



# COVID-19 Crisis Mode: Building Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained the US health system, making large demands on health care workers who are on the front lines of the battle against the virus. Here are strategies, inspired by military training, that may help you thrive in these extreme conditions.



## Recognize the Crisis

You may be in a position where you have to make or implement difficult decisions and may witness scenarios that may be challenging to process. Pausing to acknowledge and identify some of the feelings getting stirred up by what you are seeing and hearing may help you process the intensity of the situation.

- » **Use an emotional vocabulary** beyond mad-sad-glad to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has created never-anticipated scenarios.
- » **Try to identify moments** of humanity, collaboration, or individual strength.
- » **Consider** if the language of moral injury and burnout describe what you are feeling.



## Share Your Voice

After a battle, soldiers often gather around a campfire to share their experiences. There is tremendous power in sharing the narrative to temper the intensity of direct exposures and potential vicarious traumas. Sharing in a safe forum with individuals you trust can help you process the day's events.

- » **Grab a few interested colleagues** for an end of shift "campfire."
- » **Set up a virtual space:** both video and group chatting can be useful.
- » **Share** the tough parts of your day.



## Connect with a Front-line Buddy

Having a front line buddy who is in the trenches with you and understands what you are going through, can offer deep, durable support.

- » **Find a front line buddy** from work or a friend who is also caring for patients and is interested in teaming up.
- » **Check in** on each other regularly, send texts to brighten each other's day, and be there when it is time to vent.



## Adopt a Mantra

"*Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome.*" This mantra is important as we face COVID-19. Times of scarcity make improvisation and adaptation necessary. Focusing on meaning during a crisis can make it possible to bear immense amounts of adversity with determination and optimism. Disrupt negative thoughts by focusing on your role during this difficult time.

- » **Pick a mantra** of your own, or borrow one of these: *improvise, adapt, and overcome; breathe in strength, exhale fear.*
- » **Keep your phrase in mind** and try to stay in the present.
- » **Ask yourself**, "What can I do here, right now? What can I control, and what is beyond my control?"

## Moral Injury & Burnout

**Moral injury** is an injury to core values and often occurs when people are unable to provide maximal care for individual patients due to limitations that are outside of their control. This can include witnessing or learning about these circumstances. Signs include guilt, shame, outrage, distrust, and isolation.

**Burnout** is a product of chronic workplace stress characterized by exhaustion, negativity, and reduced productivity. Other signs of burnout include hopelessness, cynicism, and mentally distancing oneself while at the workplace.

Everyone copes differently when faced with a crisis. Experiences and associated feelings vary by person. You may be experiencing moral injury or burnout. If your distress impacts your functioning and relationships, help from professionals trained to address acute stress-related and other issues can limit the intensity and duration.

**If you are feeling overwhelmed please speak to your manager and/or employee assistance program to find other resources at your health care system.**

Unit Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ EAP Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_