

Trauma informed kindness for health workers

We see you – we hear you – we believe in you

	Acknowledging trauma responses	Supporting resilience and kindness
Safety	The pandemic has threatened our physical safety. Healthcare workers are managing real fears around treating positive patients and receiving abusive threats from the public. The safety risk has increased for some workers, who may also be living under the threat of domestic and family violence in their home.	Reach out to colleagues to help alleviate their fears to restore a sense of safety. Ask about specific concerns around patient care and remind them of their skill and expertise. Suggest protective strategies such as avoiding public transport or not wearing a uniform when travelling to work. Safety plans can help protect colleagues who are unsafe at home.
Choice	Control over our lives has been rapidly restricted. Choices around work and socialising has been taken away. Healthcare workers are used to being flexible and many have been deployed to different roles and asked to upskill in a variety of ways. This can cause anxiety and frustration, leading to unexpected emotional reactions.	Support each other in taking on new work challenges and highlight our adaptability and ability to cope under pressure. Lead by example and regain control through positive action such as exercise, routine and healthy eating. Practice regular self-evaluation to prevent getting to a bad point. Inspire your colleagues to follow your lead.
Collaboration	Connecting with colleagues will need to be different for some time. A key protective measure is social distancing and isolation but this can lead to disconnection, depression and loneliness. Many healthcare workers have chosen to self-isolate from their families so they can continue to work. Those who are not used to technology may really struggle.	Reach out to colleagues who may be depressed and lonely, especially those who are self-isolating, living alone or who have limited social support. Express your own struggles about missing human contact. Connect through social media. If you know others are struggling with technology, help them. Send virtual hugs through texts and emails. Practice humour to promote laughter and connection.
Empowerment	Power over our lives has been restricted. Healthcare workers are dealing with traumatised patients who are psychologically impacted as their choices have been taken away. The pandemic may trigger traumatic childhood experiences of violence, abuse and neglect, adding another layer of powerlessness. Isolation may exacerbate feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Past survival strategies such as family gatherings, going to the club, movies and the gym are no longer possible.	Reminding ourselves and our colleagues that we do have the power and opportunity to take positive action. Take time to acknowledge our strengths and collaborate on finding alternate ways of regaining power back into our lives. Initiate new coping strategies to survive isolation and renew your energy, such as going for a walk at lunch time and practicing self-care. This can also help with exhaustion and prevent burn out.
Trust	Our trust in the world as we know it has been severely interrupted and for some this can be destabilising. Many may grieve the loss of being with family and friends. Healthcare workers are managing anticipatory grief awaiting a surge in patients becoming unwell and dying while also fearing the loss of their own elderly relatives.	Practice random acts of kindness with your colleagues to help restore trust in the world. Remember, everyone deserves emotional support. Name the impact of grief and loss and how it can impact on our faith in each other. Be brave and ask your colleagues how they are feeling. Remind them that they are strong and capable.
Culture	Our Aboriginal and CALD workers may undergo additional stressors. Their collective safety is threatened due to prohibition of family/community gatherings. Large family groups residing in the one household are practicing social distancing, which can contribute to additional stress. Increased police presence and concerns about health and food shortages may trigger traumatic memories of segregation, racism, living through civil war and authoritarian regimes.	Practice cultural care by reaching out to your Aboriginal and CALD colleagues. Ask about their health concerns. Try to think about what life may look like from their worldview. Stay curious about their experiences, avoid thinking you know how they think or feel. Always remember their incredible resilience and capacity to survive.