



THE HEALTH & HOUSING CONSORTIUM, INC.

What does it mean to be essential? Managing conflicting feelings and identities on the frontline of COVID-19

1-2pm, June 11th, 2020

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Angela Soto - Director of Community Health Promotion, NYC DOHMH

If you have any questions, please type them in the Q&A.

What does it mean to be “Essential”? Managing conflicting feelings on the frontline of COVID-19

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June 11th, 2020

H+H Town Hall

Introduction

- * The COVID-19 pandemic is a disaster
- * Disasters create personal and public tragedy
- * There can be a conflict between the public and private response to disasters, particularly for essential workers
- * Current events and racial dynamics are further exacerbating the internal and external conflicts of being an essential worker

Who is an essential worker?

“Essential employees” are designated individuals required to work during a business closure in order to meet operational requirements

- * As per the Department of Homeland Security there are 14 essential employment categories including:
 - * Health Care employees
 - * First Responders
 - * Public Workers

Essential workers as heroes

- * In Greek drama, a hero is a person who finds themselves in the middle of destructive forces beyond their control.
- * While the hero may fail, the hero also demonstrates special qualities in their quest to prevent suffering
- * You are heroes because you have chosen a perilous and noble path that requires courage, altruism, perseverance and fortitude

Essential workers at home

Essential Workers and First Responders have a life away from their professional work roles

- * When we respond as essential workers we also impact our family, friends and loved ones.
- * COVID-19 demands that we maintain distance. This can be psychologically damaging
- * The weight of responsibility felt towards our service population and the individuals in our personal lives cannot be ignored. It is important to maintain balance.

Witnessing tragedy during COVID-19

- * Essential workers are witnesses, heroes and victims all at once
- * Blurred boundaries between self and other – who is this actually happening to?
- * How to live through something with no end in sight and in which you have shifting roles?

Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

- * **Compassion fatigue:**

- * Emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel compassionately towards others
- * Also a form of secondary traumatic stress

- * **Burnout:**

- * Emotional detachment
- * Mental and/or physical fatigue
- * Feelings of lack of accomplishment
- * Cynicism

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- * A. Exposure to actual or threatened death, injury or sexual violence.
- * B. Recurrent distressing memories or dreams of the event, dissociation/flashbacks or psychological/physiological distress at internal/external cues that symbolize the event.
- * C. Persistent avoidance of memories/feelings or external reminders of the event
- * D. Negative alterations in mood or cognition
- * E. Alterations in arousal and reactivity associated with traumatic event and continuing afterwards

Anxiety and Depression

- * **Anxiety** is excessive, uncontrollable worry accompanied by restlessness, fatigue, poor concentration, irritability, muscle tension and sleep problems for > 6 months
- * **Depression** is depressed mood or loss of interest accompanied by 5 or more of the following for > 2 weeks
 - * Changes in weight
 - * Slowed thought or ability to move
 - * Low energy
 - * Feeling worthless or guilty
 - * Difficulty concentrating, thinking or making decisions
 - * Recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation

Resilience & Coping Strategies

- * **Resilience is the ability to adapt to adversity, trauma, threat, and stress and return to healthy functioning**
- * Preventative against developing psychiatric symptoms
- * **Building Resilience:**
 - * Build your connections
 - * Learn coping skills and focus on physical wellness
 - * Adjust thought process to foster optimism

Psychological First Aid

- * Evidence based intervention designed for first responders:
 - * **Create a sense of safety** – reduce chaos and create separation
 - * **Create calm** – start with yourself and stay present and practical
 - * **Create self and collective efficacy** – involve others in problem solving and don't be a hero by yourself
 - * **Create hope** – remember when things are grim, it can get better

Conclusion

Accept your feelings
Take time to take care of yourself
Get help if you need it



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Please fill out our evaluation survey at:

<https://tinyurl.com/townhall611>

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