

# City of Milwaukee Employee Assistance Program

## Why Am I Feeling This Way?

Problem solving starts by clearly identifying the problem, giving it a name. We need to know what we are up against before laying out useful action steps. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many of us have been experiencing a mix of sadness, fear and frustration. Coping with these mixed feelings and emotions may be especially difficult without giving it a name. An article titled *That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief* by Scott Bernato can help understand this mix of feelings as grief.

The article explained that grief during a mass incident like Covid-19 is different in that it is 1) collective and 2) anticipatory. This collective grief is macro in nature and similar to what we as a nation experienced after Hurricane Katrina and 9/11.

Communities are grieving collectively. Most if not all of the nation is feeling grief (macro). Together we grieve our sense of normalcy, how things were, routine, and a sense of what we knew to be true and consistent. Understanding and working through the stages of grief is helpful:

- **Shock & Denial.** In this stage there is initially confusion followed by not accepting the reality of the incident or the severity.
- **Anger.** Statements like "It's not

*fair!*", "How can this happen?" and "Who is to blame?" are common in this stage as anger is directed outward.

- **Depression.** Individuals in this phase exhibit despair and loss of motivation/drive.
- **Testing.** This stage involves trying out new behaviors and experiences.
- **Acceptance.** In this step, individuals embrace the "new normal", which typically comes with a calm and stable emotions.

Our grief is anticipatory because we are still in it and much is unknown. This presents as anxiety. We worry about the future and all its *what if* questions. We imagine the worst happening to ourselves and the ones we care about.

The helpful strategy here is to stay present with solutions. Focus instead on what one can control (i.e. following CDC guidelines), staying connected to loved ones (e.g. virtual chats), and staying solution-focused. Asking oneself, "Ok, *what can I do about the current problem right now that can help right now?...If I can't go to the gym, what is the next best thing I can do safely exercise?*"

Employee Assistance Program



City of Milwaukee EAP

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## Managing a Work Team/Department During Covid-19

Supervising and managing a work team during the Covid-19 pandemic is challenging. The following tips may be helpful.

### 1. Constant and consistent communication.

Acknowledge stressors in team meetings and in department communication. This helps normalize experiences and increases the likelihood of someone reaching out for help if needed.

### 2. Regularly check-in with employees individually (listen non-judgmentally).

This applies to employees at work physically but also employees that may be working from home.

### 3. Make information about supportive resources readily available.

This may include information, updates, programs and services from Workforce Health, UnitedHealthCare, Voya and EAP.

### 4. Clearly layout changes to protocol and procedure aimed to mitigate Covid-19 exposure risk.

Spend five minutes at each shift reviewing procedures and providing information about possible changes.

### 5. Seek buy-in from employees.

Encourage em-

ployees to do their part to limit Covid-19 exposure (following Covid-19 protocols at work, wearing PPE, and adhering to CDC recommendations as much as practical).

Provide quality training in the use of in necessary. Allow for and provide a forum for employees to voice their concerns, ideas and solutions. This is critical in managing anxiety as it increases a sense of control.

### 6. Encourage healthy coping.

Frequently remind employees of the importance of daily positive self-care. This can include encouraging employees to take periodic breaks at work, healthy eating and exercise.

### 7. Encourage appropriate professional help.

The compounding mental and physical stress during a time of crisis can impact anyone. However, individuals with pre-existing mental health conditions or alcohol/substance challenges may be at increased risk for recurrent episodes and relapse.

Encourage employees to utilize behavioral health professionals, licensed therapists and substance abuse counselors.

## Coping With Anxiety During Covid-19

Anxiety stems from fear of what we don't know or feel we have little control over. Focus on what you can control instead of being overly preoccupied with what others not doing, focus on what you can do for you and your family's health. Follow current CDC (Center for Disease Control) recommendations for hand washing and social distancing. Move from worry to problem-solving. Focusing on things we can control gives us a sense of mastery and control.

**Exercise.** 15-20 minutes of daily aerobic exercise improves our mood by releasing anti-stress hormones, like oxytocin. Regular exercise also helps maintain a healthy immune system.

**Limit the flow of alarming media.** I am not suggesting you disconnect from the news entirely. However, make time to unplug from the constant

barrage of anxiety provoking news blasts. You may wish to choose one reputable source for updates and turn off news alerts from others.

**Quiet your mind.** Find simple ways to give an overthinking mind a rest. Pay attention to the rhythm in your breathing. Practice slower, deeper breaths. Listening to peaceful music calms the part of our brain called the amygdala, which is the area of our brain that responds to fear.

**Meaningful engagement.** Keep connected with important people in your life via phone, video chat, and text. Lean on people that care about and share good things with others.

# Misuse of Alcohol and Drugs During a Pandemic

In New Orleans, hospitalizations for substance misuse increased 2.5% in the years following Hurricane Katrina. Following 9/11 alcohol consumption went up 24.6%, smoking went up 18%, and marijuana use went up 3% among New Yorkers.

## Why the increase?

People may misuse alcohol and drugs to self-soothe; to feel less anxious, afraid, stressed and agitated. Alcohol and drugs are often used as stress management

People with pre-existing mental health disorders (PTSD, history of Trauma, Depression and Anxiety) are at a higher risk for substance misuse during a crisis.

One study assessed survivors for substance abuse after the Oklahoma City bombing. Researchers found that 6% of people without a mental health disorder used substances to cope. However, a staggering 13% – 40% of people with a mental health disorder abused substances as a coping mechanism.

During and after a crisis, people with pre-existing mental health disorders feel worse and may cope with alcohol/drugs.

## Other contributing factors?

Isolation/lack of available supports due to *Stay at Home* order limits access to counselors, clinics and self-help groups.

## What should I do?

- Pay attention to your alcohol/substance use. Note changes and increases.
- Boost your immune system by eating well, exercise and get restful sleep.
- Consult with your health care provider about safe ways to cope with anxiety, depression and sleep difficulties.
- Stay connected to support systems and care providers. This can be done virtually and telephonically.

## EAP Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to assist employees who develop behavioral/emotional problems that may directly affect their work performance, and to provide Key Personnel with policy and procedural guidelines for the management of these problems.

## City of Milwaukee Wellness Resources

- **Not feeling well?** Visit the [Workplace Clinic](#) (Zeidler Municipal Building) 841 N. Broadway, Milwaukee, WI 53202 for **FREE** onsite health care services. Call [414-777-3413](tel:414-777-3413) or go to [www.milwaukee.gov/der/wywm](http://www.milwaukee.gov/der/wywm) for further information.
- For additional current Wellness resources visit: [www.milwaukee.gov/der](http://www.milwaukee.gov/der) and click on the *Wellness* tab.
- **UnitedHealthCare App** is a UnitedHealthcare (UHC) mobile app that provides instant access to your family's critical health information, anytime/anywhere. Find a physician, check the status of a claim or speak directly with a healthcare professional. Search for UnitedHealthCare in your app store.

## Healthy Coping

Below are types of healthy coping strategies:

**Opposite Action.** Do something the opposite of the negative feeling you are having. If sad, watch a funny movie or read something cheerful.

**Distraction.** Take your mind off what is bothering you by sustaining attention somewhere else. For example, doing a puzzle or working on a home project and engaging in crafts.

**Emotional Awareness.** Express emotions in a journal, letter, music, or in art.