive self-talk and don't be afraid to ask for help and guidance from mentors.
- When tough things happen, establish new relationships with those who have been through similar situations.
- If you're under too much stress, do something that is easy for you to give you a sense of accomplishment.
- Find people who can help you with engaging in healthy habits.
- Regularly reflect on the balance between the satisfaction of fulfilling work duties and the personal sacrifices you are making. Be prepared to adjust behaviors and expectations if that balance changes over time.

Here are a few potential actions for building Competence in oneself during prolonged stress:

- Make a commitment to endure, using whatever coping skills work best, as well as these potential actions:
 - Divert attention temporarily, using humor or acceptance.
 - Keep worrying circumscribed to actual potential risks and be disciplined about not letting fears derail important life tasks.
 - Shift expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a "good day"
 - Clarify top priorities and focus on taking steps towards what is most important.
 - Create routines of living and make every effort to keep to those routines.





POTENTIAL COMPETENCE COWORKER SUPPORT ACTIONS

Restoring or enhancing Competence in the face of Orange Zone stress can require the following sequence of actions:

Action	Specific Intent	Examples of Phrases to Use
Stop	<p>Make sure there is time given to rest and to recover if needed.</p> <p>Identify challenges to functional capabilities.</p> <p>Do not keep doing what is not working.</p>	<p>"We need to pause. I can cover this. Take a 10-minute break."</p> <p>"The EHR is down. Take a break and step away from the keyboard. What do you need to get done?"</p>
Back up	<p>Retrain and refresh old occupational, well-being, or social skills.</p> <p>Give training in new occupational, well-being, or social skills.</p> <p>Help mentor, problem-solve or explore new options.</p>	<p>"You have been doing this a long time and it feels like everything changed in the last few months. What new skills or ways of thinking do we need now and going forward?"</p>
Move forward	<p>Provide practice in refreshed skills.</p> <p>Provide practice to perfect new skills.</p> <p>Assist in integrating back into duties and in finding new directions and goals.</p>	<p>"I am glad that you completed the communications training and are back to work. Remember that not everyone knows that you are trying to change.</p> <p>"I will check in with you to see what is and is not working; you can check in with me too."</p>





POTENTIAL COMPETENCE LEADER SUPPORT ACTIONS

Because leaders are in a particularly important position to help with Competence, many of the following examples of ways to build Competence in others are best implemented by those in leadership positions:

- Be authentic, normalize stress reactions, and give simple examples of ways to cope.
- During highly stressful times or after mistakes, give extra attention, training, or mentoring.
- Connect the person who has Orange or Red Zone stress reactions to relevant resources to learn coping and well-being skills.
- Provide targeted training after mistakes and with skills that are used infrequently.
- Provide training in stress management and other well-being skills.
- If someone is stressed because they are overthinking, give them simple systematic ways to occupy their thoughts, like counting random numbers, or counting steps.
- Let people know that you would expect them to struggle in certain stressful situations.
- Mentor others by offering advice on how you got through similar situations.
- If an employee is struggling to learn a task or process, find someone who matches their personality — somebody they can relate to and communicate with — and assign that person to help them.
- For less experienced workers who are anxious when learning something new, start with less stressful tasks, and provide stepped escalation of potentially stressful jobs in a thoughtful manner.
- Give the stressed individual responsibility little by little so that they do not feel overwhelmed.
- Remind the person of coping strategies and skills that have worked for them before.
- Encourage active coping.
- Help problem-solve and set achievable goals.
- After mistakes, help the person become more competent, to help with shaken confidence. Remind them that everyone is human and that all reactions are acceptable in the right context. Help them to figure out what they might do differently in the future.
- If the team's sense of duty and commitment lead to overworking, make sure that they're getting rest, and advocate for them.
- For those who need a break, reassign or temporarily suspend key job duties.
- Before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off, make sure taking time off is feasible for that individual.
- For those who have taken time off, integrate them back into duties by assigning responsibility in a stepped, gradual way and help the person "recalibrate" their expectations and goals to meet current circumstances.



Stress First Aid Model

X. SFA: Confidence

Confidence focuses on building realistic self-esteem and restoring hope, both of which are often diminished in the aftermath of intense or prolonged stress.

Confidence can be needed when Orange Zone stress can cause a person to feel guilty or bitter, have difficulty forgiving themselves or others, or have trouble finding meaning or hope after what has happened. For example:

- The death of a patient due to failure to take proper precautions results in guilt.
- A wear-and-tear stress reaction results in losing respect for leaders.
- Significant life threat results in depression and loss of spiritual faith).



The SFA Model is a framework that includes seven actions, the Seven C's. The cycle begins with the onset of stressors that are accompanied by distress or loss of function, and continues to wellness. Check and Coordinate actions are repeated throughout the cycle, and the other five C's are used as needed.

Use the examples on the next three pages to answer the following questions:

What are some ways that you have been able to increase a sense of confidence, meaning, or hope in yourself?

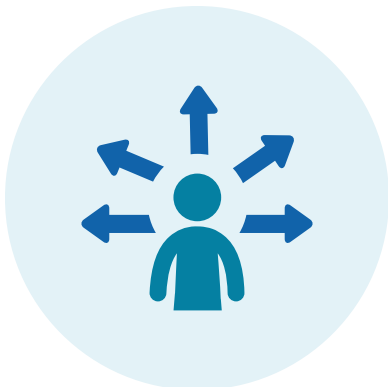
What are some ways that you have offered or been offered support to increase confidence, meaning, or hope?



POTENTIAL SELF-CARE CONFIDENCE ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for building self-confidence:

- If you unfairly blame yourself for a challenging situation, use positive self-talk to reframe the way you look at the event.
- Remind yourself of other successful cases to boost confidence when faced with those that are less successful.
- Even in the most severe cases, focus on ways that you were able to make a positive impact.
- Adopt a long-term perspective.
- Don't take perceived failures personally.
- Use small triumphs to build confidence. If you have self-doubt, get advice from self-help books.
- After particularly traumatic situations or losses, don't push yourself to "process" the situation in any particular timeframe. If something triggers you, give yourself time and space to think it through, integrate it, talk to someone, and have emotions about it. Find ways to make sense of the situation so that you don't get stuck in suffering.
- Use the wisdom gained from difficult experiences to reconfirm your values, make changes in your life, appreciate what you value or help others.





POTENTIAL LEADER ACTIONS FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN OTHERS

Leaders play an important role in building trust and self-worth by developing clear lines of communication, reducing stigma, offering encouragement and praise, fostering and supporting efforts that will alleviate and mitigate stress, and helping to re-establish confidence in coworkers who are experiencing stress reactions.

Here are a few potential leader actions for laying a foundation that builds confidence in others:

- Set realistic expectations about the need to follow procedures but be open to taking a lessons-learned approach about deviations from protocol.
- Discuss your preferred values for working with each other and stress that you will stick together in adverse circumstances.
- Focus on learning opportunities.
- Confront stigma about stress reactions.
- Be a role model to show coworkers healthy ways of dealing with difficult situations.
- Remind people of the ideals and values that drew each of you to the work you are doing.
- Give regular positive feedback, and remind them about their positive impact, values, skills and competence.
- Give them tasks that they can be successful at.
- Foster and support taking steps to alleviate and mitigate the harmful effects of stress.

Leaders can also help someone with significant stress reactions with the following actions:

- Allow the person to be reassigned or take a break from work.
- Be patient and open to the possibility that the person can fully return to work duties.
- Gradually increase duties and responsibilities when the person returns to work.
- Look for positive changes in the person's behavior.
- If necessary, help to re-establish the trust of coworkers in the person by providing accurate information, reducing rumors and gossip, being a non-judgmental, accepting role model, and discussing coworkers' fears and concerns.
- Mentor the person to consider other options if they continue to struggle, including leaving their current position.



Here there are some potential actions that can contribute to building Confidence in coworkers:

Action	Specific Intent	How to Do It	Examples of Phrases to Use
Determine needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess self-image, understanding of meaning of life events, level of trust in self and others, and hope for the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen empathically. • Develop a trusting relationship. • Ask questions and offer tentative observations and understandings. 	<p>“You said, ‘It doesn’t matter anymore.’ Why is that?”</p> <p>“Team, we have had a rough week. What does it mean to be a doctor, nurse, tech given our experience?”</p>
Connect with resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore depleted physical, psychological, and social resources. • Foster spiritual connections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with all possible sources of needed resources, both inside and outside the organization. • Address problems: financial, family, occupational, health, etc. • Identify obstacles and find solutions to overcome them. 	<p>“The past month has been a drain for all of us. Physically, mentally, financially we have been hit. Some of us are pretty exhausted. Here are some of the resources that we have...”</p>
Encourage growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce excessive guilt or shame. • Promote forgiveness of self and others. • Establish new meaning and purpose. • Set new directions and goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the person focus on the present rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. • Let them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions. • Listen for and confront distorted or overly negative and/or rigid conceptions or perceptions of self or others. • Encourage the person to understand how others see them, or to try more adaptive ways of seeing themselves or the situation. • Encourage learning and education. • Encourage setting realistic goals and setting a plan to achieve those goals in readily attainable steps. 	<p>“There was a bad outcome and you are feeling bad; I get it.</p> <p>“You are not 100% responsible for this. Let’s take an honest look at what was and was not in your control... Now let’s think about what we will do differently in the future.”</p> <p>“Team, we have been talking about our challenges and the things that did not go well.</p> <p>“Let’s take a moment and talk about some of the things that did go well... Which of these do we need to make sure that we keep doing?”</p>



POTENTIAL COWORKER SUPPORT CONFIDENCE ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for building confidence in others:

- Be authentic, empathic, and nonjudgmental. For instance, make simple, nonjudgmental statements such as:
 - “I can understand why you’re feeling this way, given your strong values,”
 - “I know this can be rough,”
 - “What can I do to help?” or “What would be helpful?”
- Help them focus on the present.
- Encourage them to remember their personal strengths, positive relationships, spiritual change, appreciation for life, or other things they value.
- Help them make meaning of difficult events or losses by encouraging them to find ways to memorialize or honor those events or losses.
- When a person is struggling with lack of confidence, guilt, or self-doubt, help them counter their guilt by normalizing their reactions and letting them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions.
- Be willing to talk with them as many times as they need, give them relevant reading materials, and connect them to treatment or to people who have dealt with similar situations.





XI. Stress First Aid Scenarios

Use the following scenarios to think through or discuss how SFA actions can be used with those who are experiencing either significant distress or impairments in functioning caused by stress reactions.

Remember, SFA should be used in a natural, seamless way, and implemented when needed.

In most cases, it is not necessary to provide all the SFA actions.

As a reminder, SFA core functions along with a sampling of associated actions are provided in the table below.

SFA FUNCTIONS	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assess current level of distress and functioning• Assess immediate risks• Assess need for additional SFA interventions or higher levels of care• Reassess progress (Re-Check)
Coordinate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decide who else should be informed of situation• Refer for further evaluation or higher levels of care, if indicated• Facilitate access to other needed care
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure immediate physical safety of stressed person and others• Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort• Protect from additional stress (ensure respite)
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce physiological arousal (slow down heart rate and breathing, relax)• Reduce intensity of negative emotions such as fear or anger• Listen empathically to the individual talk about experiences• Provide information that calms
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage connection to primary support people• Help problem-solve to remove obstacles to social support• Foster positive social activities within crew
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help mentor back to full functioning• Facilitate rewarding work roles• Arrange for retraining
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mentor back to full confidence in self, leadership, mission and values• Help restore meaning or faith• Foster the trust of coworkers and family members in the individual



SCENARIO 1

- A respected member of your staff has had a hard couple of years. He had an injury, financial problems, and lost a close friend to a motor vehicle accident. Recently, he separated from his spouse and had to move out of the family home.
- He has been drinking a lot and often appears to be under the influence of alcohol when not at work.
- He is distracted and expresses a sense of hopelessness that things will improve.
- Today, he arrives to work late.
- When you begin to talk with him about your observations he says, “What difference does it make? Nothing really matters anyway. It doesn’t matter if I’m here or not.”

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?

SCENARIO 2

A nurse who you know has been having marital issues has trouble with entering data into an electronic record. She throws a stack of papers on the floor and runs to the bathroom.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



SCENARIO 3

A well-respected staff member who has recently been transferred to your unit becomes upset when other staff make jokes and comments that seem to bother him. He begins to become more irritable and isolative and tells you that he finds the behavior of the other staff offensive.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?

SCENARIO 4

- Your pediatric ICU unit responds to a child who is injured from suspected physical and sexual abuse.
- Your team includes a nurse who has been on the job for about one year.
- When the child's vitals take an emergent turn for the worse and the nurse is asked to assist, she freezes.
- You call her name, but she doesn't respond. You then tap on her shoulder and she responds immediately, re-engaging in the task at hand.
- A few shifts later, she tells you "I just don't know if I can keep doing this."
- As you talk further, she tells you, "I froze in that instance. What if I freeze again and someone dies because I don't react fast enough?"

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



SCENARIO 5

- Your unit has been responding to a particularly strong viral outbreak that results in a rash of illnesses on the ward and two staff members falling seriously ill with pneumonia.
- You notice that the conversation during lunch focuses on the lack of trust in leadership and whether the agency even cares about their safety.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?

SCENARIO 6

- You are training a nurse. Up to this point, she has been a quick study and eager to learn.
- She is becoming increasingly frustrated and throws the papers she is holding and starts to walk away.
- Another nurse makes a snide comment as she passes by and she makes a rude gesture to her.
- You know that the nurse has had two deaths in her immediate family in the past month and is dealing with her child's learning issues at school.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



SCENARIO 7

- You and your team hold a small celebration on the day that an intern returns to work.
- Six months earlier, he was injured in a workplace violence incident and has just returned to work.
- Later during the day, the you notice that the intern is unusually quiet, but when asked if everything is ok, he assures you that he is fine, but just a little tired.
- As he walks into the same hallway where the workplace violence incident occurred, you notice that he is breathing very rapidly and sweating.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?

SCENARIO 8

- You notice that one of your coworkers is withdrawn, avoids contact with other staff and has stopped participating in off-duty activities.
- When you talk with her, she confides in you that she recently discovered that her 17-year-old son has an addiction and she is not sure what to do. She and her husband argue because they do not agree about what to do.
- She tells you she doesn't sleep well because she frequently checks to make sure her son is breathing.
- When you ask her about work pressure, she tells you that she is struggling to complete a special project that her supervisor asked her to do. She says, "I guess I am just a failure all the way around."

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



XII. Summary and Next Steps

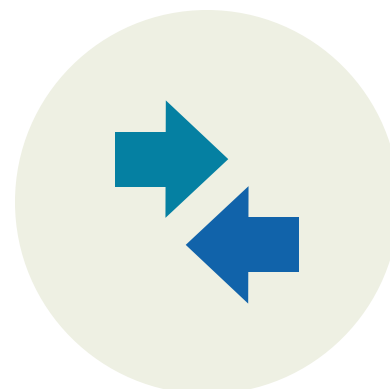
Stress First Aid fosters self-care and coworker support, but it invites you to use the framework in an individualistic way, taking into account your preferences and your capacity to engage in self-care and supportive actions.

Rather than prescriptively requiring that you offer support in a particular way, it instead highlights the importance of coworker support, which is protective because of the unspoken understandings that result from working together. It is frequently only in moment-to-moment encounters that the right support can happen, if a person is aware of its importance and empowered to decide how best to give that support. This model empowers you to be creative in the way you engage in support of your employees and coworkers. It asks that you avoid taking for granted all the small ways that you show kindness, empathy, and support, and reminds you of the cumulative potential impact of these behaviors in the lives of each other.

SFA gives a framework to identify what research has suggested are potent protective actions which are helpful in many different ongoing adverse circumstances. It also highlights the importance of organizations engaging in discussions and problem-solving around work stress and empowers employees and leaders to work towards reducing both acute and cumulative stress.

DISCUSSION: NEXT STEPS

1. Will SFA be helpful in your self-care?
2. Will SFA be helpful in coworker support?
 - a. If so, how can you start incorporating SFA principles into your workplace?
3. What are next steps?
4. What obstacles do you anticipate?
5. What resources might you need to best move forward with SFA?





XIII. Stress First Aid Examples from the Field

Here are some quotes from employees in high stress work settings, regarding either the need for SFA or how to implement SFA. These individuals were recommended for SFA focus groups because of their reputation as skilled leaders, peers, or mentors. These have all been included to help you reflect upon how SFA can best be used in your work setting.

NEED FOR CHECK EXAMPLES

"I see stress reactions in group meetings. People who normally might have been engaged and instead are just on their phone or checked out."

"I've seen ultimatums, where individuals say, 'I'm not going to do this anymore,' and just dig in their heels."

"I think it's an energy too. There's an energy feel to people. It's almost a hollow look and hollow feel. They're just checked out. But you don't even have to see them sometimes and see their face. You can just feel it. I don't know."

CHECKING ON SELF EXAMPLES

"I really think a lot of what this is, is permission to take care of ourselves."

"I have made a very conscious effort to keep tabs on myself. The big stress indicators for me are fatigue, having a hard time focusing, being short on the fuse, not exercising, and not doing the things I like."



CHECKING ON COWORKERS EXAMPLES

Build a Foundation:

"You have to have a foundation of relationship in order to be able to most effectively check on people. At the end of the day, if we're not comfortable talking to one another or we don't even have the relationship to even care about one another on that level, none of this is going to work."

"The groundwork or the foundation that you lay at the human level is going to make a difference when it's time to have a hard discussion or conversation that's way below the surface. Having something else to engage people on a personal level outside of the profession is hugely important. Caring about your people beyond the task and duty is one of the key top-rated leader characteristics in research studies."

"Leaders may be afraid to ask how they can help because they don't want to promise what they can't provide. Don't be afraid to ask staff about their biggest challenges. But also ask them what is working and ask what they think is needed to solve problems. Let them know up front that you might not be able to fix everything, but that together as a team you can find ways to creatively adapt to challenges."

"In supervising staff, I have a one-on-one meeting with each of them each month just to talk about work stuff or personal stuff, and how they're doing."

"When I was starting, I was on a tough case and my supervisor will reach out to me to say, 'Hey, how are you doing?' I can't emphasize the important of this enough."



"I want to make sure that we're setting up a system where people feel like it's okay to reach out. We also need to set up a system where it's not only okay to reach out, but where we're going to reach out to you so that you don't have to be the one to reach out."

"We had a new boss who came in and literally went door to door, went through the entire district, sat down with each person and said that he wanted to hear from them what was going right, what was going wrong, or how they felt, and that's a really great way to start a job. Even small things like giving a lunch, just to bring people together, talking about late night text messages, and setting aside time to have lunch starts to build a foundation."

"I consider most of the misbehavior or bullying behavior on my team to be the result of unhealed Orange Zone stress. Then we can approach it as a stress injury that needs mitigation, rather than criticism."

"When I walk on unit, there are two things that show stress: 1. If there's a big open bag of candy, and 2. If I can't hear 'please,' 'thank you,' or 'I appreciate.' When people say 'please,' 'thank you,' and 'I appreciate' consistently, it changes the tone and builds teams."

Find Practical or Creative Ways to Start the Conversation

"I use Check with employees regularly – they don't even know I'm doing it. I will pursue a line of questioning if there is two-way communication and try and get down to what's going on. It's active listening. I will instead start a line of communication, get them talking, and look for words, non-verbal signs, and cues as to how they are doing."

"If you have a close working relationship, let the person know that you have noticed that they don't seem to be themselves, or seem preoccupied, and it looks like they could use a break. Then invite them to get lunch, grab a cup of tea, etc."

"I usually start with, 'How's it going for you?' I see if they can offer some information that will give a lead-in. If that doesn't work, I try to start with something positive like, 'Hey you're doing well but it seems like you may be struggling here, is there anything I can help you with?' It kind of depends on if you know the person very well or not. I might say, 'I've heard what you're going through.' Having a specific example helps."

"You can have a meeting and say, 'Okay. You know, it sounds like most people in here are sort of Yellow right now heading into Orange. Is that where you guys are?' kind of thing. 'Who is stressed out?'"

"There are many different ways to check in. I've had management come to my office, close the door, and just ask how I'm doing about a specific situation. I've had coworkers walk with me as we leave work together and just ask how things are with a situation."

"In our office, we have this little stuffed crab. When people are acting a little crabby, somebody will walk by and throw the crab on their desk. It's meant to lighten them up a little bit. It's just to acknowledge 'Hey, we all see that you're having a bad day.' But when the crab is thrown on a desk it's not as serious. It can be whatever you make it. So it's an easy way to kind of check in."

"One person in my office who was worried about a coworker left her stress ball on someone's desk and a note that said 'It looks like you might need this more than I do. If you want to have a conversation let me know.' They didn't have to sign their name because it was a particular stress ball that was obviously hers, and everyone knew it. It gave the person the space to decide whether they want to talk or not, but they didn't feel pressured to talk at that moment."

"One of my supervisors, as a way to break the ice and get a conversation started in a light way, would say, 'Everyone



has their Kryptonite, even Superman. It seems like you've got the Kryptonite in your life right now."

"We just had two people that just started sitting down having lunch together. Then it was three people. Then I pop in every once in a while. Then the next thing you know it's 15 people. You just have to start somewhere."

"Sometimes you've just got to be the person to open the door and say, 'Hey, are you doing all right?' And maybe your follow-up is, like, 'I don't have to be the person you need to talk to. By all means, tell me to leave, but go talk to somebody you trust. I'm just letting you know I'm recognizing something is not right here.'"

"Most of our office partner up on work cases when they can, and it's a great opportunity for them to share experiences and that's when a lot of sharing goes on, whether it's about family, whether it's about the job."

"I've done after-hours calls where I've called and said, 'Okay. We're out of work. Feel free to vent now.'"

"A text just shows that, even though you're outside the work hours, you're thinking about that person. That is so important."

"When my intention is to provide some Stress First Aid, I realize that the folks who are closer in age and position may do a better job. It doesn't raise a threat flag because they're used to having a normal conversation with them. When it's with the supervisor who typically gives them things to do or enforces disciplinary actions, it raises that flag. If you've had enough normal conversations with people, it's less likely to raise a feeling of threat that it's about disciplinary action."

Check in During or After Challenges

"When someone is working on a high-risk case, a good supervisor asks, 'Hey, how are you doing? Are you OK?'"

"I had a particularly traumatic loss at work, and my supervisor called and asked me how I was doing because she knew how much I had been affected. She said, 'Don't be upset. I know you've been working really hard and things just happen.'"

"We had a particularly hard situation happen at work and one of my coworkers said to another, 'I'm in the Orange Zone. What about you?' And the other one said, 'Me too, and all that tells us is that we've got to watch out for each other.' And then they briefly talked about the SFA actions so that people remembered to use them for themselves, for somebody else, and with their family."

"We had someone at work whose mother had some surgical complications and she was very stressed and emotional. She wasn't ready to talk about it, but we sent periodic text messages saying, 'Hey, thinking about you. Want to make sure everything is okay. We're here for you.' When she came into the office, because people had reached out to her, she was very comfortable discussing the experience, and has processed it well. Just that little bit of letting her know 'Hey, you're on our mind' helped her to know that she had love and support no matter where she was."

Check in After Noticing Patterns

"If you start to see someone who's only sending e-mails between midnight and three in the morning and it's a pattern, then you probably want to check in with them and say, 'Hey, how are you doing? How is it going? I know it's not a time zone thing, so let's really talk about this.'"

"We are often as a group more direct, for instance we go straight to the person and just make an observation by saying, 'Is everything OK? I'm just checking on you.' The same thing is true when we notice withdrawal and isolation. We just knock."

"As a supervisor, when I think reduced performance might be tied to other things, I might say, 'Let's take a walk down



and grab a cup of coffee. I do this because, firstly, if other people are aware of performance issues, sometimes they will jump to conclusions seeing me talking to that person. Secondly, that person might be more open to talking about things if we're outside the workplace."

"When something seems out of place in a person's demeanor, I will pick up on it. Maybe one day they just need a pick me up. I try to be mindful and observant as a leader in order to be there for them at times like that."

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, some nurses and physicians were being furloughed because they were not wearing masks. Managers were told to punish workers who weren't wearing protective equipment. Instead, we asked what was going on in the system. We found out that the hospital had bought cheap goggles that don't work and fogged up and nurses wanted to see patients. They were willing to risk splash to take care of patients. We started a Check process that resulted in staff feeling supported instead of punished, and a problem-solving dialogue."

"SFA creates an improved ability to identify issues, come together, and problem solve solutions. It calls attention to systems level issues that are problematic for the workforce. Rather than managers worrying that if they ask what's going wrong, they will have to fix it, it's more about having a dialogue. For instance, staff can report that there are activities or issues that are putting them into the Orange. Then those issues can float up and be discussed. 'A department is in Orange because. . .' 'The hospital is in Orange because. . .' It's not the old model of sucking it up, taking two breaths, and going back to work. It's a model of identifying and addressing issues as a team."

Check in After Noticing Signs of Distress

"Someone was on medical leave and she came in for a monthly potluck. Her appearance and conversation were not consistent with someone who was coping well. So

we had a frank discussion; she was very receptive and pursued assistance through EAP, and we checked in frequently. Now she's doing great."

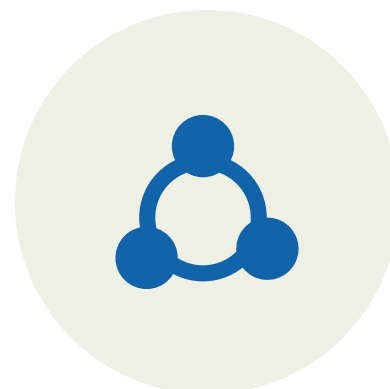
"We're quick to say, 'You need to take care of yourself.' There's a sense that while you're on the job you should be able to handle everything. To me, that's nonsense because we all have been affected somewhere along the line. At some point people just aren't able to take care of themselves, and as a coworker that's a good time to reach out and help them because they can't do it themselves at that moment. They're not seeing it. They're too close to it."

NEED FOR COORDINATE EXAMPLES

"There was some mistrust about utilizing EAP because of how it might affect their career. And even when we've had staff in divorce proceedings who went to counseling, they were worried about that being put on their background."

"We're rural so we contract with different treatment providers who then end up on the EAP list. Sometimes our staff is not comfortable in talking to a local counselor who they see in other settings."

"EAP staff really don't have an understanding about our culture. And in rural environment, many don't feel like there was anybody locally who could provide the needed services."





“We have a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team with people who have extensive training in coworker support, and they reach out to help employees, but there aren’t enough trained staff throughout the District to reach everyone that needs assistance.”

COORDINATE EXAMPLES

Set Up A Variety of Resources in Advance

“The vast majority of people are going to be helped by you being a human being and just having a listening ear. It helps just knowing somebody cares and has some simple advice. However, when you run into things where you don’t know what to say, it is helpful to have the resources to be able to talk to a local clinician, mentor, coworker teams, or somebody else who provides Stress First Aid and ask them what they think.”

“I consider it preventive maintenance to talk with a trained counselor, to be able to have longevity in this job. People don’t mind doing preventive maintenance on the car with the idea it’s going to protect the car for long-term use, but we don’t think of ourselves in that way. And what you’re talking about is like regular tune-ups, changing the oil. All the things you need to do for cars we don’t think about for ourselves as often.”

“One does not have to be identified as a trained ‘coworker support’ person to be helpful, but it may lead to greater confidence in reaching out to coworkers.”

“We used life coaching because I needed someone who was trained, understood our business, and wasn’t a therapist. Coworker support falls in line with something like that.”

“Our primary referral process has been to get someone to a counselor, but what I found to be as critically important was referral to support groups and self-help groups. Maybe they don’t need to go to a therapist. Maybe they’re suffering from a grief situation. Maybe they need to go

to a church. I think sometimes we get so locked into professional help we forget that some of these other programs are just as helpful.”

“We have found a free, 24-hour, confidential toll-free number specifically for people in our lines of work. They have a better sense of our culture and experiences. We have also found other hotlines, texting support services, and telehealth services that can serve our staff.”

“I’ve found that working over the phone with a very competent life coach has been as effective as meeting with someone in person.”

“I have had luck coordinating with local mental health professionals in the community who are willing to provide low-cost services to those who work in our settings.”

“I would recommend testing the system prior to a problem. Start dialing numbers and find out if everyone in the employee assistance chain knows what to do. We can test the strategy and come up with our work-arounds and alternative plans before there is the immediate need for help.”

“We have a contact list with information and options, so you have names of people you could contact easily.”

Mentor, Problem-Solve, and Normalize Stress Reactions

“As a leader/supervisor, I share openly the effects of accumulated stress and what it has done to me. The stigma is a big target because it runs really deep. To go get help, it’s still considered to be a weakness, but it’s actually our greatest strength. Getting help doesn’t necessarily have to come from a therapist. It can be obtained in a number of ways.”

“I try to identify who someone already has in place for support, what resources are they have used before or are already utilizing, and how can they work with those.”



“Going on retreat is a good option that’s been emphasized from day one.”

NEED FOR COVER EXAMPLES

“The worst part is when you know you’re not covered. You can bust your tail and you feel like you’re not supported by superiors, that’s the worst part.”

“I had a boss whose attitude was, ‘when I say jump, you say how high?’ He just wanted to be in charge. Once he just started screaming and it made me so incredibly scared. It made me feel really unsafe.”

“A coworker was going through a divorce, and there was definitely 1 to 2 months where we had to be checking in regularly and asking him, ‘How are you doing?’”

“There are instances where staff members have felt targeted by a coworker or supervisor, and this leads to anxiety when coming to work. Even simple phone calls from a supervisor then become anxiety-invoking even though they are benign in nature.”

“Sexual harassment by coworkers or people is anxiety invoking, but there is fear of saying anything due to the perception of being overly sensitive.”

“Some are concerned about their safety due to a person coming in and destroying or damaging property and making threats.”

“A lot of people in this job are Type A. I think it’s common to want to be right, to want to be on task, and to not want to fall short, which leads to overworking and burnout.”

“A coworker died unexpectedly. The concern shown by leaders following the death seemed disingenuous and created hostility, because prior to their death, the person had been looked down upon and treated poorly by supervisors. It made all of us feel like we couldn’t trust our leaders to be authentic.”

COVER SELF-CARE EXAMPLES

“I don’t know how you know how to make yourself safe to open up to others when you’re stressed, other than just knowing that a person or place seems like they can offer it. The safe type of person on the job is someone who makes eye contact. I feel something when I look at someone, that connection. It’s either there or it’s not.”

“Somewhere along the way you have to give yourself permission to take care of yourself.”

“I think I recently had a realization that I have to set boundaries for myself to keep myself safe and healthy. At the end of the day all of this work, all the stress I’m putting on myself doesn’t always change the outcome. You can still put in all this time and all this effort and you’re still going to get more and more work. It just happens. We’re important, certainly, but we’re not that important that we can’t put it down to take care of ourselves.”

“I think it’s important for people to be really clear as to what their preferences are, and make a list for self-cover, because everyone has to know what works best for them.”

“Occasionally I will actually turn my phone off and just say, ‘Okay. I’m going to turn it off.’ And you need a break. I think giving yourself permission to completely check out is important.”

“In terms of Cover self-care, I think one of the most important things is to find someone that you’re comfortable being vulnerable with and reminding yourself how important that type of connection is. It’s really important to find that one or two people that you can be vulnerable with in an appropriate way so that you can be safe to share and to disclose. The markers of a safe person are that they’re not going to go tell everybody else, and they don’t tell you what to do. They just listen. Sometimes I just need to get it out and I don’t want a solution. I just want to vent. I just want to be heard.”



“Having the Cover in your personal life, that one person to talk with, who is aware of what type of work you do, or if you just have a bad day, is very important. Having that Cover available in your personal life is necessary, because so many times we’re still thinking about what happened at work when we get home.”

COVER COWORKER EXAMPLES

Cover as Setting Healthy Boundaries

“I think it’s really about a supervisor giving us permission to put the phone down and giving permission and guidance about how to set boundaries and limits with what we’re working with.”

“Cover is sometimes implemented by setting boundaries, so people feel safe to take care of themselves. Sometimes what I’ve done with boundaries in my office is to say okay, during our lunch break, we’re not going to talk about work. Let’s talk about something other than work because it’s so easy to get caught up in talking about work all the time. So just setting that boundary. We can talk about work when we get back to work.”

“At some point in my career a supervisor told me, ‘If you’re just having a particularly hard day, you have permission to leave if other people can cover for you for the rest of that day.’ He allowed us to give ourselves permission to go home, and to let the job go for that day.”



“I had an old supervisor tell me our work is like sweeping sand. No matter how much you sweep, it’s going to be there. That helped me realize I can put my work down and go home, because I can come back tomorrow and start sweeping some more.”

“I had to have conversations with people and say, ‘Don’t come in to work on your day off. Get some rest and relaxation. Don’t come in.’ People’s sense of duty and commitment sometimes lead to overworking. I have to make sure that they’re getting rest.”

“Pretty much everyone I see is burdened by work. We are out taking on more duties as our workforce shrinks and budgets shrink. But to say “You should take time off’ may be really tough for someone to do, financially. So, before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off, make sure it won’t be more stressful for that individual to take time off.”

“Work stress is compounded by life stress. You can’t avoid the news anymore, and people’s stress levels in general are high, where they’re constantly getting bombarded with bad news, and getting crushed by the news. At some point you have to put the phone away turn off the notifications and pick and choose what you want to hear, in smaller doses. I tell my team, day by day, just keep doing what you can do, try not to go beyond that.”

“One thing I’ve tried to do to set good boundaries. If I send a text or email, I say, ‘You do not need to respond to this.’ Because one of my worries is that everybody is texting that person and they feel a need to respond to all the texts. So, I write, ‘Do not feel like you need to respond to this. I just want you to know I’m thinking about you.’”

“I’ve had several people tell me, ‘Hey, it was only when I went out of the country and couldn’t access my phone that I realized how important it is to check out completely when I go on vacation.’”



"I'm getting ready to go out for six weeks for surgery and was so stressed about leaving work for six weeks. My supervisor said, 'Why don't you just relax a bit, so you don't have to have surgery again. Sometimes you just have to let other people take the burden. You can't do it all yourself.'"

"As a supervisor, what I've learned is to help people make decisions when they may not be making the best decisions for themselves."

"We had a death a few months ago and the supervisor said, 'You could've done everything perfectly and it still wouldn't have necessarily changed the outcome of this, so let's look at what lessons we might learn from the case.' I think saying that out loud, helps the person."

"Cover is achieved is by showing vulnerability yourself and by knowing your employees. SFA needs to start well in advance of anything going on. You slowly implement it into any organization, so it is normal. We talk, drop our guards, and show our vulnerability. It has to begin well in advance of anything happening."

"On the whiteboard, we staff would write our name if we thought we were in the Green Zone that day, to give permission for coworkers to approach us for support without worrying about being a burden. We could erase our name if no longer in Green."

Cover in Unsafe Situations

"I like to give a briefing before there might be a potentially unsafe situations: 'This is something we could encounter. This is what we're going to do if these things happen. Let's problem solve ahead of this situation.'"

"I had a situation a where someone was making inappropriate sexual comments, and I talked to my supervisor, who stepped in to help make things safer for me."

"We had a very difficult case. From the very beginning, there was incredible support from everyone, because we knew things were going to be hard. Because of that team approach from the very beginning, providing Cover, there wasn't the same level of anxiety."

"We have cases that are hard to deal with, and just having a supervisor who is willing to stand by, even if they don't talk, provides Cover and support. Just having supervisors who are willing to oversee without intervening is really comforting."

"During a public health crisis, everyone came together, and upper management kept us informed and with constant updates to everyone in the office, it was just united and all together."

Covering Each Other For Personal Issues

"Our management is now becoming more aware of the impact of having family issues, such as sickness, or the need to care for a parent when they're in the nursing home, those types of things. They are making sure that the person feels that there's a safety net for them, so they don't feel like their job is in jeopardy in any way, and they know that they can go, that they don't have to worry about it, that somebody has their back. So now we're covering duty, or making other coworkers aware, and telling people, 'Go, leave, you're covered, we'll take care of things here if you need to go.'"

"If a coworker has signs of high stress that cause them to make mistakes at work, you can address that person individually to get a pulse check of what's going on. Hopefully you're going to draw them out with active listening to get at what is at the root of problems. There also is a time and place for me to be more abrupt and directive, if there is danger, or if it is a re-occurring thing. Sometimes you need to be more directive or abrupt."



Cover for Family

"I gave my family a general safety briefing so they knew about things at my work that might affect my safety or theirs."

"It's important for family to be educated to be aware of any red flags that you might demonstrate. They should also know the different challenges that might happen from the very beginning of your career, and know that sharing information, whatever is comfortable, is important, so that they can be prepared. It is providing Cover for them too. If you start to shut down and isolate, they might be thinking, 'Okay, what did I do wrong? Are they mad at me? What's going on here?' So it's important to share just enough so that they can provide you Cover, and not take your stress reactions personally."

"My husband works shift work, and sometimes I feel like I'm a single parent for four days a week. Some of the Cover that I do with my kids is that they still don't know about the details of the stressful experiences on my job, because I'm not telling them about it. But I do let them know that there may be times when I act a certain way and that is probably because of stress on the job, so they will know it is nothing that they have done to make me act that way."

"Part of what I do with my husband, is to review as little as possible of the harder stuff because if I were to sit and open his eyes to all of these terrible things that happen, it would worry him, so part of my way of covering him is kind of shielding him from some of that awful stuff that most people in this world don't have to deal with."

"On my way home I'll call my sons and tell them, 'mom is not cooking so let's go out to dinner.' And then they know that I've had a bad day without me actually having to say anything more. I think that helps us both."

NEED FOR CALM EXAMPLES

"When overwhelmed with too many obligations or distractions, I've witnessed coworkers completely 'shut down,' rendering them incapable of doing their job. These overwhelmed states were not just due to the job; it is typically a combination of multiple stressors."

"Calm was needed after a heated exchange during a staff meeting."

"Issues with coworkers create a need for Calm."

"I needed Calm after I came upon a volatile situation at work."

"My work has affected my family and vice versa. As much as we want to believe that whatever dynamic happens at home doesn't affect our work, we're lying to ourselves. For example, an argument at home can affect your work."

"Often times meetings are the place where changes are being discussed, and now you have to deal with things a different way, and negative emotions arise in people. A lot of disagreements happen in meetings. I think after we walk out of a staff meeting, you hear a lot of grumbling and people are just emotional, angry and frustrated."

"Not long ago, I had a case take a sudden turn for the worse. My head was all over the place trying to make sure that the crisis was averted before I could even feel like I was able to effectively address the situation."

CALM SELF-CARE EXAMPLES

"To calm myself, I like physical activity, exercise, motion, and having my family and close friends is good. I have a good female friend up the street. She seems to know when I need to talk. Those are the things you absolutely cherish."



“What helps calm me is breaking down responsibilities into manageable pieces, making lists and being organized.”

“Taking a break from work to clear one’s head is beneficial. During this break, several different strategies can be used: a short nap, physical exercise, meditation, stretching, having a conversation with a friend, laughing, getting a drink of water and avoiding caffeinated beverages that contribute to agitation or anxiety.”

CALM COWORKER EXAMPLES

Education

“A close coworker died unexpectedly. Education was shared regarding ‘critical incident stress’ to inform staff about what they may experience physically, cognitively, emotionally, etc.”

“Preparing people ahead of a very stressful experience can be very calming as well. It’s helpful if people just acknowledge potential stressors. It has to be on your radar instead of expecting people to suck it up and deal with their own stuff. Acknowledge that it could be necessary to have some help. It calms them because they feel they then have a sense of control over that one piece.”

Venting/Connections

“I often have people come into my office and vent their frustration/anger without judgment being passed.”

“I have gone to the gym with coworkers or asked them if they wanted to take a walk or take the ‘friend’ chair in my office to vent.”

“Generally, for me if it is after hours and I need to calm down, I call a coworker. And I find for me talking it out with somebody who’s not as emotionally charged about the situation calms me down.”

“Going to dinner and/or having a beer after a stressful day can be calming.”

“I had coworkers overwhelmed with things and we got ice cream on the way back from a home visit because ice cream solves everything. Sometimes the littlest thing can have a significant impact.”

Making Meaning

“After the death of a coworker, we met as an office and shared stories and memories, and it seemed to help us begin to heal.”

Calming Activities

“During a particularly difficult interview or meeting with coworkers, I’ll often have calming music quietly playing in the background.”

“I paradoxically find that listening to intense hard rock music calms me down.”

“We have an individual who does medical grade biofeedback, which is very calming.”

“When decisions are completely out of our control or not even in our manager’s control and everyone’s trying to figure out how we’re going to handle it, some of the ways that we found for calming ourselves are running, listening to different types of music, gardening, riding horses, or just getting involved in something enjoyable. I personally volunteer in the nursery.”

“Just find something that you can escape to you and have some simple ways that are calming is good, like breathing or mindfulness practices. In court, one judge starts out with 50 deep breaths before we go into the case.”



Taking a Break

“After particularly tough situations, I’ve told people, ‘It’s been a rough day for you. Just go home. Just go relax. Take the day. Do whatever you want to do. Just go home.’”

Prioritizing/Problem-solving

“I think every day we have to prioritize what we need to accomplish. I make lists and there’s something very calming and satisfying about scratching things off that list. So when difficult challenges come up, one of the most important questions is, ‘what do I need to accomplish?’ And then there is that sense of accomplishment and bringing a bit of order to the chaos.”

“It’s making a list of options and thinking through what the options are. Then I can respond. I can do this, and I can do that. Taking a minute, looking at my options, and figuring out the most practical one, the one that I can handle, the one that makes the most sense, is calming.”

Fostering a Positive Work Environment

“It’s important to actively not promote agitation, rumor mill spending, and negativity. Reducing all of those helps keep people feel calm.”

“There was a policy change that was really affecting morale. Four different people on a team of eight were actively interviewing for other jobs. We kept saying things need to change, but nobody was listening. And then we went into a staff meeting where they essentially told us that we need to stop complaining. And me and two other people lost it. I had just gotten to the point where I just couldn’t do it anymore. Luckily, I had a supervisor who said, ‘Let’s make a list so I can make sure we are going to the appropriate people to bring up this content concerns.’”

“If something is going wrong on a unit, someone will say ‘Orange huddle!’ That means: ‘Everyone take breath, we’re

coming together.’ It’s not blaming or shaming. It means there’s an issue, we feel it, someone saw it, something is happening, and it’s tense. So, we now have a shorthand way to say, ‘Let’s all take a breath. What do we need to do? This is the shift from hell, but we’ll make it through.’”

Distraction / Empowerment

“Asking for help is a good way to calm people. Saying, ‘In order to get through this, I’m really going to need your help. I can’t do it by myself, if you could just help me out here that would be great.’ It’s empowering. It appeals to all the parts of us that are doers, fixers, and movers.”

“When stress is high, my office laughs at me and says, ‘Okay, here comes Mr. Calm again.’ The more chaotic things get, the calmer I become in my communication.”

“Humor is a big calming influence.”

NEED FOR CONNECT EXAMPLES

“There can be a desire to feel more connected to social support when dealing with the death of a family member or coworker, during significant illness, or during work challenges such as disciplinary action or denial of a promotion.”

“A coworker recently told me he felt he really had no close friends.”

“Reaching out to coworkers during times of sorrow or disappointment can be uncomfortable, and I believe that this is why many do not reach out or say anything.”

“When there are work challenges [and] no one reaches out, a person could retreat into themselves.”

CONNECT SELF-CARE EXAMPLES

“I have people I can talk to, call up, and in the conversation, whatever’s bothering either of us will come out. I force myself to have conversations with three or four people



who know that when I'm calling, something has come up. We flesh it out by talking."

"I do have that one person that I connect with who is on the other side of the country, but we have that connection that we can come to each other."

"The people I reach out to are honest. It's about calling a spade a spade, not dancing around it. They're able to give their perspective on my problem and show me that it might pale in comparison to another's: 'You need to pick up pieces of your shattered life and move on.' It serves to provide another's perspective, and foster honesty. Or they might say, 'That's not normal for you.' I am skeptical of self-diagnosis. I think you need to get a second opinion—a fresh perspective."

"What makes people calming to be around is genuineness. I tend to try to surround myself with people who are genuine. I don't seek out those who party until 2am; that's not what I want, not what I need. I just need peace and quiet away from incident response. As long as there's someone you have a good feel for, and you know it's what you need right now, you can seek that person out because you know what you're going to get. Rather than trying to put pressure on someone to help me out who can't, I'd rather go seek the person out who can provide what is advantageous for me, and hopefully for them at the same time."

CONNECT COWORKER EXAMPLES

Different Ways to Make a Connection: Building a Foundation

"As a supervisor, I state the expectations for conduct right up front to prevent negative office interactions. I say, 'These things are not going to happen. If they do, you and I are going to have a serious conversation. Duty, respect and integrity, all the things we preach all the time, it starts here and now. So, I'm not going to put up

with this.' I think if you lay it out at the beginning, and address it early, and take it case-by-case individually as it's going on, things seem to work out. You give the office expectations about how we will conduct ourselves, so we all hold ourselves accountable, and there are consequences if we don't. It makes it really easy to have that discussion later if you have that base and always go back to those values."

"If someone is having a hard time, I mention nine things that are going on to specifically hit on one thing that is going on, so I'm not singling someone out who has been having a hard time. I'll say, 'These are the kind of things I will not put up with: this, this, this, this, and this.' That way no one is singled out, and no one knows what I'm talking about."

"When people go through training, they should be encouraged to make connections so they could then tap into that network for coworker support when needed."

"We really have a unique opportunity to create our own world. I try to push that 'Everyone's got something to bring to the table, let's optimize our opportunities.' People are far less likely to make someone a pariah if they get to know them. I try to keep it positive and engaging for everyone, which seems to keep stuff from happening."

"Specialists often feel like they're on their own little island and it is their responsibility, and nobody's there to help them. If you have a team, and a team approach, the specialists don't feel like they have to have responsibility for every single problem or come up with an answer for everything on their own. They feel connected with the other people."

"We have someone in our organization who brings everybody treats several times a year. He'll bring a loaf of pumpkin chocolate chip bread for everybody for Christmas. It's just those little things that are soothing.



They make people feel like they are recognized and appreciated. And that really helps with maintaining a friendly cohesive atmosphere.”

“I hold a monthly luncheon/potluck for all employees to get together, socialize, and interact.”

“Where I work entire teams comes together. We celebrate birthdays usually about once a month. Everybody comes together for birthdays.”

“Our staff put on a kickball team for everyone at all levels of the organization. All their families come to watch the games and then they get to know each other’s kids and spouses.”

“We do use annual staff retreats. After our meeting we always do some sort of activity, and we are in the wellness committee, so we have everybody out doing something like walking together.”

“When half of our office staff was out on maternity leave, we made the decision that those who were staying behind were going to set up a plan to manage the situation so that no one felt lesser because they were going through maternity leave.”

“You walk into our office and somebody has left a treat on your desk, and it’s just those little actions that somebody’s thinking about you, that validates that you are significant person and that you’re important.”

“Every season I give my office a healthcare item for that season, for winter they get a hand warmer and lip balm, and it’s not much, but it is a little something to let them know I care.”

“We go take a walk, just about a 15 minute walk just to get out of the office.”

“If somebody does something and you want to recognize it in a little bit more of an official capacity, we have an ‘on

the spot program’ through HR for them to get recognized by management. You say thank you and it is an informal way so they get some credit for it even though they weren’t seeking credit.”

“We have gift cards available so that when a staff member recognizes somebody else and I approve it, they actually deliver the gift card themselves with a little certificate saying great job. For us we get [coffee shop] gift cards or [music downloads] gift cards. It’s just a little something but I think little things add up.”

“We send emails of appreciation.”

“Our deputy chief read the book *The Five Languages of Appreciation*, and she’s come to realize that even though she regularly sends out an email saying, “good job,” some people need something else. So she’s trying to tap into each of us to see what our languages of appreciation are.”

“My supervisor looked at our overalls stats, which showed we were doing above what we’ve been doing. So, he went to the chief and they took us out for appetizers and drinks one afternoon. It just meant a lot to us to know that she could take time out for us.”

“Porch night, is something like a group chat. There are about nine of us in it and sometimes, about once a month, we say that we need a porch night. So everybody goes over and we sit on the porch and we just hang out and talk.”

“We help each other out, and we help the people we serve, so we all have something to contribute and we need to remind ourselves of that.”

Making a Connection after Difficult Situations

“When someone is in the Orange or Red Zone, sometimes they just can’t ask for help and so that’s when we perform anonymous acts of kindness that just show that we’re thinking about them and that they matter.”



"I think sometimes it's important to say, 'I don't have the words,' and just be there. And depending on the relationship, give the person a hug, a pat on the shoulder, a handshake, or whatever is comfortable."

"Showing support or connection includes simply reaching out to show you care through a conversation, phone call, card, lunch, or spending time."

"You also can't underestimate the power of laughter because sometimes everyone wants to ask you about a tragic event that happened to you. You kind of feel like you're trying to hold everyone else up because they're trying to be there for you. So sometimes someone just wants to laugh and forget about it for a moment. And for me, I'm not the greatest at comforting people; so I'd rather make you laugh, get your mind off it because so many people are coming to you and asking you about it. Sometimes you just want to forget about it and laugh."

"Especially from a supervisor position, there are a lot of opportunities that come about to lend support to the people you work with, whether it's a family member who's sick or somebody has passed away. There is value in a text message saying, 'Hey, I'm thinking about you. I hope that you're doing okay. Things will be better tomorrow.' It's really important that we maximize those situations, to foster that sense that someone else is thinking about them when things aren't going well."

"A subtle, behind the scenes way to develop connection is to leave a snack bar or a stress ball on their desk."

"Sometimes when people are really stressed they aren't functioning well and so people around them start to feel like they can't trust that person or they're screwing up so your job might be to say, 'Look they're really going through a tough time, it's not right or wrong. Let's figure out ways to help them, invite them, include them; that's what Connect is about.'"

"My supervisor's wife had a medical incident and we talked about how we could cover his work, but also cover him in his personal life, such as delivering meals, setting up a cooler out back so there's a meal for his two children during breaks and early dismissal, giving rides, having the kids sleep over, and also just giving him an outlet, like asking if he wants you to come over so he can step away from his life for a few moments, or just be with him at the hospital."

"For a person whose family member died, as much as we possibly could, we helped cover their work for a period of time until they got themselves through that."

"When my parents passed away everyone brought food, and I told them they didn't have to because my church already had taken care of that, but it was the fact that they cared and that made me feel connected."

"Some people block getting support. One of the guys I work with was going through personal stuff and needed to spend time with family. One of his grandparents who he was very close with was not doing well. He said, 'I don't need to talk with anyone, I don't need to go home.' I told him, 'If you come to work, you won't be able to concentrate. You are going home to see your family. He was really glad he went home.'"

"A coworker was drinking all the time. He had been through a divorce, but it was hard to get him to talk to us. He had a





kitchen remodeling project under way, so I went over and hung out in his home and helped him. While we worked on it, he opened up, and I was able to get him some help.”

“Drug overdoses and suicides are more frequent. I check in with myself, ‘How are you doing?’ And make sure that you’re talking to somebody, like your field partner who also knows the person, because they may also want to talk a little about the last time they had contact with the person.”

“We have a lot of values in our work, like duty, integrity, and respect, but we need to put more on being good people to each other when things are hard, because the reality is that our jobs can create a lot of problems in peoples’ personal lives. You don’t have to be lifelong ‘brothers’ to be a genuine friend to someone. Reaching out, supporting other people, getting help, and keeping other people’s personal information confidential go a long way. For instance, give them a phone call, a text, whatever is simple and how you normally communicate. The genuineness piece is important. We need to look out for each other.”

“I would recommend that when there is a lot of stress, leaders should keep people moving and facilitate talking while you do things. Getting people engaged and laughing is also helpful for their stress levels. Or, have people each report out on successes, loose ends, and their plan for the next 24 hours. It only has to take a half hour.”

“Connecting means sitting and listening and being comfortable letting the other person talk, so they leave feeling better. It involves learning to listen attentively, recognizing that it could hurt, and if it starts to, figuring out what to do right after. For me, it helps to know that no matter what I say or what I do, there is no right way to do anything. Don’t even bother with cliché words, just be with them, nod, pay attention, and just feel it, and it’s okay. I know that it’s okay to support others, and there are plenty of people I can reach out to after, if I need to, and I have. But I would not walk away from someone.”

“We had a senior coworker going through a lot of stress who wouldn’t talk to anyone because he was on staff for many years. I asked him: ‘What is your coworker support plan? Who can you actually talk to? You need to bother them, whether you want to or not. Now is the time to call them.’”

“Leadership coaching with a confidential, trained coach who understood the business was very effective for me.”

Personal Connections

“I’ve worked it out that when I talk with my spouse or friends, we use this question ‘toolbox or trashcan?’ Do you want me to just listen to this, or do you want me to provide solutions to this? It allows me to know my role in the conversation, because I tend to always go to the toolbox and try to fix things, unless you tell me that you just want me to listen.”

“When I’m stressed, I try to spend time with my son so that I’m in a different world and not thinking so much about my own problems. Or maybe I’ll just sit down and have a heart to heart conversation with somebody about what I’ve been through.”

“I would prefer to have some help with practical things like somebody to come over and help me remodel my kitchen.”

“Unless your family is involved with the system somehow, they have no understanding of what you’re dealing with. It helps if family is told early on what’s going to be expected, then it just becomes part of life.”

“Just coming home and playing with my boys, because they’re still young, is a great way to just play at something silly in a way that completely distracts me from serious matters.”

“We often talk in the office that there should be some sort of training course for the spouses and family members to kind of educate them about what is going



to happen with this job. Like when you come home, you're going to be exhausted. Things like that, because we have a lot of staff who have spouses or significant others who are in the same line of work and they know the environment, and atmosphere, and they understand it a lot more. It's important to know how to get the point across about what the job is all about to somebody who doesn't know the field."

"I don't have a spouse to talk with about work. So when we talk about the importance of social connections, don't assume your coworkers will just go home to their significant other. I don't have one."

"I have a group of friends who have nothing to do with my job, and part of my comfort with them is not having to talk about work. Sometimes it's nice not even having to think about it."

"It's important to communicate with my husband if I'm struggling with something, to let him know that it's not him, it's the job. I let him know he hasn't done anything wrong, but I'm dealing with this issue at work. So just so that he can be there to help to support, but at the same time he's not worrying that there something wrong between us. He's not trying to fix it, he's just there to support me."

"My spouse and I have a pretty good understanding that I'm not great with realizing when I'm in that problem zone, and knowing that what I need is for someone objective who's listening to me talk about work say something like, 'Have you listened to yourself lately?' We've had the conversation when things aren't going well, about whether this is something I want to continue. So he helps me decide if I either need to change something or have a conversation with someone at work. Having someone who can recognize that is really helpful to be able to make an intervention before it gets to be a problem."

NEED FOR COMPETENCE EXAMPLES

"During a personal experience recently regarding a significant stress reaction I was placed under doctor's orders which restricted my ability to execute certain activities. I submitted a plan that would allow me to still do my job, but supervisors did not provide a response to that plan for 60 days. They modified the plan for the remaining 30 days, and the lack of timely communication on their part led to additional anxiety."

"I was very apprehensive about some aspects of management when I first became a supervisor, and still feel somewhat less than competent in that area."

"It used to be that if you learned the basics of the job well in the first five years, it kind of carried you through your career. Now every couple of years there's something new that people are needing to learn, with new skills. No change at all is bad, and too much too quick is also bad. I think that's where you get a lot of people frustrated and feeling that isolation."

"Certain aspects of the job are really hard. I think we've acknowledged that they're really difficult, but I don't know that we've suggested a particular way that is effective in dealing with that stress."

COMPETENCE SELF-CARE EXAMPLES

"When I'm under too much stress, I revert to doing something that is easy for me. It gives me a sense of accomplishment, like tidying the garage, or shoveling snow for a widowed neighbor. It doesn't take much thought, but it gives me a sense of accomplishment."

"It's just my nature to work hard. I'll go to the office for an hour, and I'll stay late, it's just how it goes. It's hard. It's really difficult to put work-life balance into practice. It comes with time and experience and shifting priorities. It's definitely difficult. But you do have a lot of stuff to do."



Sometimes I'll get our junior and senior leadership to do things for us. That takes some of the workload off. There's just so much to do."

"In terms of self-care, I've been through several iterations. First it was, 'I've got to get the stuff done, so, I'm going to take care of the stuff.' Looking back on that, everything was in harmony, but as time goes on, as your situation at home changes, you have to stay attuned to those changes in your family's needs, and where you are in the season of your life."

"I probably take on way too much, but those are the things I accepted when I took this job. For each person it's going to be different. They should be constantly assessing where they are, and where their families are."

"Switching specialties was a struggle for me. I utilized all the resources I could and was not afraid to ask my supervisor or other coworkers for help and guidance. I was honest about my lack of confidence in my abilities, and I sought out (and continue to seek help) from other specialists."

"After we had a difficult situation, I reached out to someone in a different district who had gone through a similar situation. When tough things happen, I establish new relationships: 'What does this look like? Help me map this out.' He gave me tips that have been very helpful and has been a good mentor in some hard times."

"I've been doing one type of job and switched to another, but this is something that's completely new to me, so I had to not feel bad about myself when I needed help. It doesn't mean that I'm not competent, it just means there's much more to learn."

COMPETENCE COWORKER EXAMPLES

Training in Work-Related Skills

"I had done something in a low-frequency situation that was unknowingly against our rules of policy. After that happened, the supervisor went around to other people and asked if they knew if they were allowed to do this. It came out that nobody knew that we weren't allowed to do it and that people have been doing exactly what I had done. So rather than me getting in trouble, my district provided training so that we could avoid that mistake in the future."

"There is one specific job that involves high levels of stress, and there are a few people who really know how to do it, but a lot of people touching in on cases where they don't have a high level of training. So that is a scenario where high stress occurs as well as low training. So, we made training videos about it. If we have a case where it's needed but the specialist isn't there, they can reference the video to know what they need to do."

Training in Well-Being Skills

"We help people when they're exposed to different things, such as teaching 'flushing techniques,' where you actually work on wiping something from the mind, so that you don't dwell on it."

"We had training in positive psychology that included gratitude journals, where you wrote three things that you're thankful for every day, and it really seem to help us to get a different perspective."





“Our department had a training on conflict resolution because we saw that when some of our staff were under stress, they didn’t really know how to effectively manage their irritability and anger. The younger ones also didn’t know how to communicate directly, effectively or assertively with others--they were more used to texting than talking. The training helped all of us improve the ways we handle conflict individually, and as an organization.”

“We’re going to incorporate retirement seminars from day one when people come in. We will bring it up during unit meetings or their annual retreats or something like that, because time goes by quickly. It will help for people to plan if they keep retirement in their mind. We are planning on implementing a program where 18-24 months before retirement they’re going to be paired up with some of the younger people and going out there to share experiences, to share guidance, so the younger people can learn from their experience, and they feel like they are leaving a legacy.”

Encouragement/Normalization

“My supervisor is an encourager by nature, so it helps me with the day-to-day stress of everything going on. He always has the right words to say. He’ll just tell me whatever it was that I did well on. It is great that he actually noticed something, instead of me feeling like I’m just over here swimming. So that helps with competence, putting all the pieces together and just noticing the little things. Sometimes it’s a big thing, but a lot of times it’s just little things throughout.”

“If you’ve seeing a decrease in someone’s level of competence, something that I’ve seen done is to say, ‘Can I share how I’ve done something similar, or even worse?’ or, ‘I went through a similar thing.’ I think when we can share our experience, how it affected us and how our performance dropped when we were dealing with something, it probably helps the person to understand,

‘All right, I’m going to be okay.’ It’s not permanent and it’s a normalizing thing, and it’s part of the process.”

“Instead of asking people how they’re doing I will ask them to tell me how they’re doing with something specific. I’ll ask, ‘What is hard for you? What are you struggling with?’ I give them more specifics, and it feels like a way to let them know that you would expect them to struggle.”

Re-Assignment

“For one person who needed a break, we have moved them out of a job for a period of time. It’s hard to do in our positions because we don’t have a whole lot to move them to and it’s produced a struggle, but we have temporarily suspended certain job duties.”

“If we have a person who is struggling and see that no matter how much we try to coach or encourage, that it’s not going to work, we sometimes will let them switch to a different position if those positions are open.”

“I had a person who realized that they couldn’t do a certain job anymore because they felt that it was just too stressful given what they’ve been through, so we moved her into a different position.”

Empowerment

“If you’re in a mentor role and someone is struggling with an issue give them the opportunity to come up with solutions and encourage them as they’re developing their own self-confidence, or their competency so they can know that they have the ability to address issues.”

“When you give people more responsibility, and give up control to them, they are more and more in control. Every little thing builds. And to have a successful track record, that you can rely on, and recognize, is huge. It pays to brush up on your Competence a little to help when your confidence is shaken. It also helps to have someone



remind you that we're all just human, and all reactions are acceptable in the right context, and then we can figure out what to do after that."

NEED FOR CONFIDENCE EXAMPLES

"After disciplinary action or the loss or denial of a promotion, staff tend to doubt their abilities or where they fit in the organization. Reassurance by management is key during these difficult times. There is extreme discouragement when a person is working to change or grow, and those around that person will not afford them the opportunity to do so or are seeing only the negative and 'piling on,' so to speak. The loss of hope or confidence comes when benign actions are interpreted with negative connotations."

"There's a lot more visible accountability now, which kind of cuts both ways. Every month you get this report; and if you haven't seen someone, it's in red and you know it's gone to your supervisor, it's gone to your chief. In some ways it's intended to help you not miss stuff, but at the same time, here's this report that's staring you in the face of all the things that you haven't done. The ones that you did fine are not in a color, but the ones that you haven't done are in bright red or yellow. I think that adds to the cumulative stress too. And then once you clear those things, then you look at the things that are gray because those are the things

that are coming up. Then it's the first of the month and you get another report. It's like a nonstop cycle."

"No one really comes to you in other moments and lets you know what you do right. Your first thought when something happens is, 'What did I do wrong?' No one checks in with you to let you know you're doing a good job, that these other things are going well. I think that adds to our stress too, because the only time anyone comes to you is when something is wrong."

"In our workplace every time there was an issue and we would go talk to our leader, he was dismissive, making us feel like we were just complainers, rather than taking our concerns seriously."

"I missed an important detail on a case. I did everything I was supposed to do, but I still missed it. Even if you have a supportive administration who says it could have happened to anybody and you did everything you were supposed to do, that self-imposed responsibility is difficult to overcome."

"It would be nice to have more feedback going to people about successes. If people got better feedback, maybe it would foster a sense of confidence."

"Pending retirement can cause issues with Confidence. It can almost feel like we have to find ourselves again."

CONFIDENCE SELF-CARE EXAMPLES

"Sometimes you have to do some self-talk, because there's only so much you can do and you're not going to change someone trying to blame things on you, so you have to be comfortable in saying, 'I know that I did everything that I could.' No matter how somebody else sees it, I have to get to the point where I'm okay with others thinking that I didn't do my job. I know I did my job."

"You have eight cases that don't make it, but you have two that do. Those two that do could be a point of





reference to remind you that it does work, and you do make a difference.”

“Sometimes I don’t get to see how I change people’s lives; you just have to take a step back and figure out why you’re still doing this.”

“Over time, hopefully many of us see that even when you may have a failure, you can still interact with them and treat them in a way that might change their perspective. Did you treat them with kindness? So even in the most severe cases we may still have a family member come back to us and say, ‘Thank you for what you did to try to save my child.’ And that’s success.”

“One thing that helped me has been to think long term. Just because you don’t see an immediate impact on the person you’re working with, doesn’t mean you didn’t have a long-term impact on them. And you may have touched their lives in a positive way as well. I don’t think you can always measure success based on that one particular individual in a short period of time as much as how it might have impacted them or those around them in the long run.”

“I know that what I did was the very best I could do and so it is not personal if it doesn’t turn out as well as I would have liked. That is something that I didn’t understand at the beginning of my career. I would get frustrated or angry. But now in the grand scheme of things, everybody is just trying to do the very best job they can do in their specific sphere of work and it sometimes doesn’t go exactly the way you would have liked.”

“You can be the most skillful person in the entire world but if you don’t have faith in self you are doomed. You’re never going to get through it. And vice versa, you can be overconfident but not able to learn from mistakes or be more effective. You’re just going to keep circling the drain. There is a fine line between the two. The better you are

at one, the better you will be on the other one. Even small triumphs can help with confidence. Trust is hard to rebuild. Confidence is that way too. If you’ve had a bad outcome at work, it can create self-doubt. You end up talking with a supervisor or reading more self-help books or articles. Then you realize that you were already good at your job, and that the bad outcome had nothing to do with your actions or skill level.”

CONFIDENCE COWORKER EXAMPLES

Lay a Foundation

“We had a new chief come in and change our old mission statements. Our old statement put too much pressure on us. She modified it to be more realistic, and it took a lot of pressure off of us.”

“If we are not so guarded about our own failures and our own mistakes, they can be learning opportunities for others. It might be embarrassing, but at the same time it could really help those around you.

Reframe Perspective and Put Things into Context

“When I first started, I had to make a shift about taking work home. Instead of bearing that burden I learned that when it’s time to clock out, it’s time to clock out. My mind now is on my family. My mind is on what other activities I have in my life. I’ll take care of the job the next day. It can wait.”

“It’s important to learn to not let our careers identify us and be the main part of us. This job is going to end one day and then you don’t want to be standing there with nothing and say, ‘What was it all for?’ For me it’s been about becoming a more well-balanced, well-rounded person that’s not defined by the career and letting go of certain things.”



“There was a time where I dropped the ball. It was not earth-shattering, but it was significant. I was completely unable to connect the dots at all until one day my supervisor talked to me and said, ‘During that same time period, your mom was terminally ill and had just passed away.’ As obvious as it should have been, I was not able to see the connection until he said that to me.”

“We have a lot of people who have never had something go wrong, and then once that happens, they’re just having a harder time because they’re so worried about things that they weren’t worried about before. A lot of times you have to help people tone it down for themselves and say that they don’t have to be perfect. That’s where mentorship comes into play. Just because you’re hired on and you had experience on the outside doesn’t mean that you come with all the tools that you need in this exact job.”

“Sometimes a person in need of Confidence won’t listen to anyone but the person who has been through a similar situation. It gives you a role model to show you how to potentially go through things.”

“Sometimes it’s simple. If they don’t feel comfortable doing something at that time for some reason, but they’ve done it before and know how to do it, you just relate the person back to their skills: ‘You do this all the time, you’ve done it before, you know how to do it. Just take a deep breath, take a step back, let’s look at what we’re doing here and move forward.’ But let them know you have the confidence in them to be successful: ‘Look I trust you or I wouldn’t have you doing this in the first place, so I know you can do it, I know you’re capable, just get back in there and do it.’”

“Trainees sometimes get overwhelmed. You have to go there and let them know that they are plenty competent, and to relax and get out there. And once they get

over that, it’s very rewarding to look back and see the development in their confidence.”

Focus on Positive Actions and Outcomes

“Pointing out each other’s strengths is important because people are often unable to see their own positives. It is important to have someone that is able to provide validation and reassurance. For instance, share a compliment. Gaining Confidence, for me, was being able to see my role and have clarity in what my function was, what my purpose is.”

“A coworker had a pretty horrible situation happen at work, so he was thinking of all the things he should or shouldn’t have done. But rather than automatically jumping to what he might have missed, his supervisor told him all the things he did right.”

“There was a tough incident, and one of my coworkers felt overwhelmingly responsible for it. He was a solitary kind of guy so it was expected that his reaction would be one of retreat. A year ago, I would have let him retreat, but because I was introduced to the SFA model, I included him in discussions and projects that would benefit from his expertise and created collaborative opportunities with coworkers. It gave us the opportunity to include him, take his temperature from time to time. It redirected his energy to get him back to a sense of Competence and Confidence, to get him back into doing something that was in his wheelhouse professionally. These actions have all the appearances of being effective.”

“I had a couple of tough cases back to back. My supervisor said that I handled it really well. It was nice to get kudos because it felt like I was treading water the whole time.”

“A run of losses can cause us to lose Confidence in what we’re doing. But then we’d get that one successful story, and it would kind of lift everybody up again, so we’d keep going.”



"If someone makes a decision that it's time to leave, I tell them, 'There is no shame in leaving that role. It's not a permanent thing, it shouldn't be, and you've really enriched the program, so hold your head up high. You've made a great contribution, so don't feel that it's a letdown.'"

"In our district trainings we recognize longevity, success, and service to others in formal and informal ways such as plaques or gift cards."

Foster Meaning, Values, and Faith

"Spirituality means very different things to very different people. I think it can be good to initiate a conversation with coworkers about preferences, to get a feel for how or if we might want to go down the road with each other."

"I try to return people to a fundamental notion of why they got into the job in the first place. I also tell them, 'You're a valuable part of the mission, and if you're struggling, maybe we can find something else for you so that you can really believe in what you're doing.'"

"I had a guy who worked really well, and then his personal life fell apart and he had a divorce and child issues, and he walked in and handed me a letter of resignation. I knew that his sense of identity was in the job, so I told him, 'I'm going to sit on the letter for 30 days, and then after that, if you still want to quit, I'll turn it in, because right now you have a lot going on.' At 30 days, he came back in and said, 'Can I have that letter back?' Last year he walked up to me and thanked me for that, and he always tells me that he was so glad that I didn't let him quit. And I always say, 'I'm so glad you're here now helping out.' For me, it would have been adding insult to injury to allow him to quit at that particular time."





Skill Applications

The following sections contain three scenarios that can help you reflect on the application of Stress First Aid actions. There are no absolutely “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions posed in each scenario; your answers will reflect how you interpret them. Try to use the SFA core actions to shape your responses.





XIV. Skill Application I: Bus Accident

A local coach bus overturns on the interstate during an icy storm. Many people are injured and 50 are brought into the ED with various levels of injury. You are asked to respond as a member of the Staff Support Team to the ED. It has now been 12 hours since the accident, and many staff are now working on overtime.

CHECK

How should you introduce yourself to the ED staff, and what should you be looking for in the staff as signs of stress?

COORDINATE

- You have now been in the ED for 30 minutes and have talked with a few staff. Many of them are exhausted, missed all of their break-times and never got to any meals today.
- What should you report back to the Staff Support Team coordinator about the needs of this department?

COVER

John is an RN who worked his regular 12-hour shift and then an extra 6 hours due to the bus accident that brought 50 people through the ED today. The pace has been hectic. John has also functioned as the unofficial patient family contact person. He has fielded numerous phone calls from distraught families and has met in person with families of 20+ patients. Some of those families, in their desperate need to see and touch their loved ones, have muscled John aside to run into the ED trauma rooms, trying to see their loved one. John has gotten shoved and even kicked by some of these families. As the Staff Support Team member assigned to the ED, you have come down to the ED to try and lend support to the exhausted staff.

How can you check to see if John is safe? If he is not safe, what Cover actions would you consider providing?

CALM

You have arranged for John to come to the designated break room near the ED. He is clearly “revved up”; he is talking rapidly, pacing, and is unable to sit down for very long. Every now and then he says, “I am exhausted, but I can’t seem to relax enough to even sit!”

What Calm actions could you use to help John?

CONNECT

John tells you that although he has been an RN for 10 years, he is relatively new to working in the ED. Before this, he worked in long term care. He tells you it was very slow paced compared to a normal ED day, and that this pace today is “over the top” for him. In fact, he has been working so fast and hard, he has not even had a chance to check in with his former preceptor who is working around the corner in another part of the ED. He wonders if his experience and reaction of feeling overwhelmed is normal or if he is not coping well.

How could you use Connect actions to help John?

COMPETENCE

After his long shift, John goes home. The next day, he returns to work and calls you “just to talk.” He mentions that he feels, in retrospect, like, he “didn’t prioritize” very well yesterday, and could have been more efficient.

How can you use your knowledge of Competence to help John?

Who else in John’s department could best use Competence actions to help John?



CONFIDENCE

The day after this terrible day in the ED, the nurse manager calls you and asks what you noticed in her staff and what you think she should do to help them, now. You mention the exhaustion, but also mention that some staff felt like their skills were not sufficient to deal with the levels of trauma and the constant triaging and prioritization that they needed to perform. They also felt like they should have done a better job and feel like they failed their patients in some ways.

How can you work with the nurse manager to improve Confidence in her staff?



XV. Skill Application II: Workplace Violence

- A man with a firearm entered the pediatrics unit and confronted his child's mother and her boyfriend, taking them, the child, and the child's nurse hostage, barricading himself in the room. Police were able to extract the perpetrator from the room, place him in custody, and remove him from the building, but shots were fired.
- Staff Support Team members are assigned to several units. The team has clearance from police to go to the pediatric ward. The team has been given information that the boyfriend is a hospital employee and was injured in the shooting, and that there were no other casualties.

CHECK

- You and a Support Team partner go to the pediatrics unit, introduce yourself and explain your role to the nursing director, charge nurse, and staff.
- How do you introduce yourself?
- When considering using the Check action, what behaviors or concerns are you looking for?

COORDINATE

The charge nurse explains that the staff has been focused on maintaining care for patients despite the threat in adjacent unit. The extra attention required for care in these circumstances, compounded by the isolation due to building security measures, has resulted in limited knowledge of the status of the situation. Nursing staff, patients, and visitors are speculating and anxious about unfolding events.

Are there needs for additional resources at this point? How would you obtain them?

COVER

Some staff members are closely watching the hallway in the direction of the shooting, inquiring nervously about unfamiliar sounds and retreating into patient rooms at the appearance of unfamiliar people. Someone reports that a friend called her cell phone saying that the perpetrator has an accomplice who works on another unit.

How do you assess the safety status of the staff on the unit?

If there are safety needs, what are they and how can you use Cover to help?

CALM

You have provided staff members with information about the status of the situation and arranged a walk-through by a police information officer and a hospital administrator. You have also arranged for space and refreshments in a conference room, and the charge nurse is coordinating opportunity for staff to rotate through. You notice that one of the nurses is talking rapidly, and he spills his tea.

How can you use Calm actions to help him?

CONNECT

A week after the event, you have arranged a follow-up session for drop-ins and tea in the conference room. One of the staff is a recent graduate who joined the unit within recent weeks. She states that her nursing school was in her home state of New Jersey. She took the job here because her boyfriend is planning to move here in the near future. She has not made many local friends yet.

How can you help her Connect with social support?

COMPETENCE

In the follow-up session, some staff members report that they feel they are not giving full attention to patients



as they did before the event. They are keeping up with nursing tasks and patient safety is not compromised, yet they feel on edge and less attentive to the emotional needs of patients. Thinking back on the event day, they wonder if they were attentive enough to maintain safe nursing performance.

What can you do to improve the staff's sense of Competence?

CONFIDENCE

In a follow-up session arranged four weeks after the event, some members report thinking that they had not handled the situation with sufficient professionalism, though their patients suffered no harm and they had secured the unit as anticipated in the Code Silver plan. Some confide that---although no supervisors have said so---they believe nursing management is critical of their performance.

How can you work with management to help these nurses regain Confidence in themselves?



XVI. Skill Application III: Flood

After an extended period of above average rainfall, local areas have experienced a downpour that has dumped 10 inches of rain in 12 hours, with resultant flash flooding throughout the region. A surge of casualties has been admitted from communities devastated by flooding.

Regional power, telephone lines, and cell towers are out of service. Many staff members who were at work at the onset of the storm are unable to get home. Staff are unable to communicate with their families and don't know if loved ones or property are safe. Many who are scheduled to work are unable to make in.

CHECK

You are assigned as Staff Support Team member to the orthopedic unit. You've been told they have five extra patients due to this emergency, including two who are being housed right in the hallway since there are no available rooms. Several nurses have now been there for 24 hours, with only a short rest break. As you walk onto the unit, a tired looking unit secretary looks at you, and asks, "So, why are you here?"

What should you say to explain your role to this secretary and other unit staff, and what might you do to assess the needs for staff support?

COORDINATE

What kind of information should you tell the unit manager?

What should you report back to the Staff Support Team coordinator?

COVER

As you walk farther onto the unit, you watch several nurses at the worktable huddling and talking with great animation. You hear one of them say, "Not only have I not gotten home in 24 hours, but I haven't even been able to get off the unit to go to the cafeteria to get anything to eat ...all of my breaks have been right here

listening to call lights." The other nurses all nod their heads and say, "Me too."

What Cover actions should you provide to make the situation safer?

CALM

You have talked to the Staff Support Team coordinator and the unit manager about the rest needs of the staff, and a break room has been set up for staff to retreat to. They can even take a nap if they want, using cots and recliner chairs. You are re-assigned to this rest area for a few hours. Mary, one of the RNs from another ward, comes to the rest area while you are there.

You start to talk to her and find out she really wants to rest in a recliner chair, but she is afraid she is "too tired and too anxious to really rest."

How can you help Calm Mary?

CONNECT

Mary is able to get some rest in the recliner. She even closes her eyes and appears to sleep for 20 minutes. She opens her eyes and comes over to where you are sitting by a refreshment area where there is some bottled water, juice, cheese and fruit available. As she snacks, she tells you her husband is home alone with her three young children. She is worried about whether they are safe and have electricity and water. She believes they might be



worried about her, since she hasn't even had time to call them. She tells you that although her husband is good with the kids, having them all at home together without power is a stress.

How can you help Mary Connect?

COMPETENCE

The nurse manager asks to talk to you in her office. When you get there, she closes the door and says "I know my staff are exhausted, but we still have to take care of all of these patients. I have come up with some staffing ideas, but am tired myself, so wonder if they are good ideas or not!" She asks you if you are willing to discuss the staffing ideas with her.

What can you do to improve the nurse manager's sense of Competence?

How can you help her improve her staff's Competence?

CONFIDENCE

One of the staff's favorite flood victims, a little girl who was crushed by debris, dies unexpectedly days after rallying with the help of staff. Two of the nurses in particular feel responsible for the death and are noticeably shaken by the experience. The nurse manager reports to you that they made a few mistakes due to their exhaustion, but nothing that would have contributed directly to her death.

How can you work with leadership to help these nurses regain Confidence in themselves?



Stress First Aid

for HEALTH CARE
WORKERS

W O R K B O O K

