



Peer, Friend, and Self Support in the COVID-19 Crisis:

How to Provide Support for Ourselves and Others Through Times of Fear & Isolation



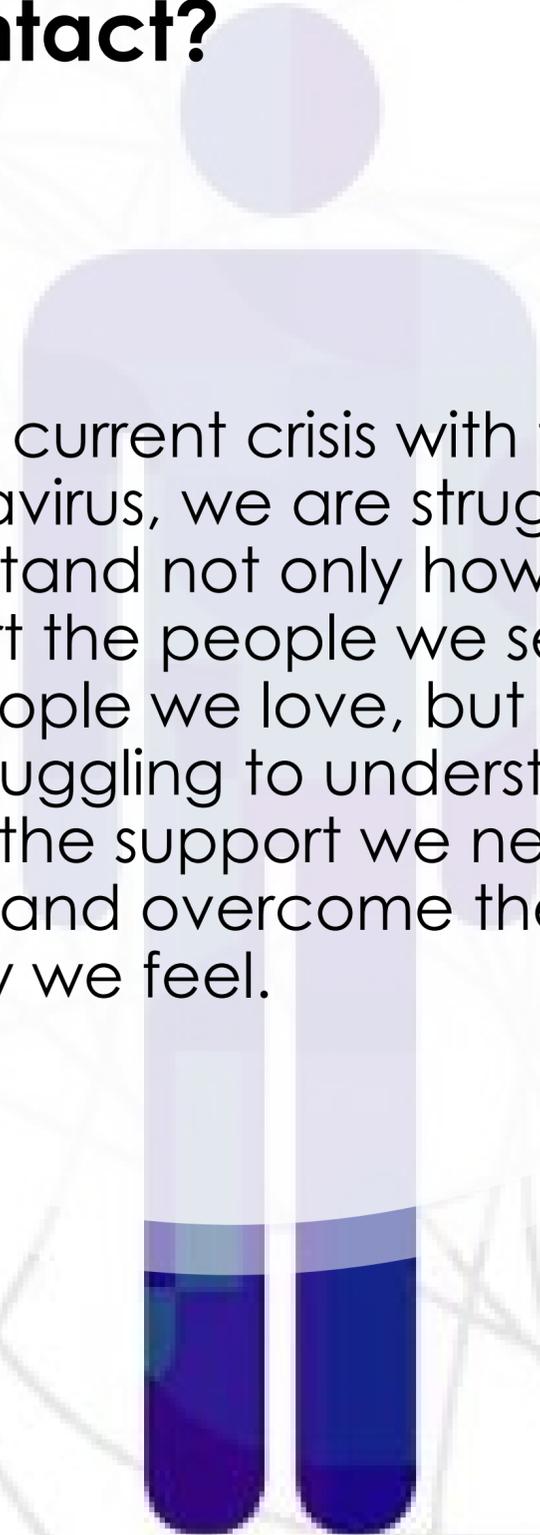
Patrick Hendry
V.P. Peer Advocacy,
Supports & Services



MHA
Mental Health America
B4Stage4

How do we provide support in a world with no contact?

- In our current crisis with the coronavirus, we are struggling to understand not only how we can support the people we serve and the people we love, but we are also struggling to understand how to get the support we need to stay strong and overcome the fear and anxiety we feel.



Fear, Anxiety and the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

“The outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) may be stressful for people. Fear and anxiety about a disease can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions in adults and children. Coping with stress will make you, the people you care about, and your community stronger.”

(CDC, 2019)

Everyone Reacts Differently to Stressful Situations

How people react to the COVID-19 crisis can depend on the things that make them different from other people

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at a higher risk
- People with mental health conditions including SUDs
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response
 - Doctors and other medical providers
 - First responders
 - People in support roles

(CDC, 2019)

Stress Reactions During an Infectious Disease Outbreak

- Fear and anxiety during a disease outbreak can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions.
- Symptoms can include:
 - Fear and worry about your own health
 - Fear and worry about your loved ones
 - Fear and worry about the people you provide support to
 - Changes in sleep or eating patterns
 - Difficulty in concentrating
 - Worsening of chronic health problems
 - Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs
 - Anger or short temper (CDC, 2019)



Remember That it is Important to Take Care of Yourself if You are Going to Help Others

- It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief and worry during the current crisis.
- We are faced with a situation that is dangerous and unfamiliar.
- What can we do for ourselves to cope with these intense emotions:
 - Take care of our bodies
 - Connect with others
 - Maintain a strong support system and healthy relationships
 - Take breaks, do things you enjoy
 - Stay informed but avoid exposure to too much news
 - Seek help for yourself when you need it.
- Do these things for yourself and assist others in self-care and support.

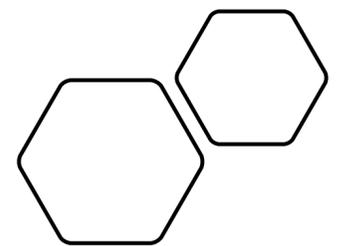
When Supporting Others Understand and Identify Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress

- People providing support to others during a crisis can experience:
 - Burnout- Be aware of its' signs:
 - Sadness, apathy, or depression
 - Easily frustrated
 - Irritability
 - Lack of feelings
 - Isolation or disconnection
 - Poor self-care (hygiene)
 - Tired, exhausted or overwhelmed
 - Feeling like a failure or that nothing you can do will help



When Supporting Others Understand and Identify Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Secondary Traumatic Stress – Be aware of its' signs:
 - Excessively worrying, or fearfulness about something bad happening
 - Easily startled or “on high alert” all of the time
 - Physical signs (racing heart)
 - Nightmares or recurrent thoughts about traumatic situation
 - The feeling that others' stress is your own.



Peer Support During the Crisis

During this time of quarantine, social distancing, and isolation many of the people we serve with peer support are struggling.

- Many are feeling extremely lonely, confused, and afraid.
- How do we provide support?
 - Use the telephone, email, text messages and social media
 - Provide them with accurate information to overcome rumors
 - Talk using Face Time or Skype
 - If you are allowed to, go to the individuals' residence and visit through a window.
 - Hold up signs or banners
 - Talk if possible
 - Be hopeful and cheerful if appropriate

Peer Support During the Crisis

- How do we provide support?
 - Provide them with warmline, crisis & suicide hotlines, and other important information
 - Make sure they stay in touch with family and friends
 - If necessary, arrange to have groceries and supplies delivered to them. Some local stores and/or organizations provide deliveries.
 - Make sure they have important contact information
 - If possible, arrange for telehealth contact with their clinical providers.
 - Provide them with information for calming and relaxation techniques.
 - You can use Skype or other apps to have group sessions

Peer Support During the Crisis

- How do we provide support?
 - Make sure they are monitoring their health for signs of infection
 - Provide accurate information
 - Provide contact information for their physical health
 - For individuals with substance use disorders make sure they are in touch with providers, sponsors, and online or telephonic groups.
 - Remind the people you serve to arrange for bills to be paid on time.
 - If possible, arrange for families and friends to celebrate important events such as birthdays and holidays, by telephone or online.
- Allow yourself to feel good about what you do and enjoy the relationships you have helped to create.

Peer Support During the Crisis

We are facing a unique time in history. For the first time in modern history the population of the world is enforcing isolation, quarantine, and social distancing. Man is a social creature, we are hardwired to have social contact.

Loneliness reached record level in developed countries prior to the current crisis and has only recently begun to be addressed.

Peer Support in behavioral health has grown exponentially in recent years and is now quickly adapting to our new circumstances.

Effective support for peers, friends, families, and ourselves requires creativity and new thinking. What we do now will change the future for millions of people.

Supporting Friends & Families

- Providing support to our friends and families is a two-way street, as is peer support.
 - When we help others, we receive help in return.
 - The Helper Principle
 - Reach out to friends and family members.
 - Some people are reluctant to express their desire for contact
 - Follow some simple guidelines from Mental Health First Aid
 - Treat them with respect and dignity, listen and respect their confidentiality
 - Offer consistent emotional support and understanding
 - In difficult times we all need empathy, love, and understanding

Supporting Friends & Families

- Reaching out to friends and family members.
 - Have realistic expectations. Accept the person as they are.
 - In times of stress many of us have a tough time performing everyday chores.
 - Give the person Hope.
 - Remind them that they are not alone and that we will all feel stronger with the support of each other.
 - Provide practical help.
 - Provide them with information they need to cope while living with the necessary isolation of the crisis.

Supporting Friends & Families

- Reaching out to friends and family members.
 - Remember it is a reciprocal relationship
 - Take comfort from your family and friends
 - They care about you and can help you to cope with the crisis and de-stress.
 - Talk about things other than the crisis
 - Figure out ways to socialize if you can't physically be with them
 - Remember to practice safety,
 - Washing hands
 - Social distancing
 - Negating rumors

Supporting Friends & Families

- Remember to allow yourself emotional time away from the crisis
 - Be creative, have fun
- If family or friends are struggling provide them with the information and tools you have available
 - Listening and talking can be magical
 - Relate to them as what they are, family and friends
 - Make sure they know that you care
 - Make yourself available when possible
 - Be aware of the potential for empathy burnout.



Things You Can Do to Support Children

It is a scary world out there right now and our children need our support.

- There are many things we can do to support our children
 - Take time to talk with them about the COVID-19 breakout. Answer questions and share facts in a way the child can understand.
 - Reassure them that they are safe. Let them know it is OK to be upset.
 - Share with them how you deal with your own stress.
 - Teach the simple calming techniques

Things You Can Do to Support Children

There are many things we can do to support our children

- Limit the family's exposure to news coverage including social media
- Try to keep regular routines. Create a schedule for learning activities and fun activities.
- Be a role model. Take breaks, get regular sleep and eat well.
- Help them to stay connected safely with their friends and other family members.

Risk and Reward in Support

Support in behavioral health and in the general population is essential, but so is safety. I have known many wonderful individuals working in peer support who have put themselves in dangerous situations in order to help and protect those of us who struggle to exist in an often confusing world, and in many cases their actions have been highly admirable.

This is different, if we do not stick strictly to the rules of social distancing, quarantining, and isolation we do not just risk our own safety. We risk the safety and suffering of society.

Continue to provide support but remember, with a little creativity and forethought we can preserve safety.

Patrick Hendry, 2020

Resources for Support and Supporters

Many organizations have mobilized their resources to provide up to date information about the coronavirus (COVID-19) and resources. A quick internet search can provide you with multiple choices. Here are just a few of the available sites.

- Mental Health America and COVID-19 – Information and Resources
<https://mhanational.org/covid19>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has published a wealth of information under their Coronavirus (COVID-19) on their website. This site contains detailed information on medical, social, and access to other sites.
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- NAMI has published an online COVID-19 Resource and Information Guide at:
<https://www.nami.org/getattachment/About-NAMI/NAMI-News/2020/NAMI-Updates-on-the-Coronavirus/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf>

Contact Us



-  Mental Health America
500 Montgomery Street
Suite 820
Alexandria, VA 22314
-  [Facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthamerica)
-  [Twitter.com/mentalhealtham](https://twitter.com/mentalhealtham)
-  [Youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica](https://www.youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica)
-  Patrick Hendry
phendry@mhanational.org



THANKS FOR COMING

Patrick Hendry



Mental Health America
B4Stage4