

WELLBEING FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

Essential frontline workers are those who must leave their homes and risk exposure to COVID-19 in order to help their fellow New Zealanders. The effort, courage and kindness of these workers has not gone unnoticed. Thank you for all your hard work in helping to keep us safe. It is normal to feel under a great deal of pressure at the moment. Here are some tips for essential workplaces and their staff to maintain wellbeing.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR STAFF:

As leadership and management, you are obliged to take reasonable steps to ensure your employee's safety. Physical safety needs and physical distancing of staff in the workplace should have been addressed. A communication strategy for staff should be in place – regular open communication is key. Check in with staff around their psychological wellbeing during this crisis, normalize their responses and acknowledge that it can be hard. Providing reassurance can help alleviate stress. Ultimately, the resilience, communication, and ability to adapt of the team will be imperative in responding well to the current workplace changes during this crisis.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF:

Essential workers face greater vulnerability to negative mental health effects, including the possibility of exhaustion, burnout and other challenges.

Stay connected

- Physical distancing doesn't have to mean complete isolation. Have regular online or over the phone catch ups with friends and whānau. Remember, sharing our feelings and offering support to others builds our support systems, helps us to destress, and can make us feel better.
- Some workers may experience greater isolation within their home from family and friends due to fear of unknowingly passing on the virus. If you experience this, turn to co-workers or others your trust for support. It's possible your co-workers have had similar experiences.

DISCUSS ANY WORRIES WHĀNAU (AND YOURSELF) MAY HAVE

Feeling anxious in response to COVID-19 is normal, especially when working on the frontline. Discuss any worries you may have. It might be helpful to discuss the plans your workplace has to keep you safe, and to come up with a plan as a family.

Focus on the positives

- Remember the importance of your work. In spite of the difficulties, you are providing a meaningful service and assisting those in need during a time of uncertainty. It can be overwhelming to have constant exposure to COVID-19 news, and be a frontline worker during the fight.

- Limit your off-duty exposure to news and remember that as a country, we are collectively doing the best we can to contain the virus.

Stay physically healthy

- Make sure you're staying hydrated and eating healthy - a nutritious diet will assist in better mood.
- Get enough sleep. Avoid electronic devices an hour before bedtime, use your bed only for sleeping, and try to get some natural sunlight in the day to regulate your internal body clock.
- Try to get in some exercise. This reduces stress and anxiety, increases energy, and leads to better sleep. Going for a walk or run outside gives us fresh air and a chance to be in nature. Find ways to move more that work for you, like regular stretching or following an exercise clip on YouTube.

Incorporate things that uplift you into your routine

- Self-care and taking advantage of moments that uplift us is another way of being kind to ourselves during a difficult time.
- This could mean going on walks, listening to music, taking tea or coffee breaks, stretching, reading a book, journaling, going on walks, doing yoga, baking, arts and crafts, taking a bath – the list goes on! You could try breathing exercises or guided meditations, there are many available online. Find what works best for you. Be kind to yourself, it's normal to feel concerned at a time like this.

PACE YOURSELF AND ASK FOR SUPPORT IF YOU NEED IT

If there are moments at work where you feel stressed, stop and take a moment to ground yourself. This can mean doing some deep breathing to centre yourself, or noticing your surroundings, or talking to someone. If you are feeling overwhelmed, it's okay to ask for support. This might mean asking people in your bubble to help out with household chores, discussing what you're going through with your manager, or calling a helpline. Our free 24/7 national anxiety helpline can offer support (0800 ANXIETY; 0800 269 4389).