

WHAT'S IN YOUR FIRST AID KIT

Resources and Tools to Help you Thrive and Survive

SELF-CARE GUIDE



CANCER SUPPORT
COMMUNITY
COMMUNITY IS STRONGER THAN CANCER



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INTRODUCTION

Taking care of yourself is important, especially during uncertain times. This toolkit is meant to be an interactive guide to self-awareness and self-care. Having an easy reference kit can help you understand and manage stress, develop healthy coping mechanisms, and invest in yourself. This guide can help you incorporate self-care activities into your routine until they become something you do without thinking.

It's important to remember this guide is not a one size fits all. You should take the ideas and activities in this book and make them your own. Some may work for you and some may not. This toolkit is a starting point to help you explore.

This toolkit was designed as part of the Cancer Support Community's **What's In Your First Aid Kit?: Resources and Tools to Help you Survive and Thrive** workshop series. If you are interested in learning more about the ideas explored in this toolkit, you can view recorded sessions of each topic, delivered by experts in the field.

Recorded sessions can be found on the CSC website at www.cancersupportcommunity.org/study.

About the Cancer Support Community

The CSC is a global non-profit network of 175 locations, including CSC and Gilda's Club centers, health-care partnerships, and satellite locations that deliver more than \$50 million in free support services to patients and families. In addition, CSC administers a toll-free helpline and produces award-winning educational resources that reach more than one million people each year. Formed in 2009 by the merger of The Wellness Community and Gilda's Club, CSC also conducts cutting-edge research on the emotional, psychological, and financial journey of cancer patients. In addition, CSC advocates at all levels of government for policies to help individuals whose lives have been disrupted by cancer. In January 2018, CSC welcomed Denver-based nonprofit MyLifeLine, a digital community that includes nearly 40,000 patients, caregivers, and their supporters that will enable CSC to scale its digital services in an innovative, groundbreaking way.



DEFINITIONS

Burnout

Burnout is a syndrome of workplace stress when perceived work demands outweigh perceived resources. Burnout can cause feelings of exhaustion, detachment, cynicism and reduced personal accomplishment.

Compassion Fatigue

Broadly, compassion fatigue is the stress resulting from exposure to a traumatized individual. It is a combination of secondary traumatization precipitated by the care delivery that brings formal and informal caregivers into contact with suffering. Compassion fatigue can manifest in many ways, such as: hopelessness and anxiety, feelings of incompetence, negative attitudes, and reduced compassion for others.

Self-compassion

Self-compassion broadly describes treating oneself with warmth and understanding in difficult times and recognizing that making mistakes is normal. Self-compassion protects against feelings of self-judgment, isolation, and rumination.

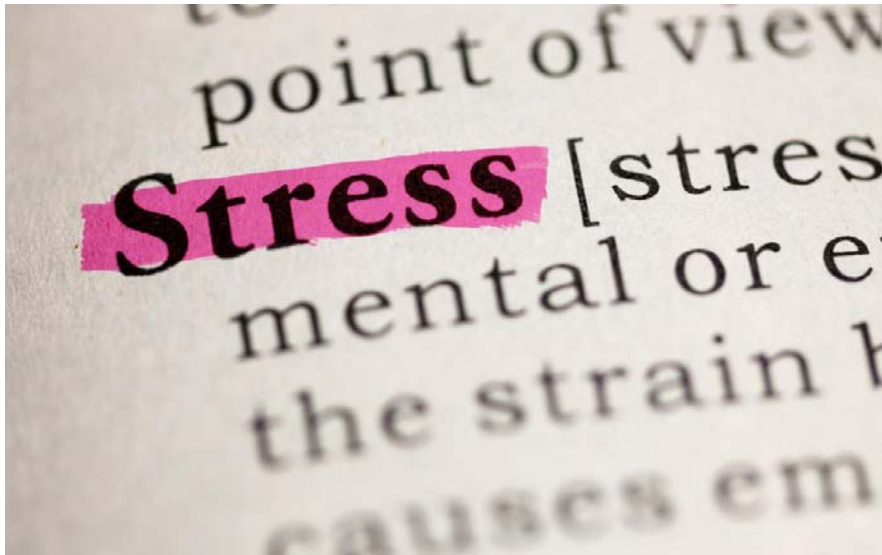
Moral Distress

Moral distress is distress in response to situations that constrain you from acting in accordance with your moral values. It may be that you know the moral thing to do, but constraints prevent you from pursuing this course of action. Conversely the 'right' course of action may be unclear.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Racial battle fatigue describes the psychological symptoms people of color may experience living in and navigating historically White spaces. It is the cumulative result of constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive, or hostile environments or individuals. Racial battle fatigue can cause mental, emotional, and physical distress such as high blood pressure, depression, isolation, and reduced feelings of self-worth.

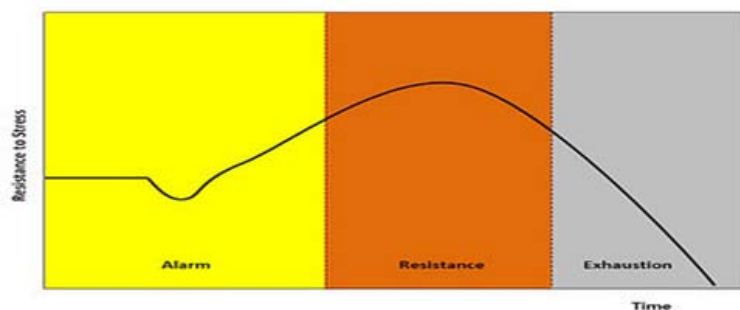
UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND TIPS FOR PROMOTING SELF - CARE



Stress is a natural and normal response that occurs when you appraise a situation as a threat that exceeds your perceived coping mechanisms. When you feel stressed, your muscles may tense, you might start breathing heavily, or feel your heart pounding.

Stress can be both positive and negative. It can boost productivity, but if prolonged, it can cause irritation or depression. When stressed, your body releases hormones producing a well-orchestrated physiological response. An outgrowth of the 'fight or flight' response, this response has evolved to keep the human species alive. However, your body does not differentiate between stressors: whether faced with a saber-toothed tiger or an impending deadline, you respond the same way.

Under chronic stress, like the COVID pandemic, your stress response is repeatedly activated. Your body adapts and becomes resistant to stress, maintaining a heightened response. Maintaining this stress level over time causes exhaustion and depletion. Chronic, negative stress causes mental and physical concerns like anxiety, fatigue, and depression.



UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND TIPS FOR PROMOTING SELF-CARE



In caring for patients with cancer, you have contended with additional stressors like an increased risk for COVID-19 infection and delays or omissions in routine screening and care. You have dealt with intense workloads, separation from family, and risk of personal harm.

Providing care to others during the COVID-19 pandemic can cause stress, anxiety, fear, and other strong emotions. How you cope with these emotions affects your well-being, the care you give to others at work, and the well-being of loved ones. During this pandemic, it is critical that you recognize what stress looks like, work to build your resilience and coping skills, and learn when and where to seek help.

The good news is, there are strategies to manage stress and trigger your relaxation response. The goal is not to eliminate stress but to manage it so that that it does not feel uncontrollable or overwhelming.

Quick Tips

- Practice acceptance and mindfulness techniques
- If the stress is controllable, try and identify actions you can take to resolve the situation (problem-focused coping).
- If the stress is uncontrollable try to figure out ways to manage your discomfort (emotion-focused coping).
- Plan activities based on how you feel that day (is it an A Day? A B Day? A C Day?)
- Remember that your thoughts aren't facts. Try reframing your thoughts to better understand: is this thought accurate? What would I say to someone else in this situation? Can I do this differently or break it up into manageable steps?
- Maximize your social support. Identify what supports you have and what supports you need more of.

UNDERSTANDING STRESS AND TIPS FOR PROMOTING SELF-CARE



Exercise

Hands and Arms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold arms at a 45 - degree angle and make fists.
Face and Neck	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Raise eyebrows, squint eyes, wrinkle nose, bite down lightly, pull back corners of mouth, and pull head slightly down to chin.
Chest, shoulders, back	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take a deep breath, hold it in, pull back the shoulders and pull out chest.
Thighs, calves, feet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lift your feet off of the floor, flex slightly, and turn toes inward.



View a recording of Session 1 here: tiny.cc/FirstAid1

PRACTICING SELF - COMPASSION



Self-compassion is about being kind and caring in your response to yourself. During times of stress, particularly extended stress like the pandemic, we can be self-critical. The good news is that you can learn self-compassion.

Self-compassion means caring for yourself the same way you would care for a friend. You don't ignore your pain; you offer care and comfort. You respond with understanding when confronted with your failings.

Self-compassion is not self-pity and does not mean that you get a free pass. Self-compassion increases clarity while self-pity brings isolation and loneliness.

It is important for caregivers like you to practice self-compassion so you can remain in the presence of suffering and care for others without being overwhelmed. It protects your own well-being. Try showing self-compassion the next time you make a mistake or feel challenged beyond your ability to cope.

“**Self-compassion is key because when we're able to be gentle with ourselves in the midst of shame, we're more likely to reach out, connect, and experience empathy.**”

- Brene Brown

Quick Tips

- Speak and think kindly about yourself
- Forgive your mistakes
- Take care of your mind and your body
- Realize it's not all about you
- Cultivate acceptance
- Place your feelings in context



PRACTICING SELF - COMPASSION



Self - Compassion Break

Think of a situation in your life that is difficult, that is causing you stress. Call the situation to mind, and see if you can actually feel the stress and emotional discomfort in your body.

Now, say to yourself:

1. This is a moment of suffering

That's mindfulness. Other options include:

- This hurts.
- Ouch.
- This is stress.

2. Suffering is a part of life

That's common humanity. Other options include:

- Other people feel this way.
- I'm not alone.
- We all struggle in our lives.

Now, put your hands over your heart, feel the warmth of your hands and the gentle touch of your hands on your chest. Or adopt the soothing touch you discovered felt right for you.

Say to yourself:

3. May I be kind to myself

You can also ask yourself, "What do I need to hear right now to express kindness to myself?" Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation, such as:

- May I give myself the compassion that I need
- May I learn to accept myself as I am
- May I forgive myself
- May I be strong.
- May I be patient

This practice can be used any time of day or night, and will help you remember to evoke the three aspects of self-compassion when you need it most

- developed by Dr. Kristin Neff

View a recording of Session 2 here: tiny.cc/FirstAid2

FINDING FORTITUDE



Resilience is the ability to adapt, ‘bounce back’ from, and overcome adversity, trauma, or tragedy. But what happens when you feel you can’t bounce back? Or when ‘being resilient’ becomes a burden?

Fortitude – bravery when dealing with pain or difficulty, especially over a long period of time –, may speak more to you at this moment. Dr. Jamie Aten, the Executive Director of the Humanitarian Disaster Institute and a cancer survivor, offers a more nuanced way to understand resilience in yourself and the people you help.

At the core of fortitude is the ability to cope with long-term suffering. Fortitude helps you to reconceptualize your experience with an emphasis on enduring. It can help you learn how to live during difficult times and understand that you can flourish even if a positive outcome is not guaranteed or may be delayed. While resilience can mean pushing through, fortitude encourages you to find life amid suffering and regain a sense of ownership.

Cultivating Fortitude

1. Find Life-Giving Rhythm

As an oncology professional during the pandemic, you may have taken on additional roles or had to adjust to ever-changing shifts and guidelines. These additional stressors make it hard to adapt to the rhythms you were once used to. You can develop new life-giving rhythms even if they look different than before. Ask yourself, where can you cultivate a moment of respite?

Because of COVID, you may need to develop new practices or adapt the old. Can you drink that brief cup of coffee in your car before your shift? Can you practice ten minutes of yoga when you used to have time for more? Find new rhythms in your life that fulfill you.

2. Practice Humility

Humility allows us to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses and encourages us to be other-oriented. It also helps us know when we need to cut back and understand our own limitations. Research has shown that higher levels of perceived humility correlate with lower levels of burnout.

Humility helps us accept what we can and cannot do. Rather than having the perfect work-life balance, think of it as a wave. It's okay to ride waves of busyness, but a constant state of busyness can be dangerous. Humility helps us know when the wave might be dangerous and when we need to get out of the water.

FINDING FORTITUDE



3. Positive Social Support

Taking the time to build a positive social support network is an investment in your well-being. Social support builds you up during times of stress and gives you strength to thrive and stay motivated. Remember that the goal of building social support is stress reduction. Watch for situations that drain your energy and avoid spending time with people who are constantly negative or involved in unhealthy behaviors.

Quick Tips to Nurture Relationships

Stay in touch. Try a quick text or a phone call just to say hi.

Practice gratitude. Take the time to say thank you and express how important those in your network are to you.

Give back. Be available to provide support when needed.

Be intentional. Carve out meaningful time to connect with your friends and family.

Accept Others. Have a realistic expectation of the others' strengths and weakness and remember that change occurs over time.

4. Meaning Making

As oncology professionals we often help others make meaning, but we forget to do so ourselves. Finding meaning can lead to better relationships, increased contentment, and feelings of accomplishment. The search for finding meaning can motivate people to immerse themselves in volunteering, activism, or spirituality. In the next section, you'll learn more about the importance of finding meaning in your life.

Exercise

Cultivating the mundane can be a way to find rest in our busy lives.

What is one way you can take a chore or task and turn it into an opportunity to decompress?

IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES & FINDING MEANING



Pillars to Finding Meaning



1 CONTROL YOUR PERCEPTIONS OF LIFE

The problem with constantly searching for happiness is that you often do not find it. Striving for meaning in life, however, has a different impact. It causes you to look beyond your current situation and at the bigger picture. This can help you ride life's ups and downs. Seeking meaning without focusing on your happiness in a certain situation provides a solution that is not tied to a specific moment. It is important to remember that life is not fair and to always treat yourself with self-compassion.

2 FIND THINGS BIGGER THAN YOURSELF

By focusing on things and experiences that are larger than just you, you can gain perspective and fixate less on yourself. Do things that inspire awe and help you find beauty in the world, such as connecting with nature, writing, stargazing, or enjoying works of art.

3 SURROUND YOURSELF WITH JOY

Fostering connection is an important way to find meaning. It is a way of assuring your sacred belongingness and showing you that we are not alone. You can find meaning in your life by cultivating good relationships and surrounding yourself with things that bring you joy, like a good book or a soft rug between your toes when you wake up.

4 FINDING YOUR WHY

Finding your why, or your purpose, comes from understanding and reflecting on your values. Your why is what pushes you forward—something you work towards or for, that gives you a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Finding your 'why' is a way to support yourself during uncertain times.

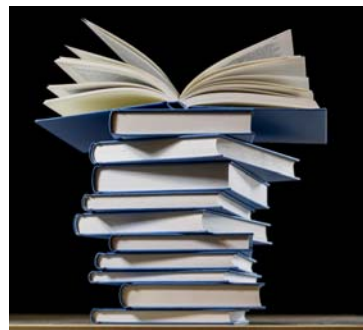
IDENTIFYING YOUR VALUES & FINDING MEANING



Exercise on Personal Values

1. Take a few moments to look through a list of values and pick 5-10 that resonate with you the most. If you have trouble, it can help to think 'what would my friends say if I discussed my values with them?,' 'What am I good at?,' 'What am I passionate about?'
2. Write a brief statement about each value and why it is important to you.
3. Put these values in order by priority. Compare each value to the others. For example, if your list includes family and productivity, think which you would choose if you could only pick one.
4. Once your values are prioritized, take a moment to reflect on each. Are your current behaviors aligned with these values? Why or why not?
5. If your behaviors are not aligned with these values, decide if they are still important to you. If they are, set attainable goals for how you can become more aligned with your personal values.

View a recording of Session 4 here: <http://tiny.cc/FirstAid4>



BUILDING TEAM RESILIENCE



Challenges like burnout and compassion fatigue impact you as an individual and how you work as a team. Traumatic injuries occur, especially in oncology care, and health care workers are rarely trained in how to manage their own grief in these situations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, oncology professionals have reported feeling disconnected from their co-workers, working longer hours with a more intense workload, and an increase in patient needs, all of which can impact teamwork.

It is important for you to understand the signs of burnout and compassion fatigue so you can work to prevent them. It is often easier to recognize signs in colleagues than in yourself. You can help your colleagues identify these signs in themselves so they can take action.

Burnout	Compassion Fatigue
Helping Professionals	Any job/career
Relational in nature	More connected to the environment
Can occur quickly	Tends to be cumulative
Connection to empathy in helping	Connection to demands of daily life
Exhaustion from witnessing suffering	Negative attitude towards work
Signs: exhaustion, depersonalization, low sense of professional accomplishment	Signs: hyperarousal, avoidance, re-experiencing trauma (like PTSD symptoms)

BUILDING TEAM RESILIENCE



Team Approaches for Growing Mighty

✓ DEVELOP A METHOD FOR TEAM CHECK-INS

This can be a professional group discussion/debrief after a tough case or a recreational forum, like a lunchtime walking group.

✓ FIND A WAY TO SHARE SELF-CARE RESOURCES

Consider something digital like a Google or Teams Drive or a good old-fashioned cork board.

✓ PROVIDE GOOD TRAINING TO YOUR TEAM

Training is key! Seek out and provide quality training to your staff on issues like burnout and how to prevent them.

✓ CELEBRATE WINS

It's important to remember to affirm your team members often and publicly. Affirmation can go a long way!

✓ SUPERVISION/ MENTORSHIP

Good leadership is essential for good teamwork. Supervision should be consistent and thoughtful. Consider joining or developing a mentorship program at your organization.

✓ ASSESS YOUR TEAM NEEDS

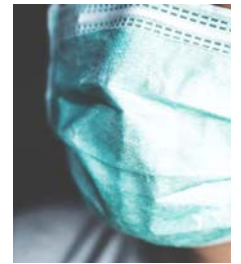
A team assessment such as a staff questionnaire or an evidence-based survey like the Pro-QOL or Single Item Maslach Burnout question is helpful to get a baseline. Consider doing this as a team and identifying strategies from there.

Exercise

Where is one place you can make a difference for your team?

Write down the steps to make this happen

COPING WITH MORAL DISTRESS



What is moral distress and how does it differ from regular old stress? Moral distress is stress in response to a situation that constrains you from acting in line with your moral values.

It is a mismatch between what moral actions should occur and the reality of the situation. It may be that the moral or 'right' course of action is unclear, or that you are noticing morally distressing actions occurring around you.

Moral distress can be caused by internal constraints, external constraints, and the clinical situation itself.

Internal Constraints

- Perceived lack of efficacy or role expertise.
- Incomplete understanding of situation, issue, or clinical context.

Clinical Situations

- Healthcare system gaps.
- Inequities in distribution/use of limited resources.
- Belief that treatment plan is not in the patient's best interest.

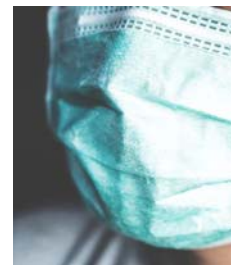
External Constraints

- Conflicts between policies, priorities, and patient care needs.
- Pressure to reduce healthcare costs or litigation risks.
- Gaps in collegial support or community culture.

The pandemic has produced sources of moral distress such as a lack of PPE, fear of contracting and spreading COVID, amplification of healthcare disparities, and feelings of isolation and disconnection from colleagues and patients. You might have delayed critical surgeries or chemo regimes for patients, used telehealth to deliver serious news, or observed or made decisions regarding prioritizing care.

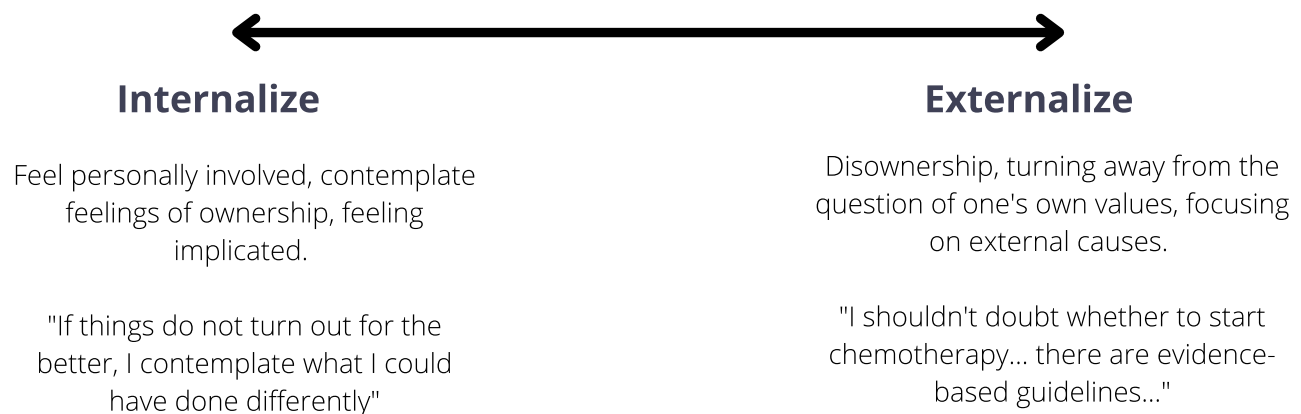
Moral distress involves many factors that are out of your control. Recognizing moral distress is critical to developing and implementing strategies to cope on a day to day basis.

COPING WITH MORAL DISTRESS

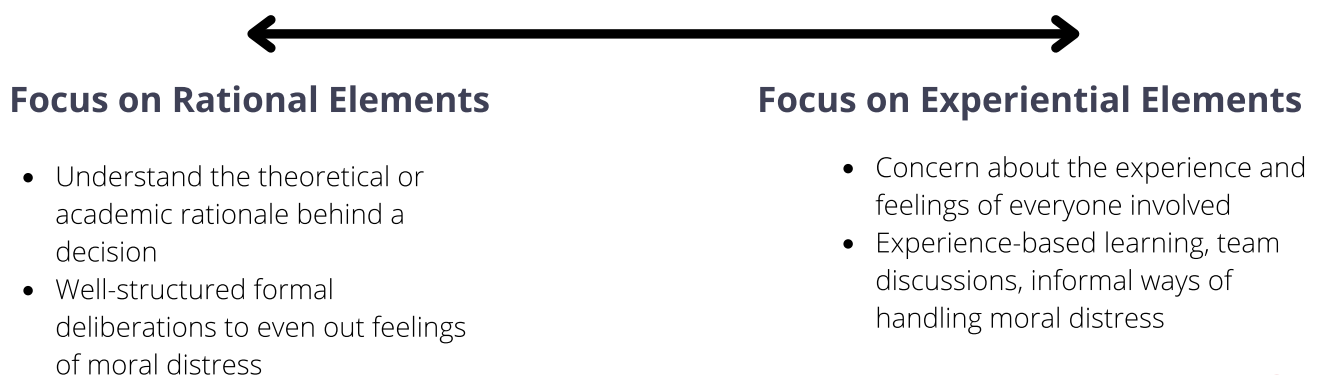


Whether you've realized it, you are coping with moral distress on a daily basis. Doing a self-assessment can be helpful to take stock of your current coping strategies.

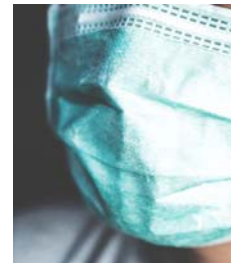
Coping with stress is different for each person. Take a look at the spectrum below. Do you tend to internalize or externalize stress?



Another way of self-assessing coping strategies is to determine what you focus on after a distressing experience. Where do you fall?



COPING WITH MORAL DISTRESS



Practical Strategies for Addressing Moral Distress

Moral distress is related to burnout and compassion fatigue and can impact the quality of care you deliver. There are many ways to tackle moral distress on an individual, team, and system level.

Individual/Team Strategies

1. Challenge thoughts. Use gentle, curious questions to understand thoughts and beliefs.
2. Reality test thoughts with colleagues
3. Normalize and validate intense emotions
4. Provide/ask for active listening from the 'right' people (e.g., a close colleague with knowledge of the situation or a trusted friend outside of the profession)

System Strategies

1. Provide educational resources, workshops, and training for your team
2. Promote discussions between staff on moral issues that we face
3. Create guidelines or criteria for positive practice environments
4. Recognize exemplary teams and individuals



Exercise

After considering where you fall on the spectrums from the previous page, think about your colleagues, staff, or supervisors. Where do they fall?

How might different approaches impact team dynamics and needs? Consider biases you hold toward people in other specialties.

Now consider the strengths and drawbacks of each approach.

RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE AND ALLYSHIP



Often the burden of addressing issues like burnout or moral distress is left to the individual to manage, even though it is a systems issue. Our colleagues of color are faced with a multitude of systemic barriers. These include outright racism, microaggressions and professional biases around dress and hairstyle.

Healthcare professionals of color experience higher levels of burnout and compassion fatigue than their white counterparts and are underrepresented in oncology practices. 13% of the U.S. population is Black or African American and 18% is Hispanic while only 2.3% of practicing oncologists self-identify as Black or African American and 5.8% self-identify as Hispanic.

The cumulative effect of racism in societal functions like housing, education, organizational culture, and professional standards, can lead to racial battle fatigue.

Racial battle fatigue describes the psychological symptoms people of color may experience living in and navigating historically White spaces. It is the cumulative result of constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive, or hostile racial environments and/or individuals. Racial battle fatigue can cause mental, emotional, and physical distress such as high blood pressure, depression, isolation, and reduced feelings of self-worth.

For Professionals of Color

“Remind yourself that the problem we are facing today is not your fault. It is the fault of oppressors who have built systems to maintain the status quo. In this, remind yourself that your anger, fear, sadness, etc. are justified emotions.”

RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE AND ALLYSHIP



Individual and Community Self-Care Tips

- Unplug or disconnect from people and places that make you feel fatigued
- Build and connect with community
- Care for your body
- Participate in relaxing activities
- Find safe spaces
- Ask for Help / Seek Support
- Engage in activism

How to be a White Ally

To be an ally, one must become educated about racial issues and support anti-racism efforts through action. You must listen more than you speak; ask, don't assume; and apologize when you get something wrong. Remember that it is not the job of colleagues of color to educate you on issues of racism. When it comes to talking about allyship, 'work' is the operative term. Anyone can be an ally!

Quick Tips on Allyship

- Be open to listening
- Educate yourself
- Examine your privilege and use it to amplify historically suppressed voices
- Make privilege visible. Interrupt racism and microaggressions.
- Be aware of your implicit biases
- Acknowledge the ways you have participated in oppressive systems
- Seek and collaborate with your colleagues of color
- Do the work!



Exercise

Commit to taking one action this week. Here are some examples.

1. Read or listen to a podcast about racial prejudice or injustice.
2. Donate your time or money to an anti-racist organization
3. Speak up if you hear or see a microaggression
4. Find out if there are local organizations you can get involved in
5. Seek out a colleague of color to work on a project together

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**GILDA'S
CLUB**

CANCER SUPPORT COMMUNITY NATIONAL OFFICE
5614 CONNECTICUT AVE, NW
SUITE 280
WASHINGTON, DC 20015
WWW. CANCERSUPPORTCOMMUNITY.ORG
KDOWNNEY@CANCERSUPPORTCOMMUNITY.ORG