

HELPING THE HELPERS: HOW MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDERS CAN COPE WITH ANXIETY FROM THE PANDEMIC

There has been an increasing need in mental health care due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health care workers are not immune to feeling these effects, especially anxiety. Now more than ever, it's important to pay attention to and understand the emotions you are experiencing, where they are coming from, and what you need to move forward. Here are some tips to guide your thinking and adjust your behavior and emotions.



Examine and Reflect: Think about lessons learned during the time of adjustment to pandemic restrictions—about yourself, your work style, your strengths and needs. What aspects of the pandemic work environment might you want to keep? Limited or different work hours, working from home, electronic forms for clients, new notetaking or billing software. Finding meaning in the challenges and tragedies of the pandemic might help you manage your feelings.

Plan: Determine what practices you may want to sustain—only vaccinated clients in-person, only video sessions, in-person for all clients but with masks on? If you and your clients have different comfort levels and needs, consider referring clients to colleagues who have different policies. Adjust your plan as feelings change.



Preventing Vicarious Trauma: Recognize and manage your vulnerability. It is important to protect your mental health and release any trauma or distress that you feel from listening to a client's anxiety. Directly following a session, engage in a stress release activity such as supervision, therapy, body-scan, movement, grounding or guided imagery exercises, meditation, mindfulness, or journaling.

Address Survivor's Guilt: If you are personally touched by a COVID-related death and/or survived COVID yourself, you may suffer from Survivor's Guilt. If not addressed, these feelings can lead to anxiety, depression, and risk of substance abuse and/or suicide. To maintain professional conduct and sound judgement, Survivor's Guilt must be managed. To address Survivor's Guilt consider volunteer work, therapy, focusing on internal and external locus of control, or leaning on social supports.

