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Mental Health Concerns and the Importance of Self-Care During COVID-19

By Carolyn Reinach Wolf and Jamie A. Rosen

The COVID-19 pandemic is taking a major toll on our collective mental health. Even with vaccines being distributed across the world, we still face uncertainty in our daily lives. Couple that with civil unrest and political tension and we have the perfect storm for a mental health crisis. One year later we are still dealing with anxiety, confusion, and judgment from others as we continue to manage our “new normal”. We must all take steps to monitor our mental health and engage in personal and professional self-care. It is important to know the signs of stress in yourself, your loved ones, and your colleagues, identify those red flags, and implement coping mechanisms to minimize the impact of fear and anxiety.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. Some individuals have strong coping skills and solid support systems. Others face one or more serious risk factors. Look out for signs of serious distress and anxiety such as excessive worrying, increased irritability, changes in appetite and energy, difficulty concentrating, difficulty sleeping or nightmares, and increased use of alcohol or drugs. Given the encouragement, and in some cases, mandates, to isolate ourselves or self-quarantine, be especially cognizant of signs of depression such as feelings of hopelessness or sadness, inability to carry out activities of daily living, or sleeping too much.

There are several things that everyone can do to reduce stress and cope with anxiety. While it is important to stay informed, it is equally important to take breaks from watching, reading or listening to the news, including social media. Second, take care of your physical health. Stretch, meditate, journal, get enough sleep, and continue to eat as healthy as possible. Despite the recommendations for “social distancing”, it is important to keep in touch with your friends, family and colleagues. Regular phone calls, text messages or video chats are encouraged. If you are working remotely, hold virtual team meetings to help coworkers stay connected.

In addition to personal self-care, everyone must also engage in professional self-care to avoid work burnout. Many of us have returned to work in healthcare facilities or offices, operating our businesses in completely new ways with new protocols and procedures to keep everyone as safe as possible. We must stay current on the Governor’s Executive Orders as well as Federal, State and local regulations to maintain and constantly update the new safety precautions. Many of us have been exposed to illness and maybe even experienced the death of a loved one or a patient. Part of self-care and avoiding burnout is taking time to grieve, creating appropriate professional boundaries, and learning effective coping strategies. Take an actual lunch break, go for a walk outside, and take your vacation days, even if not travelling. Understand that it is acceptable, and even encouraged, to seek out a mental health professional and talk about anxiety, triggers, and fears. For example, Lawyer Assistance Programs provide free, confidential mental health services to the legal community including peer support, crisis intervention and referrals.

Once we have taken proper care of ourselves, putting on our own oxygen masks first, then we must look outward to our colleagues and clients. For example, legal professionals must maintain contact with clients and continually educate them on their legal options and rights, which frequently change pursuant to different Executive Orders and court rules. Being flexible is key, as plans and business strategies change. We must also manage client expectations and anxieties about how the pandemic is affecting their business or causing other complications. Assure clients that you are always available to assist them, in good times and in bad times.

As mental health attorneys who work closely with families coping with loved ones’ emotional distress, as well as serious mental health and substance abuse issues, the volume of calls has increased during this pandemic. There is no shame in relying on our friends and family in a time of crisis as well as turning to experts for information and advice.

About the Authors



Carolyn Reinach Wolf is an Executive Partner in the law firm of Abrams, Fensterman, Fensterman, Eisman, Formato, Ferrara, Wolf & Carone, LLP and Director of the Firm’s Mental Health Law practice. She is the only attorney in the country with a family-focused practice dedicated to serving individuals and families struggling with serious mental illness and/or alcohol/drug addiction. Supported by a

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