

CONNECTIONS

MAY, 2020

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Greetings City Employees,



We would first like to thank the City leaders who have provided us with their resilient experiences to be included in this month's newsletter. We are grateful for your contributions.

Our office has placed an emphasis this month on promoting resilience in the City. Tresa Martinez, our EAP Manager, has been attending international EAP meetings and collaborating with professionals in our industry to contribute resilient and wellness focused perspectives to the City's reintegration process. Arlyn Gonzalez, our newest EAP Specialist, is in the process of collaborating with the Assessor's Office and Occupational Development to create a six week program to build resilience in City staff. Sherri Amos continues to use her strong skills in assisting all levels of our office operations to help us deliver useful and relevant mental health services and resources to you all.

And it is with so much gratitude and respect for the important work you all do that I would like to announce that I have recently accepted a position with UW Madison's Employee Assistance Office, where I will continue supporting employee mental health and building resilience. My last day with the City will be May 22nd. I am so grateful to Tresa for the wealth of experiences in EAP I have been provided, and to all of you for allowing me the opportunities to engage, consult, and counsel. You have an awesome Employee Assistance Program (but I'm biased) and it's been an honor to be part of it. I wish you and your families the very best, and we hope you enjoy this newsletter!

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MAY IS 2 MENTAL 0 HEALTH 2 MONTH 0

**TAKING A SCREEN IS
AN EASY WAY TO
CHECK IN ON YOUR
MENTAL HEALTH.**



**HELP US REACH OUR
GOAL OF A
#MILLIONINMAY.**



**VISIT
MHASCREENING.ORG**

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS



It's possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone. It's the connections we make with other people that help enrich our lives and get us through tough times, but sometimes it's hard to know how to make those connections.

TIPS FOR CONNECTING



Connect with others at places you already go to. There are places that you go to over and over again - these are great places to strike up conversations and start to make friends. At work you might ask a co-worker to join you for lunch or to grab a cup of coffee. If you have kids involved in extracurricular activities, you probably see the same other parents attending their practices or dropping them off each time. If you go to the gym at the same time each day, you may notice others who are on the same workout schedule.



Use shared experience as a topic of conversation. Use your current situation as a topic to talk about. Maybe you're stuck waiting in a long line, or you noticed someone is wearing a shirt from a place that you've been. Hometown sports, local news and events, or even the weather can also get a conversation going.



Give compliments. If you're struggling to figure out what to say to someone to strike up a conversation, try starting with a compliment. You can comment on a person's outfit, tattoo, or a piece of jewelry that you like and maybe ask them where they got it. Use their response to continue the conversation, for example if they tell you they got it at a certain store, ask where that is.



Make time to be social. Going to work and taking care of life's other daily responsibilities is time consuming and many of us feel exhausted by the end of the day. While it's tempting to just sit on the sofa and zone out in front of the TV, that time can be spent in a more meaningful way. Set aside at least half an hour each day to connect with other people outside of work.



Not all connections have to be done in person. While spending time with someone face-to-face helps to create the strongest relationships, phone calls, text messaging, emails, and video chats can maintain friendships when distance or time constraints get in the way of hanging out.



Accept invitations. If someone asks you to go somewhere or do something with them, accept their invitation. When you turn people down over and over, they may stop inviting you. It may not be your favorite place or activity, but you can use the time to build your friendship and suggest things you like better for the next time you get together with that person.



Pay attention to what other people are interested in. For instance, you may notice a family portrait or a pet's picture on a coworker's desk. Ask them how old their children are, or what their pet's name is - and show genuine interest in their answers. Ask follow up questions and if appropriate, share something relevant about yourself, like how many children you have or the name of your pet.



Organize activities. If there is something that you are interested in doing, ask someone else (or a group of other people) to join you. It can be hard to make the first move, but it may end up that someone else wanted to do the same thing all along and was waiting to find out who else was interested. Don't be discouraged if schedules don't cooperate sometimes. Keep making invitations!

FAST FACTS



Research shows it can take 50 hours for someone you don't know that well to turn into a true friend.¹



During the week, Americans watch an average of 2 ½ hours of TV per day, but only spend half an hour per day socializing.²



The number of friendships you have early in your adult life and the closeness of those relationships can influence your wellbeing 30 years later.³

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

¹Hall, J. A. (2019). How many hours does it take to make a friend? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(4), 1278–1296.

²US Dept. of Labor. (2018). American time use survey. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/tus>.

³Carmichael, C. L., Reis, H. T., Duberstein, P. R. (2015). In your 20s it's quantity, in your 30s it's quality: The prognostic value of social activity across 30 years of adulthood. *Psychology and Aging*, 30, 95–105.

SUPPORTING OTHERS

TOOLS
2
THRIVE

While 1 in 5 people will experience a diagnosable mental health condition in their lives, 5 out of 5 people will go through a challenging time that affects their mental health. There are simple things that every person can say or do to help the people in their life who are struggling to get through the tough times.

HOW TO BE HELPFUL



Practice active listening. Active listening is different than just hearing what a person has to say. A good active listener puts everything aside and gives their complete attention to the person who is talking; asks open-ended questions to get more details about the topic that is being discussed (ex. "And how did that make you feel?"); and takes moments throughout the conversation to summarize what they've been told and make sure they are understanding clearly.



Don't compare. If a friend or loved-one is going through a tough situation and they come to you for support, you might feel tempted to tell them about something that happened to you and how you were able to get through it. It's okay to share about similar experiences, but be careful not to compare because it can make someone feel like their pain isn't valid. For instance, if they are telling you about a breakup, don't mention how you had a much harder divorce. Focus on what you did to cope with feelings of loss or loneliness.



Ask what you can do. It can be tempting to assume what would be helpful to someone who is struggling, but it's always better to ask them what they need from you. If you ask and get a response like, "nothing, I'm fine," offer up a few suggestions for things you would be willing to do (without being pushy). For instance, you could offer to come sit with them and watch a movie, cook them a meal, or pick up a few things for them at the store.



Keep your word. If you have offered your support to someone and told them you would do something, keep your word. When a person is struggling, the last thing they need is to feel abandoned by someone else. If you absolutely can't honor your promise, make a sincere apology and find another time that you can do what you said you would.



Don't judge. To be truly supportive of someone, you need to put your personal opinions and biases aside. They may be struggling because of a mistake that they made, or you may think that they are overreacting, but you will never know what it is truly like to be that person in this moment, and criticism is not helpful to their recovery.



Offer to join them. When someone is going through a time of sadness or uncertainty, their emotions can take over and leave them feeling paralyzed and unable to take care of life's obligations. Offering to go with someone to help them take care of responsibilities like walking the dog, going to the grocery store, attending doctor appointments, or picking up the dry cleaning can help them feel a sense of accomplishment and lift their spirits.



Know when more serious help is needed. Sometimes the support that you can offer won't be enough. If you notice that your friend or loved-one continues to struggle after weeks or months, they may be showing signs of a mental health condition and likely need professional help. Don't be afraid to encourage them to seek help from a mental health professional and offer to help them find a provider if needed. If someone you care about is in immediate danger of taking suicidal action, seek help by calling 911 or going to the closest emergency room. Trained crisis counselors are available 24/7 by texting "MHA" to 741-741 or calling 1-800-273-TALK(8255).

FAST FACTS



A strong social support system improves overall mental health outcomes and the ability to bounce back from stressful situations.¹



One study found that providing support to others increased activity in the part of the brain associated with rewards.²



For young people who came out as LGBTQ, those who had at least one accepting and supportive adult were 40% less likely to attempt suicide.³

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

MHA
Mental Health America

Sources

¹Ozbay, F., Johnson, D. C., Dimoulas, E., Morgan III, C. A., Charney, D., & Southwick, S. (2007). Social support and resilience to stress: from neurobiology to clinical practice. *Psychiatry* (Edgmont), 4(5), 35.

²Inagaki, T. K., Bryne-Haltom, K. E., Suzuki, S., Jevtic, I., Hornstein, E., Bower, J. E., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2016). The Neurobiology of Giving Versus Receiving Support: The Role of Stress-Related and Social Reward-Related Neural Activity. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 78(4), 443-453. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000302>

³The Trevor Project. (2019). National Survey on LGBTQ Mental Health. New York, New York: The Trevor Project.

STARTING A CONVERSATION

If you think someone that you care about is struggling it can be hard to start a conversation with them about what is going on in their life. If a face-to-face talk is too intimidating, you can start with a text message or an email.

Use the prompts below to help you think through what specifically has happened, or what you've noticed about your friend or loved one that has caused you to be concerned about them.

Start the conversation when there is an open window of time to have an in-depth discussion, and you won't have to cut the conversation short to take care of other obligations. Plan to set aside at least 30 minutes to an hour.

FOR THE PAST (DAY/WEEK/MONTH/YEAR/ _____), IT SEEMS LIKE YOU HAVE BEEN FEELING (UNLIKE YOURSELF/SAD/ANGRY/ANXIOUS/MOODY/AGITATED/LONELY/HOPELESS/FEARFUL/OVERWHELMED/DISTRACTED/CONFUSED/STRESSED/RESTLESS/UNABLE TO FUNCTION OR GET OUT OF BED/ _____).

YOU SEEM TO BE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR (BREAK-UP/DIVORCE/JOB STRESS/JOB LOSS/NEW JOB/DEATH OF A LOVED ONE/HOUSING ISSUES/DEATH OF A PET/RECENT HEALTH DIAGNOSIS/FRIENDSHIP FALLING APART/RELATIONSHIP/FINANCES/ _____).

I'VE NOTICED YOUR (CHANGES IN APPETITE/CHANGES IN WEIGHT/LOSS OF INTEREST IN THINGS YOU USED TO ENJOY/LACK OF ENERGY/INCREASED ENERGY/INABILITY TO CONCENTRATE/ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE OR ABUSE/SELF-HARM/SKIPPING MEALS/OVEREATING/GUILT/PARANOIA/LACK OF SLEEP/SLEEPING TOO MUCH/RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOR/OVERWHELMING SADNESS/ANGER/RAGE/ISOLATION/CUTTING/TALK OF SUICIDE/ _____).

TALKING TO YOU ABOUT THIS MAKES ME FEEL (NERVOUS/ANXIOUS/HOPEFUL/EMBARRASSED/EMPOWERED/PRO-ACTIVE/SELF-CONSCIOUS/GUILTY/ _____), BUT I'M TELLING YOU THIS BECAUSE (I'M WORRIED ABOUT YOU/IT IS IMPACTING OUR RELATIONSHIP/I AM AFRAID/I DON'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO/I DON'T KNOW IF ANYONE ELSE HAS TALKED TO YOU ABOUT THIS/ _____).

**I WOULD LIKE TO HELP YOU (TALK TO A DOCTOR OR THERAPIST/TALK TO A GUIDANCE COUNSELOR/FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO/TALK ABOUT THIS LATER/CREATE A PLAN TO GET BETTER/TALK ABOUT THIS MORE/FIND A SUPPORT GROUP/ _____).
WHAT CAN I DO?**



www.caregiverteleconnection.org



Date	Time	Topic	A LEADING VOICE FOR CAREGIVERS
Tuesday, May 5th	11:00 am Eastern 10:00 am Central 9:00 am Mountain 8:00 am Pacific	Diagnóstico y tratamiento de la demencia con el Dr. Nestor H. Praderio <i>El Dr. Néstor H. Praderio repasará el proceso de diagnóstico de la demencia y explicará los tipos de demencia, incluso los síntomas y las etapas. El doctor también hablará sobre las opciones de terapia y tratamiento.</i>	
Thursday, May 7th	1:00 pm Eastern 12:00 pm Central 11:00 am Mountain 10:00 am Pacific	I'm not the Same Person Anymore: Coping with Caregiver Role Changes with Evalyn Greb, LCSW <i>Do your caregiving responsibilities make you feel like a different person? This session will help you understand the definitions of role changes, role reversal, role overload, and role engulfment. You'll also find out why caregivers are susceptible to role related challenges and learn how to cope with role-related challenges.</i>	
Monday, May 11th	1:00 pm Eastern 12:00 pm Central 11:00 am Mountain 10:00 am Pacific	Dementia 101: Dementia Types, Stages, and Hope Through Research with Barbara L. Harty, RN, GNP <i>Identify different types of dementia. How do you know what stage dementia someone is in? How can the latest research help caregivers?</i> **Sponsored by the North Central Texas Caregiver Teleconnection**	
Thursday, May 14th	11:00 am Eastern 10:00 am Central 9:00 am Mountain 8:00 am Pacific	Dear Lucy with Lucy Barylak, MSW <i>This month she will discuss what caregivers can do for themselves during this difficult time. This is an interactive session where Dear Lucy will answer questions and have a conversation with caregivers regarding the issues they face in their caregiving journey.</i>	
Tuesday, May 19th	12:00 pm Eastern 11:00 am Central 10:00 am Mountain 9:00 am Pacific	What Does That Behavior Mean? with Tam Cummings, PhD <i>The lobes of the brain are each responsible for certain behaviors or reflexive actions. Knowing the normal function of each lobe and the behaviors or changes that occur as the disease progresses, allows caregivers to determine behaviors which indicate the disease versus behaviors which indicate infection, stroke, anxiety or depression.</i> **Sponsored by VITAS Healthcare**	
Thursday, May 28th	12:00 pm Eastern 11:00 am Central 10:00 am Mountain 9:00 am Pacific	Legal Issues for Caregivers with Carol Bertsch, Certified Elder Law Attorney <i>Carol Bertsch is a practicing elder law attorney, who is well known in her field as a fierce advocate for older adults and their family caregivers. Listen as Carol discusses those important legal issues and documents with which caregivers and seniors need to be familiar.</i>	



A program of the WellMed Charitable Foundation

Register online at www.caregiverteleconnection.org or call 866.390.6491 Toll Free

Support for Caregivers

Nearly everyone will be a caregiver at some point in their life, and nearly everyone will need a little help with providing that care. If you are a friend or family caregiver in Dane County, you or the person you are providing care for may be eligible for caregiver grants and supportive services. Many people are caregivers and do not realize it. Not sure if you are a caregiver? Consider reaching out to the Aging and Disability Resource Center to find out if you are and what supportive resources might be available to you and your loved one: **Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC)**, (608) 240-7400.

Necessary Self Care During COVID: Working Through Loss

By Doreen Dodgen-Magee, Psy.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

COVID-19 has both brought us loss, and at the same time, exposed our discomfort with grief.

Amidst the news-watching, hand-washing, and migrating of our lives to homes and screens, many of us haven't been consciously aware of either. As a result, we are walking around with unresolved grief that we fear (or dread) feeling.

In order to get through the months ahead, it's important to validate your feelings and work them through. Especially those related to feeling out of control, sad about lost lives and opportunities, and real, authentic grief. Regardless of how "big" or "small" your personal losses feel, they are *all* important to be worked through.

It's human to be sheepish about facing into our strong feelings and grief is one of the strongest of them all. In the West, where productivity and autonomy are held in high esteem, we are especially hesitant to take time to feel, let alone to work through our emotions.

Therefore, in our race to adapt to our new reality, many of us are reacting out of our unfelt big feelings and denying that there is grief knocking at our doors. Whether this is due to our lack of awareness, feelings of guilt regarding our own privilege in the face of the virus, or inexperience in naming and working through our feelings, this will prevent us from navigating the coming months well.

Grief must be acknowledged to be resolved. To move to the other side of the emotional fallout that comes with loss, we must own the reality of what we are facing and do what we can to feel our way through the sadness, anger, and other complex emotions that present themselves.

This is hard work, and some education can go a long way toward helping us accomplish this task. The first step is naming and understanding our grief and losses so that we can invite them and work them through.

The way in which losses occur impacts how we experience and process them. Losses that include trauma are coded deeply in the brain and often require skilled help to work through. Sudden losses, as well as those that are largely outside of our control, have especially difficult contours to be navigated.

This is not to say that the losses we choose or can see coming are easier to handle. They are simply different. In working through grief, it's helpful to recognize and empathize with the time we did, or did not, have to be prepared.

The types of loss that we experience are also varied and shape our grief in complex ways. When an incident incites several types of loss all at once, these tend to knot themselves together in our psyches, making them especially difficult to work with and harmful if we don't. In attempting to work through our grief, naming the types of loss we are experiencing can be helpful.

Here are some rough categories of loss.

Object Loss: Losing tangible things involves its own kind of grief. When a home is lost to foreclosure or fire, feelings of insecurity often result. Similar feelings are raised with loss by theft or accident of any number of objects to which we are attached.

The loss of money and financial stability also fits here. These losses are often very personal and are often minimized by others. Remember what it was like to lose a beloved toy as a child and you'll know what I mean.

During the time of COVID-19, object loss means:

- Loss of income and financial security
- The threat of losing one's home (for those who are losing jobs)
- Loss of physical vocational or educational spaces to work within
- Loss of ability to procure desired objects easily
- Loss of autonomy in our objective spaces (if we work from home and now have others in our space)

Relational Loss: These losses are the kinds we identify most traditionally with grief. The death of those we love fits here, as do losses related to separations and/or divorces in romantic relationships or friendships.

During the time of COVID-19, relational loss means:

- Emotional distance in relationships due to increased physical separation
- Fear of death (of self or others)
- The actual death of loved ones related to the virus



Role/Identity Loss: Losses that fit here are those related to ways in which we identify ourselves. Seeing ourselves as healthy, fit, or a part of a specific community are examples. Titles that help us clarify our role in our communities also fall into this category. By this, I mean helpers, leaders, on-the-ground-get-things-done-ers, and all the roles needed to keep life going.

Roles related to professional and family life are also relevant. Even the idea of being a free and independent person is core to our sense of identity. Losses in this realm are often deeply felt and frequently go unacknowledged.

During the time of COVID-19, role/identity loss means:

- Reduction of our scope of influence down to what can be achieved from home or technological means due to sheltering in place, thereby changing our sense of identity and some of our placeholder roles in the community
- Loss of independence and freedom in how one's time is spent
- A threat to ones' identity (for those who have not yet come to terms with their mortality, which the virus brings attention to)
- Loss of any feelings of security that were based on wealth or position

Physical Loss: When we experience a change to what our bodies can or cannot do, we experience a unique form of grief. When others respond to these changes with pity or infantilizing behaviors we often stuff or deny our sense of loss, scrambling to compensate and find confidence in the capabilities that remain. This actually hurts us deeply. We need to feel and work with our feelings of limitations in order to move to a place of strength.

During the time of COVID-19, physical loss means:

- A decrease in options for moving about physically in the world
- An increase in awareness of physical symptoms related to breathing
- The possible introduction of panic symptoms in response to ambient anxiety (loss of control of physical manifestations of emotions)
- A real fear of death

Deeply Personal (and Often Invisible) Loss: This category includes everything from the loss of security to the loss of control. It also includes the loss of dreams and wishes. Losses relating to events we've been planning, or experiences we've been looking forward to, fall into this domain as well.

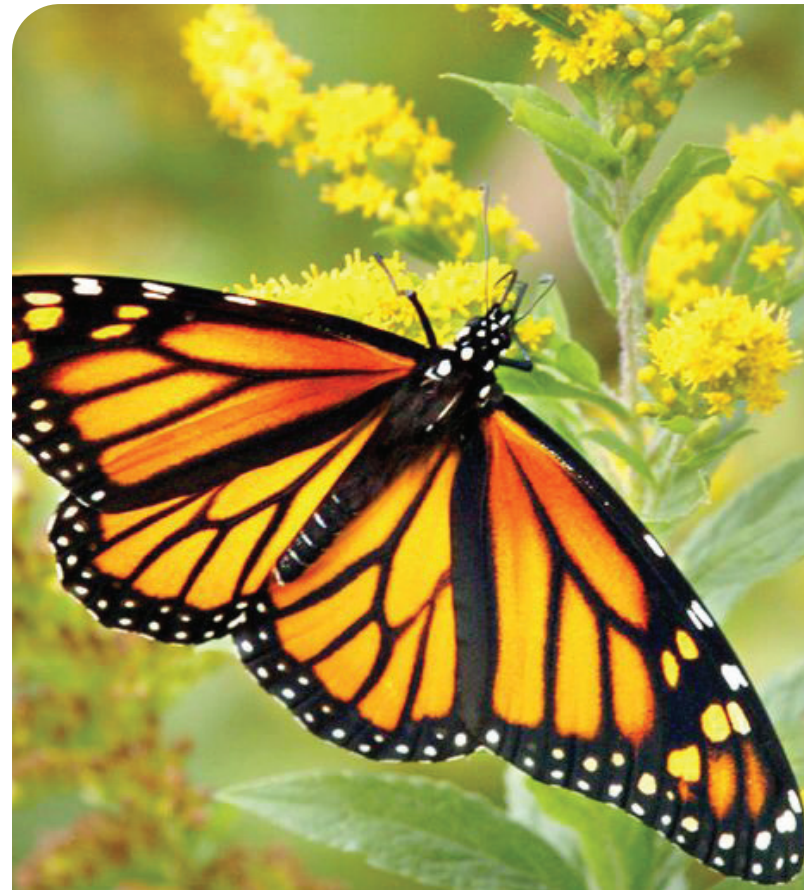
During the time of COVID-19, personal loss means:

- A major disruption of personal plans and experiences
- Actual losses of plans and experiences that can't be rescheduled (e.g: final semesters of senior years, baby deliveries without partners, etc.)
- A major shift in autonomy and personal agency in moving about in the world
- Loss of the idea that we are invincible
- Loss of the (false but commonly held) belief that we can control our lives and surroundings

And so... to weather the physical isolation, loss of human life, and loss of freedom in how we exist in the world that the next weeks will hold, it is imperative that we face our losses... no matter their size.

We must own and work through our grief. It is crucial that we name our big feelings and do what we can to work them through.

Once we've done so, it's compassionate of us to help inspire those around us to do the same. Together, we can weather this storm...the one on the inside of ourselves and the one facing the world.



10 Traits of Emotionally Resilient People

By Brad Waters, MSW, *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

Ten years ago this month, Hara Estroff Marano, Editor-at-Large for *Psychology Today*, wrote in her article "The Art of Resilience":

"At the heart of resilience is a belief in oneself—yet also a belief in something larger than oneself.

Resilient people do not let adversity define them. They find resilience by moving towards a goal beyond themselves, transcending pain and grief by perceiving bad times as a temporary state of affairs... It's possible to strengthen your inner self and your belief in yourself, to define yourself as capable and competent. It's possible to fortify your psyche. It's possible to develop a sense of mastery."

So how do we fortify our psyche to ride the waves of adversity rather than being pulled under by the torrent? How is it that some people handle incredible amounts of stress while others quickly fall apart?

Those who master resilience tend to be skilled in preparing for emotional emergencies and adept at accepting what comes at them with flexibility rather than rigidity—times are tough but I know they will get better. The old metaphor applies: Resilient people are like bamboo in a hurricane—they bend rather than break. Or, even if they feel like they're broken for a time, there's still a part of them deep inside that knows they won't be broken forever. Here's how they do it.

10 Traits of Emotionally Resilient People:

- 1. They know their boundaries.** Resilient people understand that there is a separation between who they are at their core and the cause of their temporary suffering. The stress/trauma might play a part in their story, but it does not overtake their permanent identity.
- 2. They keep good company.** Resilient people tend to seek out and surround themselves with other resilient people, whether just for fun, or when there's a need for support. Supportive people give us the space to grieve and work through our emotions. They know how to listen and when to offer just enough encouragement without trying to solve all of our problems with their advice. Good supporters know how to just be with adversity—calming us rather than frustrating us.
- 3. They cultivate self-awareness.** Being "blissfully unaware" can get us through a bad day, but it's not a very wise long-term strategy. Self-awareness helps us get in touch with our psychological/physiological needs—knowing what we need, what we don't need, and when it's time to reach out for some extra help. The self-aware are good at listening to the subtle cues their body and their mood are sending.

On the other hand, a prideful stubbornness without emotional flexibility or self-awareness can make us emotional glaciers: Always trying to be strong in order to stay afloat, yet prone to massive stress fractures when we experience an unexpected change in our environment.
- 4. They practice acceptance.** Pain is painful, stress is stressful, and healing takes time. When we're in it, we want the pain to go away. When we're outside it, we want to take away the pain of those who we see suffering. Yet resilient people understand that stress/pain is a part of living that ebbs and flows. As hard as it is in the moment, it's better to come to terms with the truth of the pain than to ignore it, repress it, or deny it. Acceptance is not about giving up and letting the stress take over, it's about leaning in to experience the full range of emotions and trusting that we will bounce back.



5. **They're willing to sit in silence.** We are masters of distraction: T.V., overeating, abusing drugs, risky behavior, gossip, etc. We all react differently to stress and trauma. Some of us shut down and some of us ramp up. Somewhere in the middle there is mindfulness—being in the presence of the moment without judgment or avoidance. It takes practice, but it's one of the purest and most ancient forms of healing and resilience-building.
6. **They don't have to have all the answers.** The psyche has its own built-in protective mechanisms that help us regulate stress. When we try hard to find the answers to difficult questions in the face of traumatic events, that trying too hard can block the answers from arising naturally in their own due time. We can find strength in knowing that it's okay to not have it all figured out right now and trusting that we will gradually find peace and knowing when our mind-body-soul is ready.
7. **They have a menu of self-care habits.** They have a mental list (perhaps even a physical list) of good habits that support them when they need it most. We can all become self-care spotters in our life—noticing those things that recharge our batteries and **fill our cup**.
8. **They enlist their team.** The most resilient among us know how to reach out for help. They know who will serve as a listening ear and, let's be honest, who won't! Our team of supporters helps us reflect back what they see when we're too immersed in overwhelm to witness our own coping.

We can all learn how to be better supporters on other people's team. In the Los Angeles Times article, "How Not to Say the Wrong Thing," psychologist Susan Silk and co-author Barry Goldman help readers develop a strategy for effectively supporting others and proactively seeking the support we need for ourselves. Remember, it's okay to communicate to our supporters what is and isn't helpful feedback/support for our needs.
9. **They consider the possibilities.** We can train ourselves to ask which parts of our current story are permanent and which can possibly change. Can this situation be looked at in a different way that I haven't been considering? This helps us maintain a realistic understanding that the present situation is being colored by our current interpretation. Our interpretations of our stories will always change as we grow and mature. Knowing that today's interpretation can and will change, gives us the faith and hope that things can feel better tomorrow.
10. **They get out of their head.** When we're in the midst of stress and overwhelm, our thoughts can swirl with dizzying speed and disconnectedness. We can find reprieve by getting the thoughts out of our head and onto our paper.

As Dr. James Pennebaker wrote in his book, *Writing to Heal*, "People who engage in expressive writing report feeling happier and less negative than before writing. Similarly, reports of depressive symptoms, rumination, and general anxiety tend to drop in the weeks and months after writing about emotional upheavals."

Writing is one resilience strategy we can literally keep in our back pocket. But there are other ways to get out of our head. Looking back at #5, it's actually okay to distract ourselves sometimes. That is, it's okay when the distraction serves to get us out of rumination mode and bring us back to the present moment. Healthy distractions include going to the gym or going for a walk, cooking & baking, volunteering, or any of the self-care items on your self-care menu from #7.



The Resilient Experience of Leaders

Resilience is a person's ability to bounce back, adapt, and thrive in the face of adversity and change. Traits of many resilient people include the ability to acknowledge that which is challenging, experience gratitude alongside those challenges, and have healthy and effective ways to manage stress. Resilience is also built through connection with one another.

We have asked leaders in the City to share their own personal experiences thus far during COVID-19 by asking the following questions:

- What are you grateful for?
- What has been a challenge for you?
- How have you managed stress during this time?

We want to promote connection and help build this resilient perspective in all employees. As a result of these contributions, we were able to find our own commonalities in how we are responding to this pandemic, as well as build connection through both shared and new perspectives on self-care. In one instance a city leader references playing board games with family as a way to manage stress, and we were able to discuss an online collection of board games one EAP member plays with their family from a safe distance (Board Game Arena). Another leader brought up the uncertainty of child care programs in the near future, a concern we share. We also shared our gratitude of being able to be more near our children while working from home.

As you proceed forward in your work teams and your circles of family and friends, we encourage you to share your experiences, the good and grateful, the challenges, and how you get through tough times. It can be easy to focus only on life's struggles, but it is a significant and resilient trait to be able to take that hardship, acknowledge it, but also frame it in a way that you are able to create new experiences and grow. Don't be afraid to use these specific questions in your staff check-ins and begin resilient conversations!!

Tracy Burrus, Asst. Fire Chief, Fire Dept.

What are you grateful for?

I am grateful for the leadership at the municipal and state level with regard to the COVID-19 response. It would be extra stressful for me if I were working in a City and State that did not follow the recommendations from Health Officials and Scientists with regard to "safer at home". I am grateful and proud of the way my Department Leadership responded to information received from the Mayor's Office and Public Health. I am grateful I have neighbors and friends who are following the "safer at home" guidance.

What has been a challenge for you?

It has been challenging with kids out of school but I wouldn't have it any other way; we can adapt. The positive aspect is that I am way more in touch with what they are learning. It is challenging to plan for the unknowns ahead.

How have you managed stress during this time?

I make sure I am getting enough rest/sleep. We cleaned out the garage and made a make-shift "home gym"; I have started doing "YouTube" yoga. We walk daily and sometimes twice or more on weekends. We visit on the terrace with neighbors. I am honest with my wife about "where I am today" with my feelings on this situation.

Denise DeSerio, Administrative Assistant, Fire Dept.

What are you grateful for?

First off, I'm grateful to still have a job, when I know a lot of people are struggling and/or have lost their jobs and businesses. I'm grateful to work for a City that took immediate steps to make sure their employees were protected during this outbreak, not only in terms of physical protections like PPE, but with emergency leave, sick leave, childcare, etc. And I am VERY grateful for the employees whom I supervise, who have really risen to the challenge to be especially resourceful, flexible, cooperative, and helpful to make sure the administrative tasks of the Fire Department are still getting done.

What has been a challenge for you?

Digesting all the conflicting information that's out there; the sadness that something like a virus can divide people even further. I live alone, so I'm used to being alone with my thoughts for days at a time, but there have been many more stressful and worrisome thoughts floating around in my head than I'm used to.

How have you managed stress during this time?

Using the breathing app on my phone, reducing the time spent on Facebook, reading a good book that requires my full attention; a nice escape. Connecting with friends via Zoom or Skype.

Michelle Drea, City Assessor, Assessor's Office

What are you grateful for?

I am grateful for a healthy family and team. If I focus on that, all of the inconveniences encountered become more bearable.

What has been a challenge for you?

Navigating the unknown is a challenge. I am fond of being prepared and it is difficult to prepare for the unknown.

How have you managed stress during this time?

I run, work out, and like to dabble in a little light "murder" by reading mystery and spy thrillers or watching that genre of show or film. Also, watching stand-up comedy or funny podcasts is really helpful.

Megan Lukens, Assessment Business Systems Manager, Assessor's Office

What are you grateful for?

A manager (Michelle) that puts people first and a team that has come together successfully; I am also thankful that my family is healthy and able to continue working.

What has been a challenge for you?

Not being able to get together with friends/family; planning ahead and having to think through so many scenarios for every possible outcome; and knowing that the only certainty is that things will change again.

How have you managed stress during this time?

I was walking and playing outside with my daughter until I injured my knee; I read a lot and now we are finding new Netflix series to watch together (spy and sci fi shows/books); we play cards and lots of board games as a family; we treat ourselves by ordering take-out from local restaurants every once in a while.

Yolanda Shelton-Morris, Community Resources Manager, Community Development Division

What are you grateful for?

I am grateful to manage and lead a team that even in the midst of this pandemic, is wholeheartedly dedicated to serving, impacting and empowering our communities in the City of Madison by ensuring they have access to the services, resources and support they need during this time.

What has been a challenge for you?

A challenge for me has been not being able to physically support my staff, family and loved ones during times of sadness and death. But I've tried to work thru that by being more intentional—regularly checking in on folks, sending cards, etc.

How have you managed stress during this time?

A huge stress reliever for me has been organizing and decluttering spaces within my home. Aside from my work with the City, I am a professional organizer, and find it calming to bring organization and order to a space that looks like a jumbled mess by pulling everything out, going thru it all, determining what stays and what goes, and then putting things back in an organized manner.

Coral Manning, Early Care and Education Manager, DPCED

What are you grateful for?

More time with my children, playing outside.

What has been a challenge for you?

The uncertainty of what next month or even next week will look like for child care programs in our City and not knowing exactly how to help them get back to business.

How have you managed stress during this time?

I started a gratefulness journal and I've been running more to relieve stress.

Mahanth Joishy, Superintendent, Fleet Service

What are you grateful for?

My own health and the health of those in my division, family, and friends.

What has been a challenge for you?

Making sure staff are using PPE and following social distancing measures, staying safe at work and at home.

How have you managed stress during this time?

Taken some time off, reconnected with old friends and family members, binge watch TV during time off.

Greg Mickells, Library Director, Madison Public Library**What are you grateful for?**

I am extremely grateful for the flexibility and creativity demonstrated by MPL staff since our libraries closed to the public. They have found new ways of contributing their talents, and have been diligently working on restoring services that are needed in our community, while still keeping themselves and our public safe.

What has been a challenge for you?

A major challenge for myself is missing the spontaneity and proximity of staff. I enjoy being interrupted in my office, or being able to share news, or ask a quick question. It is nice to see faces on Zoom, but it can't replace the same experience as you have in person.

How have you managed stress during this time?

My stress relief has been walking, and seeing my neighbors. (within proper social distancing) I have explored areas of my neighborhood where I have never traveled before, nearby parks, and especially the UW Arboretum. Plus I enjoy seeing the variety of Little Free Libraries, and the many sidewalk chalk drawings.

Scott West, Assessment Operations Manager, Assessor's Office**What are you grateful for?**

That all of my family is healthy given that my two sons both work in the grocery industry. I am also grateful for working for the City of Madison.

What has been a challenge for you?

Telecommuting and managing my staff. We were in the middle of our busiest time of year when this Pandemic occurred.

How have you managed stress during this time?

Going on long walks with my wife, playing with my dog, running, strength training.

Tresa Martinez, EAP Manager, Employee Assistance Program**What are you grateful for?**

I am grateful to have an employer who is providing transparency in communication and a genuine concern for our employees' wellbeing. I am also very lucky to have staff who are showing patience, support of each other and dedication to our work and our purpose. My kids, my dog and the people I love are healthy which provides me with a tremendous sense of peace.

What has been a challenge for you?

Feeling like I am doing enough to help my staff and our workforce through this trying time. Not having the answers and experiencing the same worries and fears makes it more difficult than normal.

How have you managed stress during this time?

Knowing that I have reliable staff and a solid relationship with my professional colleagues helps tremendously. Personally, I meditate at least twice per day, I have regular contact with my children and my wonderful friends, I laugh whenever possible and probably inappropriately at times, I watch the sunset, I walk my dog, exercise, practice yoga and I constantly remind myself how fortunate I am.

*Thanks for reading,
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the
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**External Available 24/7:
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