



Stress First Aid

for HEALTH CARE
WORKERS



National Center for
PTSD

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER





National Center for PTSD

VA's National Center for PTSD is a world leader in research and education programs focusing on PTSD and other psychological and medical consequences of traumatic stress. Mandated by Congress in 1989, the Center is a consortium of seven academic centers of excellence providing research, education, and consultation in the field of traumatic stress.





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Introduction and Overview



THOSE WHO WORK IN HEALTH CARE

SETTINGS provide medical care and related services to those in need. The settings vary, including emergency, preventative, hospital, primary care, rehabilitative care, long-term care, diagnostic, palliative, and home care. A variety of disciplines and functions are represented among health care workers, including mental health, lab/diagnostic, physical and occupational therapy, prenatal care, nutritional support, pharmaceutical, substance abuse treatment, dental, and transportation.

The stress encountered by those who work in health care settings is influenced by a number of factors: the exposure to many types of trauma, the losses which they may witness or experience, the difficult decisions they have to make, threats the job can present, the pressure they put on themselves to make a difference in the lives of those they serve, and the cumulative demands the job places on them.

Added to these factors, personal issues from home and family stressors can also come into play. As a result, health care workers may juggle many competing demands.

Stress First Aid (SFA) is a framework of practical actions that can help reduce the likelihood that stress reactions will develop into more severe or long-term problems. SFA offers a flexible menu of options for addressing stress reactions. It can be used for self-care, to help co-workers with stress reactions, or to help someone seek other types of support. Ideally everyone in an organization would



learn the basics of Stress First Aid so that support could occur wherever and whenever it's needed.

In health care settings, the individuals best positioned to provide SFA are co-workers, mentors, supervisors and others who have existing relationships with someone experiencing significant stress. Friends and family members can also play an important role.

SFA Aims to Reduce the Risk for Stress Reactions

A shared concern for oneself and one's coworkers in potentially stressful situations is at the heart of Stress First Aid. Paying attention to stress reactions can help you respond to both the acute and cumulative stressors that you and your coworkers may face. This approach can help you more quickly identify those who might benefit from early and ongoing support so that stress reactions don't progress to more troubling conditions.

SFA offers a spectrum of actions to ensure safety, reduce the risk for more severe stress reactions, and promote recovery. It then promotes monitoring the progress of recovery to ensure a return to full functioning and well-being. In situations where the provision of SFA is not sufficient to reduce stress reactions, it also serves to bridge individuals to higher levels of care, as needed.

SFA is Guided by a Set of Core Principles

Strong leadership and good connections with coworkers are potentially the most powerful forces for healing and recovery available. SFA promotes recovery from stress reactions by augmenting, restoring and leveraging leadership, peer support and existing work relationships. SFA requires a collaborative team effort to be most effective.

SFA occurs in natural work contexts, wherever and whenever it is needed. It is individualized to meet the needs of each person in their context; there are no one-size-fits-all SFA solution. It offers both immediate actions in response to high stress situations, as well as strategies for ongoing support, adjusting responses as needed over time.

Taking Care of One Another

Health care culture appeals to those who are problem solvers and are service-oriented. Therefore, it is a culture whose members could benefit from learning the basics of self-care, support of coworkers, and effective mentoring. SFA can only be as strong as the determination of each organization to preserve the health, longevity, and well-being of its workers so that they can serve others and get the most benefit from the job for as long as they choose to be a part of the organization.





Using SFA principles to improve your own self-care or to support those you work most closely with is the ideal use of SFA. The core actions are also designed to operationalize support to everyone you work with.

SFA is Based on a Stress Continuum Model

Stress reactions lie along a spectrum of severity and type. The Stress Continuum Model shown in **Figure 1** was adapted from the model developed by United States Marine Corps leaders as a tool for conceptualizing

the spectrum of stress states. The **Green Zone** is the goal of most training and prevention activities. The **Yellow Zone** is the one that most people are in when work and life demands are challenging but transient, and stress reactions are more temporary. The **Orange Zone** is the stress zone in which the risk for failure of role performance and future mental disorders becomes significant. Once an individual goes beyond the normal daily stress reactions into the more significant Orange Zone responses, SFA actions may reduce the likelihood of

Figure 1. Stress Continuum Model

	Ready (Green)	Reacting (Yellow)	Injured (Orange)	Ill (Red)
DEFINITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimal functioning Adaptive growth Wellness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mild and transient distress or impairment Always goes away Low risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More severe and persistent distress or impairment Leaves an emotional/mental “scar” Higher risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persistent and disabling distress or loss of function Unhealed stress injuries Clinical mental disorders
FEATURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At one’s best Well trained and prepared In control Physically, mentally, and spiritually “fit” Mission-focused Motivated Calm and steady Having fun Behaving ethically/legally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feeling irritable, anxious, or down Loss of motivation Loss of focus Difficulty sleeping Muscle tension, heightened heart rate, breathing, or other physical changes Not having fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of control No longer feeling like normal self Stronger emotions like panic, rage, depression Excessive guilt, shame, or blame Loss of memory or ability to think rationally Being unable to enjoy previously pleasurable activities. Increased or uncontrollable physiological reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reactions persist or worsen over time Severe distress or social or occupational impairment Hopelessness
CAUSES		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any stressor/trigger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life threat Loss Inner conflict/turmoil Excessive wear and tear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depression Anxiety Substance Use Disorders PTSD



needing more intensive intervention, which usually takes place when **Red Zone** reactions occur.

The stress reactions that commonly characterize each zone are shown above. However, the way someone will respond to stress will depend on how prepared they are for the stressor event, how they interpret it, and their resources. A person's state can range relatively rapidly from Green to Yellow to Orange to Red and back again.

Yellow Zone Versus Orange Zone

Health care settings regularly expose workers to stressful situations. Because health care workers may commonly experience Yellow Zone stress, it is important to clarify the difference between Yellow Zone stress reactions and Orange Zone stress.

Experiencing Yellow Zone stress reactions can be part of developing competence and confidence as you face work challenges. Most people have sufficient resources and skills to recover from a Yellow Zone stress reaction with limited assistance.

Orange Zone stress reactions, on the other hand, may result in no longer feeling like your normal self, feeling out of control, or being impaired in your work or personal roles. They typically require activation of resources to facilitate recovery and growth.

The concept of Yellow Zone versus Orange Zone stress is similar to the difference between a strained versus a broken



ankle. When an ankle or tendon is strained, physical therapy and controlled movement and use are often prescribed. However, when there is an injury like a broken ankle, a cast and rest are needed. In the same way, the support given for Yellow Zone stress may need to be different from the support typically given for Orange Zone stress.

Figure 2 shows four classes of stressors that place individuals at risk for enduring stress reactions: trauma,

Figure 2. Four Sources of Stress Injury

Trauma	Loss	Inner Conflict	Wear and Tear
A traumatic injury Due to the experience of or exposure to intense injury, horrific or gruesome experiences, or death.	A grief injury Due to the loss of people, things or parts of oneself.	A moral injury Due to behaviors or the witnessing of behaviors that violate moral values.	A fatigue injury Due to the accumulation of stress from all sources over time without sufficient rest and recovery.



loss, inner conflict or turmoil, also often referred to as moral distress or moral injury, and wear and tear.

The first three are usually discrete events that can be experienced either singly or in combination with each other. The last, wear and tear, is the accumulation of stressors from expected or normal life challenges, both large and small, over a long period of time. The effects of these four sources of stress can be simultaneous and cumulative.

Examples of Potentially Traumatic Events

- Exposure to very difficult cases
- Exposure to extreme violence, murder, or suicide
- Exposure to life-threatening infectious agents
- Sexual assault or offenses
- Working with families who have seriously ill or injured children
- Dealing with hostility/resistance/violence from patients
- Exposure to similar potentially traumatic events in one's personal life

Examples of Loss

- Death or significant illness in patients, coworkers, family, or friends
- Working with families who have lost their child
- Loss of ideals
- Loss of time
- Loss of personal wellbeing
- Loss of innocence

Examples of Inner Conflict:

- Conflicts with personal values and the job
- Finding time to satisfy work and personal responsibilities
- Second guessing what could have been done differently to prevent a negative outcome
- Concerns about the impact of one's job on family or friends



Examples of Wear and Tear:

- Long hours and rotating shifts
- Working when ill or injured
- Dealing with different personalities
- Addressing substance abuse
- Working through personal illness
- Lack of supervisor support
- Personnel turnover
- More record keeping and accountability in records
- More attention to things done wrong than things done right
- Balancing homelife with job duties
- Trying to manage a growing caseload
- Extra duty assignments
- Pressures from supervisors
- Multiple updates in patient care, insurance policies, and programs
- Multiple stressors in one's personal life over extended periods

Signs of Orange Zone Stress

Signs of Orange Zone stress include intense or persistent stress reactions, such as:

- Not feeling in control of one's body, behavior, mind, or thinking.
- Being frequently unable to fall or stay asleep.
- Waking up from recurrent or vivid nightmares.
- Feeling persistent, intense guilt or shame.
- Feeling numb, less caring, or less connected to one's "moral compass."
- Being unable to enjoy former activities.
- Displaying a significant and persistent negative change in behavior or appearance.
- Losing grounding in prior moral values.
- Experiencing attacks of panic, anger or rage.
- Losing memory or the ability to think clearly or rationally.





Where Stress First Aid Fits in the Stress Continuum

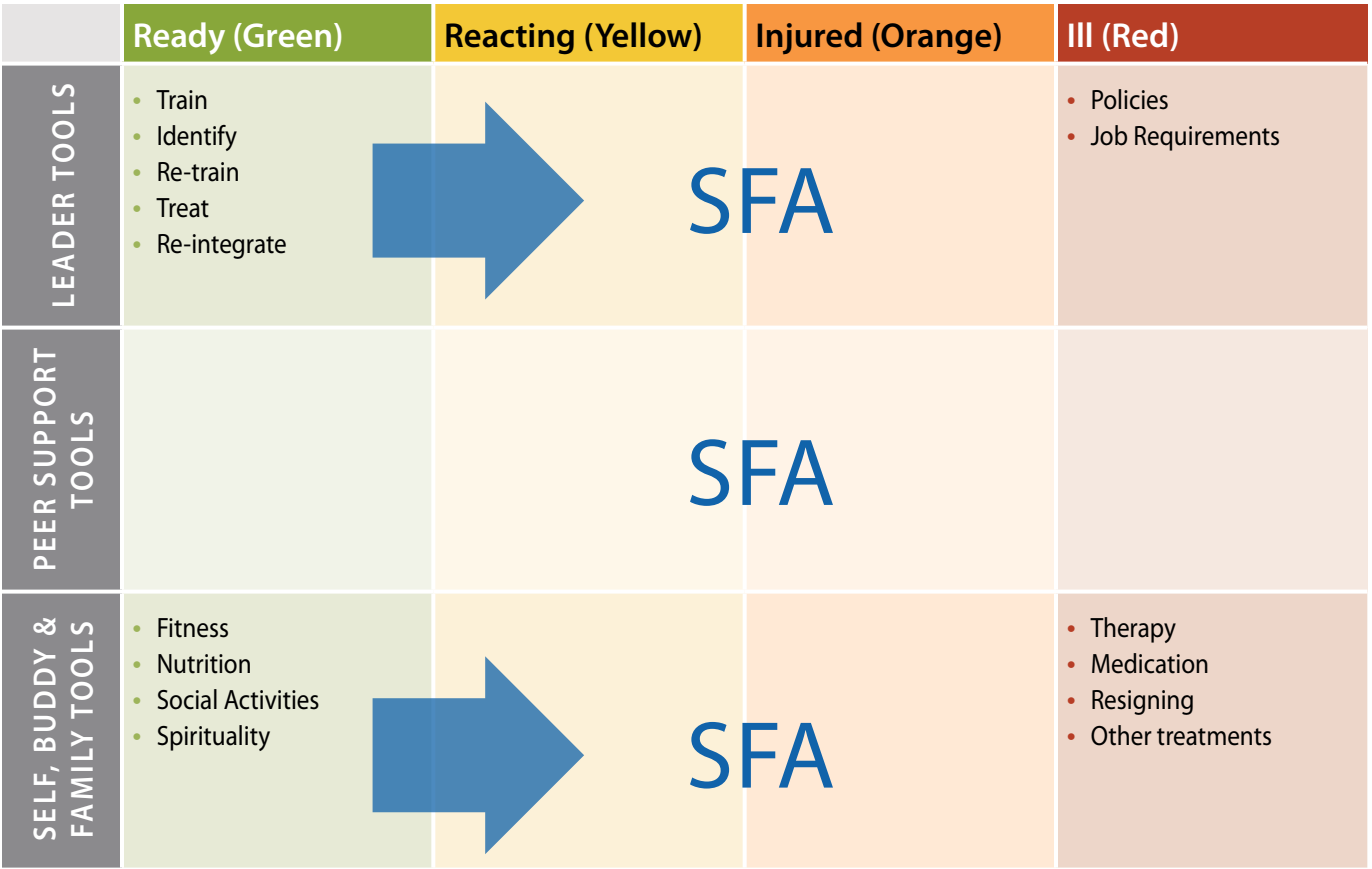
SFA actions are intended to fill the care gap between training, stress management and prevention at the left end of the Stress Continuum, and clinical care to the right of the Continuum. **Figure 3** illustrates where Stress First Aid fits into the stress continuum.

SFA Evidence Support

The core functions of SFA were derived from an exhaustive literature review of elements related to recovery from a number of different types of ongoing, adverse circumstances (Hobfoll et al., 2007). The five essential elements of immediate and mid-term intervention that are related to better recovery from stress are:

1. **Promote a sense of safety.** Maintaining or re-establishing a psychological sense of safety lowers the risk of stress reactions. Safety can be relative, and it is important to have a balanced view about the levels of danger in one’s environment.
2. **Promote calming.** Some anxiety is normal and healthy. However, extended arousal of heart rate, blood pressure and respiration is associated with disruption of sleep, lack of hydration, poor decision-making and long-term health problems.
3. **Promote connectedness.** Social connectedness is one of the strongest protective factors against stress reactions and is linked to emotional well-being and recovery following trauma and adversity.

Figure 3. Where Stress First Aid Fits in the Stress Continuum





4. **Promote sense of self and collective efficacy.** People who believe that they have the skills to overcome threat can handle stressful events, solve their problems and show greater resilience during and recovery after stressful events.
5. **Promote a sense of hope.** Hope is linked to optimism, faith, and/or the belief that things will work out in the best possible way (Hobfall, Watson, Bell, et al., 2007).

SFA actions are designed to catch the early warning signs of severe stress reactions regardless of their cause. SFA can help health care workers evaluate needs, get assistance and support when needed, and assist one another during and after cumulative stress, significant loss, adversity, inner turmoil, or exposure to a potentially traumatic event. The use of SFA strategies promotes supportive actions in the workplace and provides follow-up over time. For instance, you can adjust circumstances to reduce stress, give the person time to recuperate or to compose themselves, or help mentor or coach them to identify preferred ways to best deal with stress reactions. SFA also includes making a plan to leverage resources that promote healing, wellness, connection and a return to fully effective functioning.

SFA has Seven Core Functions

SFA consists of seven core functions: **Check, Coordinate, Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence** and **Confidence**.

The core functions will each be described in more detail in following sections. Quotes from health care workers in the appendix will further illustrate how they might be practiced in health care settings.



Check



THE FIRST SFA CORE FUNCTION, CHECK, involves paying attention to your own stress levels and reactions or to the functioning of fellow coworkers. Using Check successfully with coworkers starts with making the time to get to know their baseline levels of functioning and behavior. You can keep track of any persistent or significant changes in behavior that might indicate that a person is experiencing Orange Zone stress. Check is essentially a screening mechanism to determine if someone is recovering from a stress reaction on their own, could benefit from SFA actions, or should be referred to other resources or higher levels of care. It is also used to determine the effectiveness of any SFA actions, and to ensure continual progress toward recovery. Used in this way, Check can help ensure that a person has the necessary resources in their life to help them withstand stress, in the same way that healthy habits buffer the person's immune system against illness.

Many organizations already practice some form of Check on an informal basis. For instance, coworkers might text or call one another during challenging times, to see how their colleagues are doing. Perhaps a senior coworker will make a point of working closely with someone who has experienced a critical incident, making sure the person stays involved in activities that allow them to regain their sense of purpose or connection with others.

Within the context of SFA, checking on others includes all these types of actions, and is an ongoing commitment to the well-being of all employees. When Check is fully integrated into the normal day-to-day procedures of a department, individuals value getting to know one another on good days, so that they can know when a person may be experiencing an Orange



Zone stress reaction. They are better able to recognize one another's red flags and care for one another.

The goals of Check are to:

- Identify baseline functioning.
- Identify current level of stress.
- Look for indicators of ability to function.
- Determine needs for:
 - SFA actions.
 - Other physical, emotional, social or spiritual support.
 - Others who need to know.
 - Others who can help.

What is Check?

Figure 4 shows the major components of Check. The first and most critical task is to **observe**—to look and listen for baseline functioning, as well as verbal and non-verbal clues that the individual may be experiencing a stress reaction that might benefit from assistance. While observing, you can also identify current and recent stressors, and note any distress or changes in behavior.

If indications of a possible stress reaction are present, examine the situation more closely through direct one-on-one interactions or by checking with collateral sources. This information can then be used to determine what (if any) actions are required, based on the person's

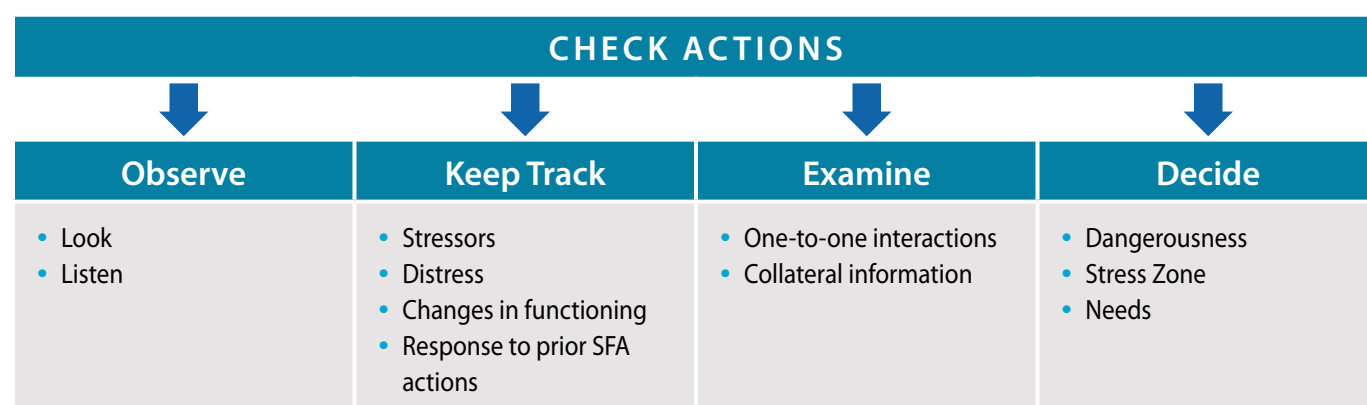
current Stress Zone. It can also tell you if the person might be a danger to themselves or others.

Why is Check Needed?

Those who work in health care settings are regularly exposed to intense and prolonged stress. These stressors can cause stress reactions either independently or in combination with events experienced in the person's personal life. Monitoring coworkers for potential stress reactions is helpful because:

- Most people are unaware of their stress zones and needs, and often don't pay attention to such things when focusing on work and the demands of daily life.
- When people have been significantly changed by stress, or injured by it, they may not recognize the ways that it has impacted their lives. Those around them may be more likely to notice the impact if they are paying attention and know what to look for.
- Even if the person affected by stress recognizes distress or changes in functioning, the stigma that surrounds such problems can be a powerful barrier to seeking help. Telling others about our problems and asking for assistance is very difficult for most of us.
- Both the stress zones of individuals and the resources available to help can change drastically over time. A continuous process of assessment is often the only

Figure 4. Components of the Check Function of SFA





way to match needs with appropriate levels of help each step of the way.

- The after-effects of stress injuries can be delayed by weeks, months or even years. Those who have been seriously affected by stress may need to be periodically followed up with and reassessed.

Recognizing Who Needs Check

When using SFA for coworker support, the first step is recognizing that a coworker might be experiencing an Orange Zone stress reaction. There are three indicators that an individual may be experiencing Orange Zone stress:

1. **Recent Stressor Events:** Examples include exposure to traumatic stress (accident, large scale mass casualty, or workplace violence); the loss of someone or something cherished (death of a favorite patient, death in the family, divorce, a close friend moving away, pending retirement, being passed over for promotion); or violations of the individual's moral code (perception that insufficient resources or one's actions negatively impacted a patient, policies perceived as counter to good patient care, concern that aspects of one's work are negatively affecting family or friends).



2. **Distress:** Experiencing significant and persistent troubling emotions, such as fear, anger, anxiety, sadness, guilt or shame.
3. **Changes in Functioning:** Significant and persistent changes in physical, mental, social or spiritual functioning at work or home that seem to be outside of the person's control.

Monitoring for Orange Zone indicators is an important skill to learn and practice. You may become aware of increased stress in a coworker if their behavior significantly changes or they confide that they are experiencing distress or changes in functioning. *Figure 5* gives examples of Orange Zone indicators that might prompt the SFA Check function.

Talking about Stress Reactions

In some cases, acquiring the information needed to have a better understanding of what is going on with a coworker will require discussing the situation in more detail with the individual. The information on active listening in the Appendix may help in opening up a more in-depth conversation.

The **OSCAR** model of communications is another easy to remember tool that can be a useful for talking to someone about stress reactions:

Observe: actively observe behaviors; look for patterns that are different from baseline.

State Observations: focus attention on the behavior; state just the facts without interpretations or judgments.

Clarify Role: state why you are concerned about the behavior and validate why you are addressing the issue.

Ask Why: seek clarification; try to understand the other person's perception of their own behavior.

Respond: clarify why you are concerned and discuss desired behaviors; state options in behavioral terms.



Figure 5. Examples of Indicators that Might Prompt Check

Stress Indicators	Look For:	Listen For:
Current Stressors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to traumatic events • A close brush with death • The loss of one or more friends or coworkers by death, injury, illness, or relocation • Events in which an individual's actions or a failure to act may violate deeply held beliefs or moral values • Yellow Zone stress reactions that continue day after day for many months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My patient just relapsed. I should have done more to keep that from happening." • "One of my patients died by suicide." • "I almost got killed in a motorcycle crash yesterday." • "My son has a serious illness." • "My mom just died." • "My husband just lost his job." • "I can't believe my wife cheated on me!" • "My husband left me, taking the kids and all our stuff." • "I just found out I have heart disease."
Level of Distress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pacing or persistent agitation • Uncharacteristic outbursts of anger, anxiety, or fear • Uncharacteristic fighting, alcohol abuse or misconduct • Persistent sadness or absence of normal emotions • Loss of interest in work, hobbies or socializing • Withdrawal from interactions with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It was entirely my fault." • "I don't have any energy anymore." • "I don't trust anyone in this department." • "The world is full of pain and suffering." • "I can't stop seeing the same scene replayed over and over again in my mind." • "I keep waking up from the same nightmare."
Changes in Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant and persistent changes in personality • Sudden drop in job performance • Persistent forgetfulness • Uncharacteristic loss of control of emotion • Uncharacteristic problems in personal relationships • Uncharacteristic poor hygiene or grooming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I can't slow down my heart rate." • "I haven't slept well in weeks." • "My appetite is gone, and I have lost a lot of weight." • "I am afraid I might lose it and hurt someone." • "I'm drinking more than usual." • "My wife and I are arguing a lot more than usual."



Here is an example of how OSCAR might be enacted in a work setting. There are many other ways that OSCAR could be used, but this gives an example of how a conversation might proceed using this strategy.

Observe: You notice your coworker has been less and less talkative and more isolated from others over the last few weeks

State observations: “Hey Joe, I haven’t been seeing you around as much lately, and you seem to be really quiet the last few weeks.”

Clarify Role: “I’m only bringing this up because I care about you and want to make sure that you’re okay.”

Ask: “Am I right in my guess that something might be going on with you?”

Respond: Joe says yes, and you say, “Why don’t we go get some coffee so we can talk away from others. Does that sound okay to you?”

The OSCAR technique can be used to get a better sense of whether the person is experiencing Orange Zone Indicators, and to gather information to answer the following questions:

- Which Stress Zone is the individual currently in and why?
- Would they benefit from any SFA actions?
- Is referral to any other resource warranted?

Checking Collateral Sources of Information

It may also be helpful or necessary to discuss the situation with co-workers and/or family members. They may be able to give you more clues about the three Orange Zone Indicators, including:

1. Current and recent stressors
2. Signs that the person is distressed
3. Evidence of loss of previous functional capacity or changes in functioning



Information received from these collateral sources can help you make more accurate and sound decisions about next steps.

Self-Care: Self-Awareness Stress Indicators

When using Stress First Aid in self-care, it is important to have awareness about your own personal “red flags” that might indicate stress injury. **Figure 6** shows some self-awareness stress indicators common to those who work in highly stressful work settings.

Self-Care: Potential Obstacles

It’s also recommended that you become more aware of potential obstacles to self-care so they can be mitigated if possible. Health care workers are often attracted to their work because of high ideals and values like selflessness, loyalty, stoicism, a strong moral code, and excellence. These values form the basis for their strength in work settings, but they can also create obstacles to self-care and increase the risk

Figure 6. Stress Indicators

Mental	Social
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Decrease in the quality of work• Increased work errors• Loss of interest in things that once mattered• Decrease in productivity• Lack of motivation• Poor work performance• Absenteeism• Lateness• Giving up• Trouble keeping up with workload• Forgetfulness• Distorted thinking• Reduced self-awareness• Guilt• Feeling less caring /numb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uncharacteristic negative social behavior• Irritability/being easily angered• Frustration about work requirements or changes in procedure• Increased isolation• Increased complaining• Hypervigilance• Less tolerance• Keeping office doors closed• Engagement with others dropping off• Closed off body language• Reduced interpersonal boundaries (oversharing of information)• Less volunteerism• Marital stress
Emotional	Physical
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emotional extremes• Anxiety attacks• Depression• Sadness• Anger• Suspiciousness• Negative attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weight loss/gain• Sleep disruption/sleeplessness• Stress induced seizures• Increased absenteeism• Medical symptoms with an undetermined cause• Increased use of sick leave• Increased drinking• Being more easily startled



of stress-related problems. Here are some potential obstacles to self-care:

- Too many responsibilities on and off the job
- The feeling that if you say “no” you will be looked down upon
- Unexpected emergencies
- Concern about being perceived as weak
- Self-criticism, having high expectations, and not being able to modify expectations under more stressful circumstances
- Limited time in one’s schedule
- Always putting the job first
- On-call or shift work
- Lack of sleep
- Lack of backups
- Never feeling that you can “unplug”
- Wanting to be perceived as perfect
- Always prioritizing others over self
- Low morale

Potential Check Self-Care Actions

Here are a few potential Check actions for improving self-care:

- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
- Make a conscious effort to keep tabs on yourself
- Become aware of personal red flags
- Pay attention to red flags right away

Potential Actions for Checking on Coworkers

For supervisors or leaders, here are a few potential actions for checking on employees:

- Build a foundation based on good relationships. Creating a culture that encourages employees to receive support or to reach out for help will make it easier for employees to most effectively check in on one another.
- Be approachable and authentic, so employees are more likely to share experiences and reactions.





- Set ground rules for staff such as stating that it's natural to have stress in health care jobs and that it's important to look out for each other and to be self-aware about specific red flags.
- Monitor/check on staff needs regularly.

Here are a few potential actions for checking on coworkers:

- Find practical or creative ways to start conversations that allow you to Check on people
- Pay attention to social withdrawal and other changes in behavior, emotional tone, and diminished work performance.
- Ask, "Is everything all right? I'm checking on you. I've noticed..."
- Offer basic resources like food, water, etc. to make a connection that can open a conversation
- Find the right way to check on someone without annoying them (e.g., writing or texting versus calling).
- Start a general conversation to get the person talking. Then look for verbal and non-verbal signs as to how they are doing.
- Start with something positive then reference specific concerns you have.
- Reference the colors of the stress continuum model.
- Place an object that references stress—like a stress ball—on their desk with a note about your concerns).
- Use humor or references to movies with characters who are dealing with stress.
- Use opportunities where there is safety, privacy and time to open conversations.
- Check in on anniversaries of difficult events.
- Check in during and after:
 - Work or personal challenges
 - Noticing Orange Zone injury behaviors and patterns
 - Noticing signs of distress

Coordinate



THE SECOND ACTION OF SFA IS COORDINATE, which involves coordinating with other resources or individuals if needed. There are two broad goals for Coordinate:

1. To inform those who need to know.
2. To obtain other sources of needed help or care.

What is Coordinate?

Figure 7 shows the three major components of the Coordinate function of SFA, depending upon the information gathered during Check:

1. **COLLABORATE** means forming a partnership with the individual to expand resources and options that may have been depleted by the situation or their reaction to it. This action moves the person to the next level of support, which could be a mentor, trusted coworker, chaplain, social worker, trained peer support specialist, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider, etc.
2. **INFORM** means actively engaging key individuals who have a need to know, have the ability to help within the organization or are well-suited to offer support. This action is most effective when it is done in collaboration with the coworker.
3. **REFER** means bridging the individual to a higher level of care when indicated. It is important to remember boundaries and the limits of your capabilities. When department members are suffering Orange Zone stress beyond the scope of SFA, they need to be connected with appropriate organizational supports and resources.

Coordinate with Other Sources of Care and Support

Coordinate can be used when a coworker needs to be referred to a higher level of care. It can also help with



Figure 7. Components of the Coordinate Function of Stress First Aid

COORDINATE ACTIONS		
Collaborate	Inform	Refer
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To promote recovery• To ensure safety• To get more information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chain of command• Family• Peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recommend resources• Consultation• Direct hand-off

determining what source of care would be the best fit. In making these decisions, the following factors should be considered:

- How confident are you in your understanding of their circumstances and reactions?
- How solid is your relationship with the person?
- Would this individual benefit from a form of care other than SFA?
- Are there other resources available, such as EAP providers or outside counselors?
- How has the individual's level of stress changed over time? Is it improving, staying the same or getting worse?

When in doubt, getting another opinion is often helpful. Although questions may still remain unanswered, in most cases, getting input from others is the right thing to do.

Coordinate can also be used to overcome barriers to delivering or succeeding with SFA, such as the following examples:

- You have stress injury that impairs your ability to provide SFA, in which case you should get help yourself
- You cannot acquire or hold the trust or attention of the other person

- You have negative beliefs about the person, or they actively resist attempts to help
- The person's stress behaviors do not respond to SFA actions

If you run into one of these obstacles to providing SFA, you can Coordinate with others who may be better able to meet the needs of coworkers. Involve other leaders, coworkers, trained peers, human resources, chaplains, or mental health providers.

Coordination with other sources of care and support does not end with a referral or request for help. When an individual is connected with other sources of care, follow up (using Check) is important to make sure they are getting needed support and appropriate resources.

Potential Coordinate Actions

Here are a few potential Coordinate actions:

- Set up a variety of resources in advance (e.g., local clinicians, mentors, coworker teams, chaplains, life coaches, hotlines, support groups and self-help groups).
- Mentor, help problem-solve, and/or normalize help-seeking
- Suggest clearly that the person talk with EAP or other support



What is Cover?

During day-to-day operations, every person is typically accountable for their own safety and for that of their coworkers. The SFA action of Cover is a natural extension of this concept. It specifically refers to actions that reduce any threats to safety that may result from an individual's reactions to stress. The **goals** of Cover are to:

- Ensure the immediate physical safety of the stressed person and others.
- Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort.
- Protect from additional stress.

Cover is used when a sense of threat is increasing someone's stress reactions or conversely, their stress reactions are impacting their safety or the safety of others.

Figure 8 shows the major components of Cover. Its key components are to **stand by** ready to help as needed; to **make safe** the environment for the individual and coworkers if in imminent danger; and to **encourage the perception** of safety that results from both reduced danger and greater support, quiet, and order.

Cover and the following SFA action Calm are analogous in some ways to Basic Life Support (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). They are used rarely, can be lifesaving when needed, and can prevent further harm from occurring until other forms of help can be obtained.

When is Cover Needed?

Cover is needed when there is a threat to the safety or perceived safety of one or more people. These situations fall into three categories:

1. The stressed person is in danger
 - Someone in a life-threatening situation is not thinking clearly or making good decisions because of stress



Figure 8. Components of the Cover Function of Stress First Aid

COVER ACTIONS			
Stand by	Make Safe	Make Others Safe	Encourage Perception of Safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ready to assist • Watch and listen • Hold attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative presence • Warn • Protect • Assist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect • Warn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caring presence • Reduced chaos • Reduced danger • Listen and communicate

- An individual has frozen or panicked in an intense situation
- Someone is impacted by a stressor or long-term stress in a way that impairs current functioning.
- Sexual harassment by coworkers
- An individual has expressed thoughts of suicide. *

**A threat of suicide should always be taken seriously. It is not your responsibility to decide if the threat is real. People who are threatening suicide must be taken to an emergency room or to a behavioral health professional for assessment.*

2. Others are in danger from the person

- Due to stress, the person is behaving in a way that impacts the safety of others, for example:
- While in a high-risk infectious disease situation, a preoccupied worker does not remind coworkers of potential hazards.
- A driver freezes or panics while driving with a coworker in the car.
- A previously traumatized person overreacts due to fear of repeating a traumatic event.
- A worker threatens others.

3. The stressed person or their family has a perception of danger or a long-term sense of not being safe

- A person has trouble setting boundaries and therefore feels unable to feel safe at work

- A person who struggles with perfectionism feels unsafe about making any mistakes
- Someone has a fear of patients with physical or mental health issues
- An individual has concerns about the safety of their family members due to events at work such as potential exposure to infectious diseases
- A person feels unsafe in particular settings or with particular individuals they work with.
- A person feels unsupported and threatened by coworkers or those in positions of authority, which results in:
 - Not feeling supported by leaders
 - Feeling too overworked
 - Feeling targeted or bullied by a coworker or supervisor
 - Fear of speaking up about any concerns in the workplace because of concern about how one will be perceived (e.g., as weak or overly sensitive)
 - Concern about the safety of the working environment
 - Concerns about job security
 - A worker or their family members have a perception of danger after an illness, injury or death of a coworker.



How Does Cover Work?

Those using the Cover action can promote safety and perceptions of safety by:

- Providing authoritative presence or guidance to reduce the person's sense of threat.
- Making decisions on behalf of someone who is not thinking clearly.
- Take action on behalf of someone who is not behaving in a safe manner.
- Work to remove anything that causes a person or team to feel unsafe.
- Warn and protect others who may not be aware of a danger.
- Create an environment of safety to reduce stress.

How is Cover Implemented?

Any action that increases the safety or the perception of safety of those feeling unsafe can be considered a Cover procedure. There are many non-verbal and verbal actions that can provide Cover. In fact, most Cover procedures are intuitive and are often what people would do instinctively when faced with an unsafe situation. When choosing a Cover action for an immediately unsafe situation, the most important priorities are to:

1. Ensure safety quickly, and
2. Take no more autonomy away from others than is necessary for safety.

In other words, intrude on others as little as possible and for as short a period of time as possible.

Here are some non-verbal ways for enforcing immediate safety with Cover, from least to most intrusive:

- Make eye contact.
- Hold up your hands in a "stop" gesture.
- Apply reassuring pressure on the shoulder or arm with one hand.
- Shake or nudge the person to get their attention.



- Move the person to safety.
- If necessary, take physical control of the person's body.

Here are some verbal ways for enforcing immediate safety with Cover, from least to most intrusive:

- Ask, "Are you okay?"
- Ask, "Do you need help?"
- Give directions; tell them what to do.
- Suggest a safer course of action.
- Yell a warning.

Here are some ways to foster a long-term environment of safety and perception of safety:

- Get feedback from those who have concerns about their own safety or the safety of others and work towards finding solutions.
- Encourage good boundaries for self-care.
- Support and educate families who are concerned about their loved ones after the work-related illness, injury, or death of a department member.



Potential Cover Self-Care Actions

Here are a few Cover actions for making oneself feel safer:

- Actively seek information that can help you feel safer
- Get an accurate understanding of risks in order to better plan
- Get help with personal responsibilities
- Self-monitor for stress reactions
- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
- Set boundaries for yourself (e.g., turn off phone, take breaks)
- Request help from supervisors (e.g., ask for case or job transfers)
- Make a list of self-cover preferences
- Find those people, places, or actions that feel safe to you and call on them.
- When you feel unsafe, distract yourself by focusing on something near you or your own breath or thought (e.g., counting).
- Realize that no one is perfect; everyone has strengths and vulnerabilities. Be aware of your own.
- Let your family know about work-related situations that might occur
- Educate your family about potential red flags that you might demonstrate if you are overly stressed, so they know when to support you and so they don't take them personally
- Talk with family/friends about the best ways you can keep each other safe
- Practice more helpful ways of thinking to foster healthy changes in behaviors. Here are a few examples of helpful thoughts:
 - "Taking a break from this work will help me be more effective."
 - "Even though I feel fine I need to pace myself."
 - "I can better care for others if I also attend to my needs."
 - "I'm doing enough."





- “I can contribute the most by pacing myself.”
- “Letting someone know how affected I am can help me.”
- “I can trust that others can fill in when it’s necessary.”

Potential Coworker Support Cover Actions

Here are a few Cover actions for coworker support:

- Tailor Cover to the needs of the situation:
 - Get to know your colleagues
 - Support one another through threatening situations
- Cover one another for personal issues
 - Become more aware of and supportive during times when there are significant issues at home, in order to provide a safety net
 - Check in and reduce high-risk behavior

Here are a few Cover actions for leaders to support their employees:

- Work to make situations safer:
 - Learn which situations feel unsafe to employees and work to improve their safety
 - Have coworkers work in partnership
 - Discuss lessons learned after unsafe situations and engage in problem-solving
 - Train personnel on situational awareness and decision-making
 - Give briefings before workers are involved in potentially unsafe situations
 - Reduce exposure to potentially traumatic information as much as possible
 - Reduce anxiety by taking a team approach to difficult cases
 - If something goes wrong, take a lessons-learned rather than punitive approach



Figure 9. Potential Obstacles to Cover and How to Overcome Them

Potential Obstacles to Cover	Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are not thinking clearly or behaving safely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get help
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are occupied with keeping yourself safe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get yourself safe first, then attend to others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You cannot get or hold the person's attention and trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve other leaders, trained peers or family members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The person remains anxious even after being removed to safety and mentored about realistic ongoing and future risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider peer support or Employee Assistance Program involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The person's family is concerned about their safety (e.g., after a workplace violence issue or during a public health crisis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find ways to reassure family Include this topic in a work discussion about concerns Mentor the person to address their family's concerns

- Improve boundaries:
 - Mentor individuals who feel overwhelmed or overworked because of their trouble setting work boundaries
 - Give time off for those needing a break
 - Be more abrupt or directive if it is necessary to keep a coworker safe
 - Be a good role model for setting boundaries for yourself or your coworkers
 - Give permission and guidance about how to set boundaries and limits
 - Allow people to go home if needed
 - Find out what boundaries work best for employees
 - Mandate workers to delegate or get coverage when they take time off, so they are not worried about their workload while on vacation
 - Help workers make decisions at times when they may not make the best decisions for themselves
 - Show vulnerability yourself
 - Help people problem-solve solutions to situations in which they don't feel safe

What are Potential Obstacles to Cover and How are They Overcome?

Because the Cover function of SFA is often used in difficult and stressful situations, it may be useful to consider in advance obstacles to its use and ways to mobilize resources to overcome them. **Figure 9** shows some potential obstacles to Cover and how to overcome them.





What is Calm?

The SFA function of Calm works by slowing down and reducing stress reactions in both the body and mind. This promotes the recovery of normal mental and physical functioning and suppresses excessive physiological arousal. Actions that promote Calm **quiet** the body by slowing down or stopping major muscular activity and reducing heart rate and level of alertness. They **soothe** intense and distressing emotions such as fear, anger, guilt or shame. Calm actions help **compose** scattered mental focus by redirecting attention outwardly, away from anxiety and internal states of distress. And finally, Calm may be achieved by providing **rest** to help promote recovery and healing. *Figure 10* shows the major components of Calm.

When is Calm Needed?

Calm is needed when intense stress has interfered with an individual's ability to reduce their physiological activity level or emotional intensity. Typically, there are three categories of situations that require Calm:

1. When physiological arousal level remains too high, as demonstrated by:
 - Loss of physical control.
 - Excessive motor activity.
 - Hyperactivity or hypervigilance.
2. When cognitive functioning is disorganized, as demonstrated by:
 - Rapid, pressured speech (talking fast).
 - Reduced situational awareness and decision-making capacity.
 - Flight of ideas (thoughts flit from one topic to another).
 - Not responding appropriately to directions or questions.
 - Freezing in place.



Figure 10. Components of the Calm Function of Stress First Aid

CALM ACTIONS			
Quiet	Compose	Foster Rest	Soothe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop physical exertion • Reduce hyper-alertness • Slow down heart rate • Relax 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw attention outwards • Distract • Re-focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recuperate • Sleep • Time out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen empathically • Reduce emotional intensity

3. When negative emotions are out of control, as characterized by:

- Poorly controlled fear, anxiety or panic.
- Poorly controlled depression or anger.
- Intense guilt or shame.

Situations where Calm is needed can vary considerably. Some examples for need for Calm are:

- When someone is so overwhelmed with obligations or distractions that they “shut down,” rendering them incapable of doing their job
- After witnessing or being involved in a heated exchange
- When working with uncooperative patients
- After negative encounters with coworkers
- After finding patients dead or in sudden decline
- After crises in their personal life that make them agitated or anxious
- How Does Calm Work?

The Calm function of SFA promotes recovery and healing through:

- Reducing physical tension.
- Reducing mental and emotional effort.
- Reducing physiological activity that accompanies stress.

- Decreasing the intensity of negative emotions like fear and anger.
- Increasing positive emotions like a sense of safety and trust.
- Increasing the individual’s capacity for self-control.
- Restoring mental clarity and focus.

How is Calm Implemented?

As with Cover, there are wide range of non-verbal and verbal ways to implement Calm. Its application should always be tailored for the specific situation and person being assisted.

There are ways to *immediately* calm an individual who is experiencing different types of intense stress reactions, as well as longer-term ways to create a calm work environment.

Here are some non-verbal ways for inducing immediate Calm, from least to most intrusive:

- Establish a confident, calm, authoritative physical presence.
- Make eye contact.
- Stay with the person.
- Do not show fear, anger, impatience or disgust.
- Provide reassuring physical touch, if appropriate and not threatening.



Here are some verbal ways for inducing immediate Calm, from least to most intrusive:

- Use repetitive, soothing phrases, such as “Easy now...” or, “It’s okay...”
- Reassure of current safety and support, such as “I’m here with you...” or “You’re safe now...”
- Provide encouragement “You can do it...” or, “There you go...”
- Give a calming directive, such as “Slow down...” or “Try to relax.”
- Get the individual’s attention by saying “Look at me!” or “Listen to my voice!”
- Coach the person in slow breathing.
- Distract the person by having them focus on your questions or directions or encouraging them to think about something else.
- Get the individual to focus on your directions by asking to be briefed on what is happening.

Here are some longer-term ways for inducing Calm:

- Provide support, caring, and communication as a leader.
- For high stress situations, give clear information on what is needed, and specific instructions on what to do.
- Take charge but elicit and accept feedback from staff.
- Include staff in decision-making as much as is possible.
- Stay focused on yourself and your own stress level, to avoid escalating a sense of chaos and anxiety.
- Listen carefully to coworkers’ distressing thoughts, feelings, and memories.
- Ask what you can do to help, or what they think would help.
- Provide information about work plans, skills, and strategies that serve to make the individual feel more informed and in control.



- Discuss lessons learned and brainstorm solutions to deal with similar problems in the future.
- Maintain a culture of learning from all situations, rather than judging or punishing for mistakes made.
- Discourage and stop rumors.
- Let coworkers know that you or others have experienced similar stress reactions.
- Engage others who have been through similar situations to act as mentors.
- Make coworker support an accepted part of the culture.

Here are some Calm procedures for use with angry individuals:

- **Distract:** ask for help with a task or suggest taking a break, such as walking away to calm down, or doing something else for a while. State clearly that you or someone else will be available when they return.
- **Defuse:** ask the individual to look at the situation in a different way, see it from another's viewpoint or suggest that they talk to a friend or loved one
- **Distance:** separate those who are angry at each other or keep them otherwise engaged.
- **Deter:** if feeling uncomfortable or threatened, ask for assistance from security or others in the immediate vicinity, so as to deter the angry individual from further escalation of actions.

Here are some Calm procedures for those who are bereaved:

When a fellow coworker has experienced a loss of any kind, either on or off the job:

- It is often best to say nothing. Instead, offer a supportive presence. Stay present, stay quiet and listen.
- Don't try to make a bereaved individual feel. Just be there to support them.
- When a person wants to talk with you about the loss, just listening and being supportive can be

enough Don't feel compelled to talk. There are no "magic words."

- Check in to connect and assess progress periodically over the following week and months.

What are Potential Obstacles to Calm and How Are They Overcome?

Like Cover, Calm actions are most often put to use in already stressful situations. It can be helpful to identify specific obstacles to its implementation in advance and to consider ways to mobilize resources to overcome them.

Figure 11 shows the potential obstacles to Calm and how to overcome them.





Potential Self-Care Calm Actions

Here are a few potential Calm actions for improving self-care:

- Spend time with family and close friends and let them know what is calming for you ahead of time so they can better support you when needed
- Take a break from stressful situations for a short time
- Get organized and problem-solve to tackle problems directly
- Try to see things from a higher vantage point to gain a broader perspective
- Focus on:
 - Whatever helps you to keep focused on the present moment
 - Being realistic — for instance, focusing on appraising situations, others, and yourself in terms of specific realistic descriptions such as “sometimes/lately” versus more polarized descriptions such as, “never/always”
- Taking action to reduce stress reactions
- Acceptance
- What you’re grateful for
- What you can control
- Changing beliefs that don’t serve you
- When/how pain temporarily eases
- Prioritize simple strategies to calm down, such as:
 - Breathing
 - Exercise
 - Yoga
 - Social support
 - Reflection/meditation/yoga/prayer
 - Rewarding or pleasurable activities. While engaging in rewarding or pleasurable activities regularly may not result in feeling better immediately, over time it has been shown to be helpful in buffering stressful experiences. One analogy is that, like good nutrition, these activities can replenish or energize.

Figure 11. Potential Obstacles to Calm and How to Overcome Them

Potential Obstacles to Calm	Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are not yet calm yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use calming techniques on yourself, which will allow you to provide similar assistance to others
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are too distracted or busy to attend to the person in need	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get help
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You are surrounded by too much noise and chaos	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get to a safer, quieter place if possible
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Another person is increasing the individual’s stress with their loud and/or frantic behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct others away from the stressed person if they are not helping
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You cannot acquire and hold the person’s trust or attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage and involve others
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The person fails to calm down after using all available non-verbal and verbal techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consider peer support and/or EAP involvement



Potential Coworker Support Calm Actions

Here are a few potential actions to calm coworkers:

- Educate:
 - Acknowledge possible stressors and the potential need for support in a matter of fact way ahead of difficult events
 - Make others aware of the importance of tailored self-calming strategies
 - Provide information about reactions and coping
- For immediate calm:
 - Reassure by authority and presence
 - Show understanding
 - Ask for help to empower and distract the person
 - If possible, get the stressed person to look at you for a minute, then be very specific and detailed about what you want them to do
 - Use the person's name and communicate exactly what is needed in a calm, methodical voice
- For long-term calm:
 - Validate concerns.
 - Encourage the person to take brief breaks
 - Praise and give positive feedback
 - Allow the person to vent without judgment
 - Invite the person to meet outside the workplace, to give them a more confidential opportunity to talk away from work
 - Find ways to make meaning and memorialize together after losses
 - Help the person to prioritize and tackle problems directly
 - Foster a positive work environment by reducing gossip and negativity, not calling attention to a person's stress reactions, and acting upon concerns.



What is Connect?

After an intensely stressful event or time in someone's life, it can help to connect with those they trust, to talk about their experiences and perceptions, affirm their personal worth, and restore understanding and predictability in their lives. Connect works directly and indirectly to meet all of those needs.

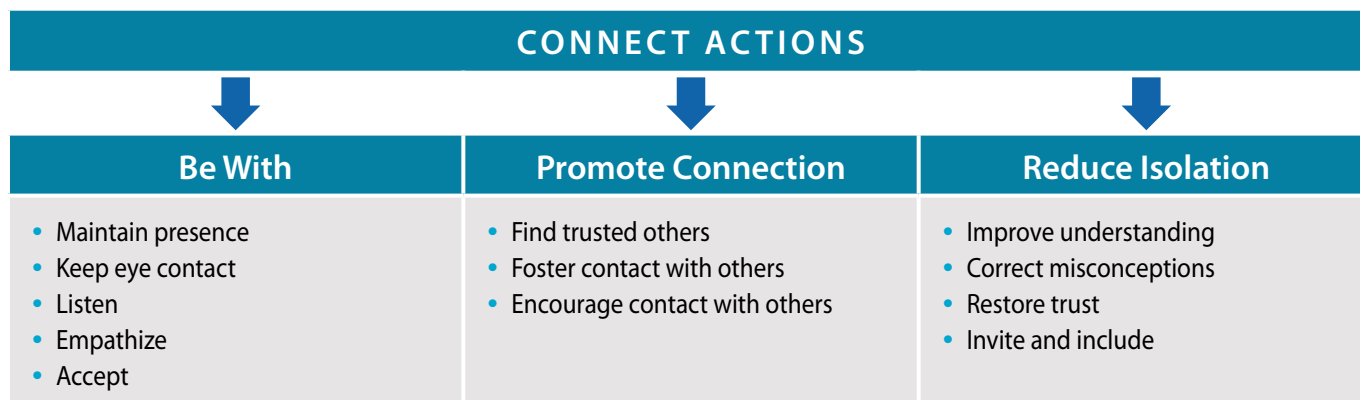
If organizations, families, and social networks always functioned perfectly, there would never be a need for the SFA Connect function. However, few people and organizations are able to function at optimal—or even adequate—levels during difficult times. Stress can create friction at work and within families and can generate persistent feelings of alienation and loss of trust. The purpose of Connect is to identify challenges to social support and attempt to correct them.

Figure 12 shows the three components of Connect. Although all overlap to some degree, each of these areas is a separate domain of social support and should be considered in every case. The most basic component of Connect is to **be with** the person by maintaining a steady presence and eye contact, and by listening and empathizing. When needed Connect also entails providing comfort to the person by encouraging or soothing them, or by validating the difficulty of what they are going through.

Promoting connection is another component of Connect, which may involve finding others who would be good social support, fostering contact with others by including the person in an activity or project, problem-solving obstacles that are getting in the way of receiving social support, or giving practical help and information that promotes connection with others.



Figure 12. Components of the Connect Function of Stress First Aid



Connect also includes procedures to **reduce the alienation and isolation** that can result from severe stress. This might be accomplished by working with other department members to improve their understanding of the individual's circumstances, correct misperceptions and restore trust in the individual.

When is Connect Needed?

Connect is closely related to the state of mutual trust, respect and communication that normally exists within health care organizations.

Severely stressed people usually withdraw from those around them and may lose some of the trust and camaraderie they previously enjoyed. Stressed leaders may also be less effective at promoting trust and communication within their teams.

Connect should be used whenever there is a relative loss of connectedness within an organization or office or an individual becomes socially isolated or alienated.

Connect may be helpful when a coworker:

- No longer seems like their usual self or appears uncomfortable around others.
- Seems ashamed of their stress reaction.
- Fears others in the unit have lost trust in them.

- Cannot stop thinking about the vivid details of a recent experience but is afraid to talk with other coworkers about them.
- Appears emotionally numb and detached or uninterested in interacting with coworkers as in the past.
- Fears that talking with others in the department will trigger painful memories about mutually experienced events.
- Can't stop feeling angry, so avoids being around others.
- Blames leaders or coworkers for a troubling event.
- Is blamed by other members of the unit for a troubling event.
- Feels exhausted and overwhelmed.
- Doesn't have sufficient energy to interact with others.
- Is dealing with the death of a family member or coworker
- Is experiencing a significant illness
- Is faced with work challenges such as disciplinary action or denial of a promotion.
- Has difficulty cultivating close friends because of work obligations.
- Has been avoiding taking vacation time.

Connect can be needed at either an individual or organizational level. When affected by stress, an individual



can feel a sense of being alienated from themselves, like they are a different person. For instance, someone might withdraw from their coworkers after a difficult case because of shame, exhaustion or loss. At the department level, disruption of connectedness can be caused by blame, lack of confidence in coworkers or leadership, shame and stigma, overwhelming exhaustion, or loss.

It is also very common for stress to cause disconnection from friends or family, for a number of reasons:

- Lack of a common identity through shared experiences and values.
- Loss of trust in themselves or in their coworkers.
- Feelings of shame, disappointment, or betrayal at work.
- Lack of confidence and competence in one's ability to make new relationships or rebuild existing ones
- Fear of being misunderstood or a burden to others when sharing negative experiences.
- Numbness, withdrawal and fear of being triggered by talking about events.
- An increase in difficult emotions such as anger or frustration, which can push others away.
- Lack of enough positive feedback or lack of supports or due to separations.
- Exhaustion, inability to talk about one's feelings, and difficulty putting experiences into words.

- Inability to ask for help and the belief that existing social support networks cannot meet their needs.
- Fear of triggering one's own stress reactions when providing support to others.
- Stigma, either in oneself or on the part of others, when asking for help.

How Does Connect Work?

Connect is not limited to providing one type of support. It serves to facilitate four types of social support:

- **Instrumental support:** providing material aid, such as help with daily tasks. Many people prefer this type of support to emotional support during difficult times.
- **Informational support:** providing relevant advice or guidance to help the individual cope with current difficulties.
- **Emotional support:** expressing empathy, care, and reassurance, and providing opportunities for venting and expressing emotions.
- **Inclusion:** Making the other person feel included in work or personal activities.

These different types of social support aim to support a stressed individual in whatever way fits the situation best, with the goal of reducing their stress and reducing their isolation or alienation.

Within an organization, Connect promotes:

- A common identity through shared experiences and values.
- Common experiences through sharing of perceptions, thoughts and feelings.
- Common understanding of events.
- Shared responsibility.
- Camaraderie.
- Reduced feelings of guilt, shame or betrayal.
- Greater forgiveness.
- Shared hope about the future.



How is Connect Implemented?

As summarized in **Figure 13**, the Connect function of SFA can be facilitated by following three steps:

1. Identifying resources for social support.
2. Determining obstacles to social support.

3. Intervening to remove those obstacles.

For individuals who lack sufficient trust or motivation to work on improving connectedness with others, consider activating a peer support team or Employee Assistance Program, if available.

Figure 13. Steps to Facilitate the Connect Function of Stress First Aid

Steps	Why Do It?	How to Implement It
1. Identify social support resources	To find the best possible sources of social support for an individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the person in the department who is most trusted by the individual • Identify someone at work who has been through a similar situation and could act as a mentor • Identify the most trusted friend outside the department or a trusted family member
2. Determine obstacles to social support	To understand why an individual is not using all available social resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask how they perceive current levels of social involvement and connectedness • Ask if they are satisfied with current levels of social support • Find out—from colleagues or the person themselves—what has changed in the individual that has led to isolation or alienation • Observe the individual interacting with others, looking for patterns that indicate problems with communication, respect, or trust their perceptions of an isolating individual
3. Intervene to remove obstacles to social support	To overcome obstacles in the individual or in others in order to foster better social connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently show concern and caring • Build teamwork • Be a good mentor or role model • Listen non-judgmentally, especially to experiences of loss, trauma or moral injury • Encourage or lead formal or informal social activities • Encourage the isolated individual to seek out greater social connectedness • Provide a model for social connectedness • Describe to the isolated individual the specific isolating behaviors you witnessed • Look for and confront misconceptions in the individual that might interfere with two-way trust and respect • Reassure the individual and confront and try to neutralize blame, guilt and shame • If specific problems are identified that are interfering with social connectedness, encourage active problem-solving • Have discussions that promote common perceptions and understanding • Reduce conflict, blaming, scapegoating and rumors in the department • Honor the fallen



Connect: Leader Actions

Leaders can support the SFA Connect function through the following actions:

- Show consistent caring and concern.
- Reassure and support individuals experiencing stress reactions.
- Be a good mentor or role model.
- Reduce conflict, blaming and rumors.
- Build teamwork.

Shame and guilt can be difficult obstacles to overcome in trying to connect with a stressed person. The support of mentors and leaders is especially important in these situations because they can tell the stress-injured person that they did a good job and didn't let anyone down. Leaders can also make sure the stressed person or team in stays involved in the work of the organization and reduce inter-organizational conflict, blame and rumors. For example, a supervisor or a trusted coworker can tell a stressed person "I saw you in action and you did not fail."

Other ways for leaders to implement Connect include identifying existing resources that can facilitate healing and recovery, mobilizing these resources, and assessing their

effectiveness. Leaders can also mentor or teach others to provide support. However, if a stressed person moves from the Orange Zone to the Red Zone, it's important for leaders to realize that a higher level of care is usually indicated.

What are Potential Obstacles to Connect and How are They Overcome?

The Connect action can be difficult to implement in certain situations. **Figure 14** lists a few possible obstacles and ways to mobilize resources to overcome them.

Potential Self-Care Connect Actions

Here are a few potential actions for improving the ability to Connect with others:

- Know the value of good mentors and friends.
- Surround yourself with people who are genuine, authentic, and honest.
- Make friends with people you can be yourself with and talk with about what bothers you.
- Brainstorm with family and friends to find the best way to support you during difficult times.
- Educate family and friends about the potential experiences that can occur in this job.

Figure 14. Potential Obstacles to Connect and How to Overcome Them

Potential Obstacles to Connect	Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them
You are too distracted or busy to attend to the affected person	Engage coworkers or peer support team members to help the affected person Connect the person with supportive family, friends and others
You cannot gain the trust and confidence of the affected person	Recruit peer support team members to assist
A coworker has recently lost one or more of their close friends	Encourage the communalizing of grief Encourage coworkers to engage with the grieving person
The person in need has been ostracized by others in the unit	Temporarily separate the person from others in the unit until the dynamic is more conducive to positive interactions. Address possible scapegoating
You have negative feelings toward the person in need	Talk to someone you trust about your feelings toward this person Ask someone else to provide SFA aid to that person



- Communicate with family and friends when you are feeling upset, so they will not worry or take it personally.
- Discipline yourself to have conversations with people who are familiar enough with you to know when something is bothering you.
- Reprioritize your schedule to spend more time with those who mean the most to you.

Potential Coworker Support Connect Actions

Here are a few potential actions for helping others connect:

- Leaders can build a foundation amongst their employees that fosters social support:
 - Hold employees accountable for treating each other with respect
 - Encourage employees to make connections at trainings or conferences.
 - Foster a team approach to problem-solve answers to challenging cases
 - Show validation and appreciation for employees
 - Foster opportunities for employees to socialize
 - Foster appreciation and peer support among coworkers
- Coworkers or leaders can make it a priority to connect after difficult situations:
 - If someone has retreated because of an incident, find ways to show them you're thinking about them and are available to talk if needed.
- Include the person in projects and create collaborative opportunities with coworkers, to get them back into doing something meaningful
- With introverts, give them time to recharge in their preferred way before facilitating reconnection with coworkers.
- If someone is stressed and resists getting support, don't be afraid to be more authoritative in getting them the help they need.
- In the middle of intensive stress, get the person or team engaged in activities that facilitate either physical movement or talking while you do other things. For instance, have people briefly report out on successes, loose ends, or their plan for the next 24 hours while walking or attending to actions that require physical movement.
- If someone is particularly stressed and isn't functioning well, foster understanding and support in coworkers.
- If someone is having significant stress in their personal life, offer practical support if possible.

Competence



What is Competence?

Stress can deplete a person's ability to function in occupational, personal and social domains. The SFA function of Competence focuses on enhancing and restoring these previous capabilities or facilitating the cultivation of new skills.

The term "Competence" is shorthand for "cultivate a sense that one can endure through difficult challenges" or "restore personal competence."

Competence is called for when it is clear that a person's stress reactions are caused by their inexperience or lack of skills on the job. Competence may also be used when Orange or Red Zone reactions deplete a person's—or a team's—ability to function or to respond effectively to stress. This SFA function focuses on **building or fostering** skills so that the affected individual or team can prevent or reduce stress reactions.

Research suggests that increasing self-efficacy, or Competence:

- Improves functioning, fosters better connections and supports, and augments individual and group morale.
- Reestablishes the confidence of others in the stressed individual.
- Helps to overcome injury to mind and spirit.
- Builds resilience.

Competence should be applied in situations in which:

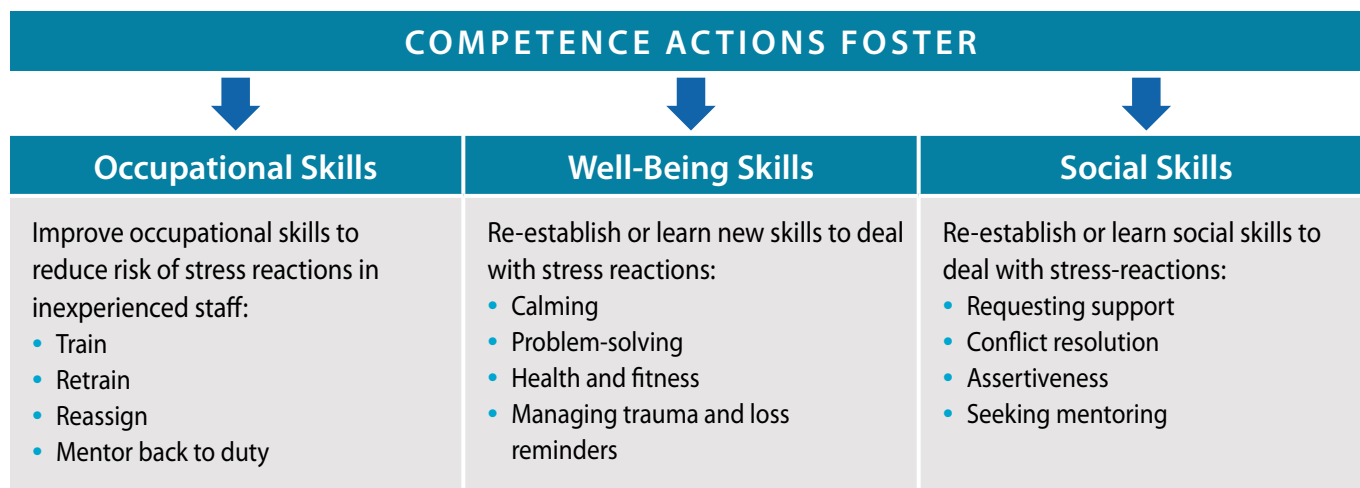
- **A specific lack of job experience, or job competence, is contributing to stress in the individual.**

Those who have less experience or training often have higher levels of stress.

Leaders can support less-experienced personnel by fostering a culture where ongoing mentoring and



Figure 15. Components of the Competence Function of Stress First Aid



training are available. This should serve to improve competence and reduce the stress that accompanies skills deficits.

Shame and blame after difficult calls and potentially traumatic events are reduced when supervisors create an environment in which all events are learning opportunities.

- **Intense stress has contributed to the loss of previous mental, emotional or physical capabilities.**

A severe stress injury may cause a brief period of significant mental confusion. This might also be followed by a longer period of slightly decreased ability to think clearly and sharply, or to control intense emotions.

- **Intense stress has created the need to develop new skills.**

Intense stress often presents new and significant challenges to an individual's capacity to cope and adapt. People may, for example, need to learn how to deal with reminders of life threat or loss. The intensity of Orange Zone experiences can also require the development of new communication

skills in order to maintain supportive connections with others during hard times.

Figure 15 depicts the three components of Competence. Individuals suffering the severe stress of life-threat trauma, loss, inner conflict and fatigue also experience a loss in their sources of resilience. As a result, the good feelings that stem from competence in their work and personal roles may also see a decline. The Competence function supports the reestablishment of important occupational, well-being, and social skills. It encourages individuals to learn new ways to manage their stress reactions.

The first component is to enhance *occupational skills*. This may require mentoring, respite from normal tasks or training for the stressed individual so that they may once again feel capable and derive self-esteem from their work. Competence can also be used to regain occupational skills that may have been damaged by stress injury. Recovering from stress-induced decrements in work functioning may require developing capabilities in the same way that physical therapy fosters recovery from physical injuries.

The next component is to re-establish or foster the development of *well-being skills* that can help the stressed individual better calm themselves, problem-solve,



improve health and fitness, and manage reactions to trauma and loss reminders. The goal is to bolster the ability to cope with life's challenges.

The last component of Competence is to improve *social skills*. This could mean developing new social skills as well as improving ones that have been damaged as a result of stress.

When is Competence Needed?

The need for Competence is signaled by:

- Indications that an employee does not have the experience or skill level to address the demands of the position, which creates stress reactions.
- Temporary or persistent loss of previous skills or abilities due to Orange Zone stress.
- An inability to cope with newly emerging life challenges due to symptoms of Orange Zone distress.

The following are examples of each category of the need for Competence.

1. Lack of experience or training can contribute to stress reactions and/or difficulty meeting job demands when:
 - Specific work challenges are new.
 - An employee does not have the experience or training to handle the specific emotional demands of the position.
 - An employee has not been trained well in certain aspects of the position.
2. Intense stress can cause the loss of previous skills or abilities, as demonstrated by:
 - Temporary loss of mental focus, concentration, or clarity during an Orange Zone crisis (e.g. foggy thinking, freezing).
 - Temporary loss of emotional or behavioral self-control (e.g. panic or rage responses under stress).



- Loss of ability to modulate physiological arousal due to intense stress (e.g. shaking, trembling, pounding heart or rapid breathing).
- More persistent decrements in cognitive functioning due to wear and tear stress (e.g. slowed memory recall, difficulty making decisions or solving problems).
- Loss of enthusiasm and motivation due to acute or chronic Orange Zone stress.
- Decrease in social aptitude due to loss of overall energy, sense of humor, fluency of speech, or range of emotional responses
- Loss of ability to see the “big picture.”

3. Intense stress can create new challenges to coping, such as:

- Trauma or loss reminders that cause feelings of dread, panic or anger.
- Disturbing memories of trauma, loss or moral injury that intrude into conscious awareness.
- Difficulty relaxing, slowing down or going to sleep.
- Difficulty maintaining an “even keel” emotionally when frustrated.

- Dread and desire to avoid re-exposure to situations that are reminiscent of trauma or loss.
- Stress-induced physical symptoms, such as low energy or changes in bowel functioning (e.g. diarrhea).

Here are some examples of a need for Competence:

- An employee is apprehensive about competence in particular cases.
- An employee struggling with personal stress is less attentive at work, refuses to accept help, and denies that there is a problem.
- New programs and requirements have been established at work.
- A public health crisis makes it difficult to cope.
- An employee experiences a significant stress reaction related to medical emergencies.
- An intern responding to an infectious disease patient becomes anxious because he has never had experience with that type of patient before and has concerns about his own safety.
- A nurse who was the target of a violent patient experiences persistent mental confusion and slowed, unclear thinking.





- A nurse who developed wear-and-tear stress injury loses the ability to stay calm when dealing with co-workers.
- A manager who loses a staff member because that person became infected with hepatitis C when they were stabbed by a violent patient becomes hesitant about sending staff into potentially hazardous situations, increasing the danger to the entire department.

How Does Competence Work?

The Competence action lays the foundation not only for recovery and healing, but also for growth and development. Competence can reduce the stigma associated with Orange or Red Zone stress by minimizing

the impact of stress on an individual's career. It also reduces the potential social consequences of Orange and Red Zone stress by identifying those interpersonal skills that have been diminished and facilitating their restoration as quickly as possible.

How is Competence Implemented?

Like an obstacle that suddenly appears on the road after we drive around a bend, Orange Zone stress can present a life challenge that sometimes cannot be circumvented without first stopping, backing up a bit and then changing course. Applying the Competence function of SFA means taking one step backward in order to move two steps forward. **Figure 16** describes the steps that can facilitate of the Competence function of SFA: Stop, Back up and Move forward again.

Figure 16. Steps that Facilitate the Competence Function of Stress First Aid

Step	Specific Intent	How to Implement it
1. Stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest, take time to recover • Identify skills decrements or challenges to functional capabilities • Stop doing what isn't working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, take a pause • Assess functional capabilities and limitations in occupational, social, and personal well-being spheres
2. Back up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresh old skills • Learn new skills • Explore new options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresher training • Leadership mentoring • Problem-solving • Training in new occupational, social or personal wellness skills • Enhance wellness through good nutrition, exercise, sleep, meditation, prayer, etc.
3. Move forward again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice refreshed skills • Practice and perfect new skills • Find new directions and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradually increase responsibilities and duties • Set achievable goals • Explore and trouble-shoot obstacles as they arise • Reinforce successes • Reinforce motivation to overcome challenges



In addition to providing training and mentoring in occupational skills, leaders should consider educating their staff in coping skills that can relieve Orange Zone stress. Examples of important well-being skill sets that should be considered as part of the Competence function of SFA include:

- Goal setting
- Problem-solving
- Physical exercise
- Sleep hygiene
- Relaxation and self-care
- Anger management and conflict resolution
- Attitude and belief adjustment

Competence: Leader Actions

Leaders are in a unique position to perform the Competence function of SFA in that their role allows them to take the following actions when needed:

- Reduce exposure to the particular stressors confronting a stressed employee.

- Assign employees to meaningful activities in order to increase sense of competency.
- Find a step-by-step strategy for the employee to resume productive contributions within the organization.
- If the person feels shame about their ability to perform their duties, implement remedial steps to build their sense of confidence and ease their anxiety.
- Work to reduce the employee's sense of helplessness or passivity.
- Find ways to integrate the employee back into their role within the department.
- Provide supportive, corrective feedback and resources.

For example, if an employee is avoiding some aspect of their duties, resulting in a hesitancy to act, a leader could devise a progressive program to gradually help them to resume full functioning.



Figure 17. Steps that Facilitate the Competence Function of Stress First Aid

Potential Obstacles	Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them
You do not have the time, trust of the individual or motivation to restore Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with others to support mentoring, retraining or skill building • Coordinate with others to trouble-shoot obstacles to restoring the individual's competence • Refer the individual to the peer support team (if your organization has one) or the EAP Provider
The individual does not recognize their need for the Competence action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeatedly but tactfully describe your observations about their functional capabilities and performance to the stressed person • Coordinate with others to do the same
The individual lacks motivation to retrain or develop new skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeal to the person's loyalty to coworkers, family members, and others who rely on them • Coordinate with other influential people in the individual's life to enhance motivation
Resources are not available for retraining or training in new skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively advocate for resources • Consult with others to brainstorm ways to address lack of resources
You are not sure you have sufficient skills to implement Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with others; seek mentoring • Refer individual to other levels of care

What are Potential Obstacles to Competence and How are They Overcome?

Restoring and enhancing Competence in all important life spheres can be challenging. **Figure 17** lists a few possible obstacles to Competence and ways to mobilize resources to overcome them.

Potential Competence Self-Care Actions

Here are a few potential actions for building competence:

- When you are having a difficult time, use positive self-talk and don't be afraid to ask for help and guidance from mentors.
- When tough things happen, establish new relationships with those who have been through similar situations.
- If you're under too much stress, do something that is

easy for you to give you a sense of accomplishment.

- Find people who can help you with engaging in healthy habits.
- Regularly reflect on the balance between the satisfaction of fulfilling work duties and the personal sacrifices you are making. Be prepared to adjust behaviors and expectations if that balance changes over time.

Here are a few potential actions for building Competence in oneself during prolonged stress:

- Make a commitment to *endure*, using whatever coping skills work best, as well as these potential actions:
 - Divert attention temporarily, using humor or acceptance.
 - Keep worrying circumscribed to actual potential risks and be disciplined about not letting fears derail important life tasks.



- Shift expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a “good day.”
- Clarify top priorities and focus on taking steps towards what is most important.
- Create routines of living and make every effort to keep to those routines.

Potential Competence Coworker Support Actions

Because leaders are in a particularly important position to help with Competence, many of the following examples of ways to build competence in others are best implemented by those in leadership positions:

- Be authentic, normalize stress reactions, and give simple examples of ways to cope.
- During highly stressful times or after mistakes, give extra attention, training, or mentoring.
- Connect the person who has Orange or Red Zone stress reactions to relevant resources to learn coping and well-being skills.
- Provide targeted training after mistakes and with skills that are used infrequently.
- Provide training in stress management and other well-being skills.
- If someone is stressed because they are overthinking, give them simple systematic ways to occupy their thoughts, like counting random numbers, or counting steps.
- Let people know that you would expect them to struggle in certain stressful situations.
- Mentor others by offering advice on how you got through similar situations.
- If an employee is struggling to learn a task or process, find someone who matches their personality — somebody they can relate to and communicate with — and assign that person to help them.
- For less experienced workers who are anxious when learning something new, start with less stressful tasks, and provide stepped escalation of potentially

stressful jobs in a thoughtful manner.

- Give the stressed individual responsibility little by little so that they do not feel overwhelmed.
- Remind the person of coping strategies and skills that have worked for them before.
- Encourage active coping.
- Help problem-solve and set achievable goals.
- After mistakes, help the person become more competent, to help with shaken confidence. Remind them that everyone is human and that all reactions are acceptable in the right context. Help them to figure out what they might do differently in the future.
- If the team’s sense of duty and commitment lead to overworking, make sure that they’re getting rest, and advocate for them.
- For those who need a break, reassign or temporarily suspend key job duties.
- Before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off, make sure taking time off is feasible for that individual.
- For those who have taken time off, integrate them back into duties by assigning responsibility in a stepped, gradual way, and help the person “recalibrate” their expectations and goals to meet current circumstances.



Confidence



What is Confidence?

Confidence is the final SFA action. It focuses on building realistic self-esteem and restoring hope, both of which are often diminished in the aftermath of intense or prolonged stress. Confidence is the capstone of the process of recovering from stress, enabling the stressed person to become stronger, more resilient and more mature as a result the experience.

Realistic self-confidence and self-esteem are earned by overcoming obstacles and hardships to master challenges and achieve goals. After a potentially traumatic event, supervisors and coworkers play a pivotal role in this process by supporting personnel as they make sense of what has happened. Through this growth process the stressed individual will come to understand their role in what happened and learn from mistakes (if any) that were made. If properly supported by department culture, they will develop a personal philosophy of learning from, rather than being crushed by, intensely stressful events. Personnel will also learn to set realistic goals, work to achieve those goals and maintain a positive but realistic self-image.

Figure 18 depicts the four components of the Confidence function of SFA: **Trust, Hope, Self- worth, and Meaning**. Each of these is a key to living a constructive, creative and fulfilling life— as an individual, and in relation to important others, institutions and values.

When is Confidence Needed?

Each of the SFA functions discussed up to this point addresses a potential need of an individual who is currently experiencing intense stress. It is important to note that for a person in the Orange Zone, these needs can be experienced as deep insults to self-esteem. This can be especially



Figure 18. Components of the Confidence Function of Stress First Aid

CONFIDENCE ACTIONS REBUILD			
Trust	Hope	Self-Worth	Meaning
Trust in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peers • Self • Leaders • Mission • Equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness of self • Forgiveness of others • Imagining the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief in self • Self-respect • Accurate self-concept 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making sense • Purpose • Faith

true within work cultures that prize self-sufficiency and autonomy. However, the strong connections present in the health care culture can be an asset as Confidence depends on a firm social base to be effective.

Here are a few real examples of a need for Confidence:

- Someone whose failure to take proper precautions contributes to the death of a patient feels extremely guilty and becomes self-destructive.
- An individual who develops a wear-and-tear stress reaction loses respect for leaders and becomes angry and irritable.
- Someone who is regularly exposed to significant life threat suffers lowered functioning, loses spiritual faith, and becomes depressed.
- A staff member realizes that they don't have all the answers and don't see patient improvement.
- Someone doubts their abilities after disciplinary action or lack of promotion.
- Someone experiences a leader responding dismissively to their concerns.
- During difficult times, an employee hears from a supervisor about when they make mistakes but doesn't hear about when they're getting something right.

- A person doesn't give themselves credit or appreciation for the work they are doing.
- A person imposes a sense of responsibility on themselves if something goes wrong, even if they have a supportive administration and did everything they were supposed to do.
- An employee's pending retirement causes issues with their sense of purpose.

Confidence addresses the need to restore a positive and sustainable self-image based on a realistic sense of one's own capabilities. The life challenges addressed by Confidence are common to all human beings throughout their lives. Almost everyone who experiences a reaction to stress will face a challenge in restoring and maintaining a positive self-image and can benefit from Confidence actions.

Confidence is directly related to having a sense of positive self-worth, meaning, trust and hope. The urgency and importance of the Confidence function of SFA become apparent when one considers the alternatives: the alternative to hope is despair, the alternative to trust is alienation, the alternative to meaning is emptiness, and the alternative to positive self-worth may be a sense of worthlessness.



How Does Confidence Work?

Confidence builds positive self-esteem, self-image, meaning, and hope by:

- Helping to restore confidence in self, leadership, organizational mission or core values and beliefs.
- Helping make sense of what has happened and mourn losses and limitations so that self-worth is restored.
- Exploring possible obstacles to confidence, and problem-solving solutions.

Confidence can be used for self-care or to support employees or coworkers. For self-care, Confidence may require viewing the situation differently, through self-reflection, reading, consultation with respected others, or a request for support from supervisors or coworkers.

Potential Self-Care Confidence Actions

Here are a few potential actions for building self-confidence:

- If you unfairly blame yourself for a challenging situation, use positive self-talk to reframe the way you look at the event.

- Remind yourself of other successful cases to boost confidence when faced with those that are less successful.
- Even in the most severe cases, focus on ways that you were able to make a positive impact.
- Adopt a long-term perspective.
- Don't take perceived failures personally.
- Use small triumphs to build confidence. If you have self-doubt, get advice from self-help books.
- After particularly traumatic situations or losses, don't push yourself to "process" the situation in any particular timeframe. If something triggers you, give yourself time and space to think it through, integrate it, talk to someone, and have emotions about it. Find ways to make sense of the situation so that you don't get stuck in suffering.
- Use the wisdom gained from difficult experiences to reconfirm your values, make changes in your life, appreciate what you value, or help others.



Building Confidence in Coworkers

Building confidence in others often entails helping them change their perspective or reframe the way they think about themselves, their life and the world. It also usually involves helping them make sense of what happened after adverse events so that their reactions to those events don't bleed over into the next event or experience. It may entail helping them find forgiveness and trust in themselves, the people around them, their values and their spiritual beliefs.

Confidence actions are most successfully implemented when there is an empathic, honest relationship between the person providing support and the stressed coworker. Confidence works best when the person providing it is respected, so that their words carry weight, their praise has an impact, and their challenges to the stressed person's distorted thoughts and perceptions are genuinely considered. Tapping into

respected values and ideals may also prove helpful. **Figure 19** lists some possible procedures to develop Confidence.

Potential Leader Actions for Building Confidence in Others

Leaders play an important role in building trust and self-worth by developing clear lines of communication; reducing stigma; offering encouragement and praise; fostering and supporting efforts that will alleviate and mitigate stress; and helping to re-establish confidence in coworkers who are experiencing stress reactions.

Here are a few potential leader actions for laying a foundation that builds confidence in others:

- Set realistic expectations about the need to follow procedures but be open to taking a lessons-learned approach about deviations from protocol.

Figure 19. Steps to Perform the Confidence Function of Stress First Aid

Confidence Step	Specific Intent	How to Implement It
Assess needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess self-image, understanding of meaning of life events, level of trust in self and others, and hope for the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen empathically • Develop a trusting relationship • Ask questions and offer tentative observations and understandings
Connect with resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restore depleted physical, psychological, social, and spiritual resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with all possible sources of needed resources • Address financial problems, family problems, occupational problems, health problems, etc. • Identify obstacles and find solutions to overcome them
Encourage growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relieve excessive guilt or shame • Promote forgiveness of self and others • Establish new meaning and purpose • Set new directions and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for and confront distorted concepts or perceptions of self or others • Encourage the individual to see events through the eyes of others, to walk in the shoes of others • Appeal to trusted authority or spiritual figures • Encourage making amends, or giving to others • Encourage learning and education



- Discuss your preferred values for working with each other and stress that you will stick together in adverse circumstances.
- Focus on learning opportunities.
- Confront stigma about stress reactions.
- Be a role model to show co-workers healthy ways of dealing with difficult situations.
- Remind people of the ideals and values that drew each of you to the work you are doing.
- Give regular positive feedback, and remind them about their positive impact, values, skills and competence.
- Give them tasks that they can be successful at.
- Foster and support taking steps to alleviate and mitigate the harmful effects of stress.

Leaders can also help someone with significant stress reactions with the following actions:

- Allow the person to be reassigned or take a break from work.
- Be patient and open to the possibility that the person can fully return to work duties.
- Gradually increase duties and responsibilities when the person returns to work.
- Look for positive changes in the person's behavior.

- If necessary, help to re-establish the trust of coworkers in the person by providing accurate information, reducing rumors and gossip, being a non-judgmental, accepting role model, and discussing coworker's fears and concerns.
- Mentor the person to consider other options if they continue to struggle, including leaving their current position.

What are Potential Obstacles to Confidence and How are They Overcome?

Restoring and enhancing Confidence is one of the greatest challenges of SFA. **Figure 20** lists a few possible obstacles and ways to overcome them by mobilizing resources.

Even under the best of circumstances, it may take concerted effort over a long period of time to restore Confidence. Both the stressed individual and the person providing support may have to be patient and accepting that their efforts will only bear fruit over time.

Care should be taken to respect boundaries with the stressed person. If providing the appropriate assistance is not possible, it is important to know what resources are available, and to be creative in finding an appropriate person to connect with the person, such as a friend, counselor or a trusted mentor.

Finally, in promoting Confidence, it is essential to continuously monitor the person for possibly dangerous thoughts or impulses. If necessary, take action to ensure their safety and the safety of others by making a referral for a behavioral health evaluation and possible treatment.

Potential Coworker Support Confidence Actions

Here are a few potential actions for building confidence in others:

- Be authentic, empathic, and nonjudgmental. For instance, make simple, nonjudgmental statements such as:
 - "I can understand why you're feeling this way, given



Figure 20. Potential Obstacles to Confidence and How They are Overcome

Potential Obstacles to Confidence	Mobilize Resources to Overcome Them
The individual is unable to grieve the death of a friend or coworker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and confront excessive self-blame or blame of others • Point out the self-destructive nature of stalled grief • Encourage the individual to imagine how the deceased person would want them to feel, or how they would want the other person to feel if the situation were reversed. • Encourage the individual to talk to trusted friends or family members • Encourage physical memorials and ceremonies
The person has endured a loss they feel is irreparable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage supportive relationships with others who have sustained similar losses and found new hope • Identify and confront excessive self-blame or blame of others • Encourage the learning and mastery of new skills and abilities
The individual feels unforgiveable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the making of amends, even if that will be a life-long endeavor • Invoke an authoritative social or spiritual image to promote forgiveness • Consistently point out the self-destructive nature of self-blame
The individual cannot forgive others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently point out the self-destructive nature of blame and of revenge fantasies • Encourage the individual to learn more about and empathize with those who are blamed • Appeal to core values

your strong values,”

- “I know this can be rough,”
- “What can I do to help?” or “What would be helpful?”
- Help them focus on the present.
- Encourage them to remember their personal strengths, positive relationships, spiritual change, appreciation for life, or other things they value.
- Help them make meaning of difficult events or losses by encouraging them to find ways to memorialize or honor those events or losses.
- When a person is struggling with lack of confidence, guilt, or self-doubt, help them counter their guilt by normalizing their reactions and letting them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions.

- Be willing to talk with them as many times as they need, give them relevant reading materials, and connect them to treatment or to people who have dealt with similar situations.

It is important to meet people where they are, without preconceptions or pre-determined solutions. During the course of a career in health care, workers must perform hard work—grieving losses, giving up immature ways of viewing themselves and their relationship to the world and forgiving themselves and others for their failings. It may only be through the empathic but honest support and feedback provided by a trusted individual over time that people recovering from intense stress can find sustainable self-worth, meaning, purpose, trust and hope for the future.



Stress First Aid Group Format



THE SFA ACTIONS CAN ALSO BE USED in a more structured, educational way for a group of people who have been involved in a potentially traumatic event. This may look similar to a group debriefing model because it is structured and done in a group setting, but there are some important differences.

1. The discussion is about how the experience is affecting sense of safety, calm, connectedness, competence, and confidence since the event, in the here and now.
2. The event is not revisited or described in detail. A person may describe how an event may have disrupted sleep or created intrusive thoughts, but the frame of the discussion will be on how the event is impacting them now.

SFA can be used in an informal group at any time, in whatever way makes sense, or these types of steps can be followed SFA in a group setting:

1. If the group is familiar with SFA, state that you will be using the SFA framework to organize the discussion.
2. If the group is not familiar with SFA, let them know that you will be organizing the discussion around five essential elements that research shows are both human needs that can be affected by difficult events, and also potentially helpful elements for getting through difficult events.
3. Identify the incident
4. Explain that the focus of the group will be on determining how people have been affected by the event, and on peer support



5. Say something like, “I want to get a sense of ways that you may have been effected by ____.”

Figure 21 has a number of possible questions that may help identify how each of the core SFA Functions have been affected by an incident. None of the questions are mandatory; they may be chosen based on the best fit the context and changed as needed depending on the situation and leader style.

After the discussion prompted by the questions, determine what else may be needed with a question such as: “We have talked about the ways that this experience has affected your sense of Safety, Calming, Connections, Competence, and Confidence. Is there anything else that that you wish to share?”

Include a short discussion about healthy coping, sleep, minimizing negative coping, and available resources.

Assess what else might be helpful with a question like: “Moving forward, is there any other support I could help you obtain at this time, from me, EAP, or anyone else?”

The SFA model can also be used in a group setting when a number of particularly stressful incidents occur over the course of a certain time period. A supervisor or leader could ask their employees the following questions to get an idea of how the cumulative stress has been affecting them:

Over the past (time frame):

1. What have been your greatest challenges, hassles, or frustrations?
2. What have been your greatest rewards or successes?
3. What does it mean to be a (name role) in this workplace?





Figure 21. Potential Stress First Aid Group Questions

SFA Function	Suggested Potential Questions
Safety (Cover)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the incident affected your sense of safety in any way? If so: • How has the incident affected your sense of safety at work? • How has the incident affected your sense of safety at home? • How has the incident affected your sense of safety in the community? • Sometimes people who have gone through similar things say that it made them feel apprehensive or afraid. How has it been for you?
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the incident affected your ability to feel calm or steady? If so, how? • What changes have occurred regarding sleep, feelings of being on edge, or ability to keep calm? • Sometimes people who have gone through a similar event have found it helpful to build more calming activities into their schedule for a period of time, like taking a break, going for a walk, talking with someone, or slowing down their breathing. • Do you think this would be helpful for you? • If so, what activities do you prefer?
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has there been an impact on how you talk with one another, on work morale, or in connecting with family and friends? If so, what have you noticed? • Who would you feel comfortable talking about this with? • Who are the people in your world that you trust to share your tough days with? • You don't have to tell me who the people are, but I want to make sure that you have someone who can be there for you. • Has anyone you know done or said something that really helped? If so, can you share it with us?
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you noticed any difference in your ability to do your job or complete tasks? If so, what differences have you noticed? • Have you noticed any difference in your ability to: • Get along with your coworkers • Connect with your family • Get along with your friends • Have you noticed any difference in how you are taking care of yourself? Have there been changes in diet, exercise routine, sleep, taking time for fun, etc.? • What are some things that you have done to cope that have been helpful in the past?
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has there been any change in your confidence in your ability to do your job in the same way as before the incident? What about your confidence in equipment or leadership? If so, what are the changes? • Does this event/incident hold special meaning or connect with other experiences in any way? If so, what is the meaning? What experiences does it connect with?





Summary: Stress First Aid



STRESS FIRST AID ACTIONS ARE TO BE USED AS NEEDED with coworkers who are experiencing either significant distress or impairments in functioning caused by stress reactions. SFA should be incorporated into work in a natural, seamless way, and implemented when needed. In most cases, it is not necessary to provide all the SFA actions. A summary of SFA is provided on the following page.





SFA Functions	Possible Actions
Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess current level of distress and functioning • Assess immediate risks • Assess need for additional SFA interventions or higher levels of care • Reassess progress (Re-Check)
Coordinate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who else should be informed of situation • Refer for further evaluation or higher levels of care, if indicated • Facilitate access to other needed care
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure immediate physical safety of stressed person and others • Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort • Protect from additional stress (ensure respite)
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce physiological arousal (slow down heart rate and breathing, relax) • Reduce intensity of negative emotions such as fear or anger • Listen empathically to the individual talk about experiences • Provide information that calms
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage connection to primary support people • Help problem-solve to remove obstacles to social support • Foster positive social activities within crew
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help mentor back to full functioning • Facilitate rewarding work roles • Arrange for retraining, if necessary • Encourage gradual re-exposure to potentially stressful situations
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor back to full confidence in self, leadership, mission and core values • Foster the trust of coworkers and family members in the individual



Appendix A:

Using Active Listening Skills to Support Coworkers





Verbal Ways to Establish Rapport

There are many possible ways to establish rapport verbally. Here are some suggestions:

- Use positive, nonjudgmental questions such as:
 - “What’s on your mind?”
 - “Can you say more about that?”
 - “What would you like to talk about today?”
 - “You seem sad; do you want to talk about it?”
 - “What most concerns you?”
 - “What thought keeps coming back to you? What do you keep telling yourself?”
 - “How have you been feeling since...?”
 - “Have you been through anything like this before? How is this similar/different?”
 - “How is this affecting how you feel about yourself, your relationships, and/or the world?”
- Use brief supportive responses to what the person is saying, such as, “I see,” “Yes,” “Right,” “Okay,” and “I hear you,” to convey attention and understanding.
- Pay close attention to what the person is saying.

Nonverbal Ways to Establish Rapport

Nonverbal actions and cues can sometimes be just as important as verbal ones in establishing rapport. Some examples of nonverbal approaches are to:

- Use a relaxed yet attentive posture to put a person at ease.
- Use brief periods of silence to give the person moments for reflection or prompt the person to open up more and fill gaps in the conversation.
- Occasional head nodding for encouragement, a facial expression that indicates concern and interest, and encouraging movements of the hands that are not distracting can be helpful.
- Use culturally appropriate eye contact to communicate attention.
- Create a culturally appropriate amount of space for comfortable personal interaction.

Do’s and Don’ts of Establishing Rapport

The following recommendations involve what you should generally NOT do.

Don’t:

- probe for details or insist that the person must talk
- give advice instead of asking the person what works for them
- avoid talking about what is bothering the person because you don’t know how to handle it
- quickly rush to tell the person that they will be okay, that they should “move on” or that they should “look for the “silver lining”
- daydream about or discuss your own personal experiences instead of listening to the person
- judge the person to be weak or exaggerating because they aren’t coping as well as others are or as you think they “should” be

In contrast, these recommendations can facilitate rapport and recovery.

Do:

- find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- show interest, attention and care
- show respect for each individual’s reactions and ways of coping
- talk about expected reactions to crises and about healthy coping.
- be free of expectations or judgments
- acknowledge that stress reactions can take time to resolve
- help brainstorm positive ways to deal with stress reactions
- believe that the person is capable of recovery
- offer to talk or spend time together as many times as needed
- ask for help if you feel you can’t help the person enough



Encouraging Conversation

Paraphrasing means succinctly summarizing what the other person has said, to let them know that you accurately heard what they said. It does not involve changing or adding to the message. The advantage of paraphrasing is that it allows the person to confirm that you are correct or provide additional clarification if needed. It can sometimes also encourage further conversation.

Reflecting feelings involves listening to what the other person has said with an ear towards feeding back to them the emotional tone of what they are saying. The advantage of reflecting feelings over paraphrasing is that it lets the person know that you are aware of how they are feeling

and can encourage emotional expression. When reflecting feelings, include only what you hear clearly stated, without probing, interpreting or speculating. Some examples of sentence stems that encourage reflection of feelings are:

- "It sounds like..."
- "From what you're saying, I can see how you would be..."
- "It sounds like you're saying..."
- "You seem really..."
- Make sure your reflections are correct by using sentences like:
 - "Tell me if I'm wrong ... it sounds like you ..."
 - "Am I right when I say that you ..."





Supportive comments allow you to convey your care for the person by commenting with empathy on what they have said. Some examples of sentence openers that convey support are:

- “No wonder you feel...”
- “It sounds really hard...”
- “It sounds like you’re being hard on yourself...”
- “It is such a tough thing to go through something like this.”
- “I’m really sorry this is such a tough time for you.”
- “We can talk more tomorrow if you’d like...”

Empowering comments or questions allow you to move the conversation forward into encouraging the person to consider their strengths and brainstorm ways to move forward. Some examples of sentence openers that convey empowerment are:

- “What have you done in the past to feel better when things got difficult?”
- “Are there any things that you think would help you to feel better?”
- “I have an information sheet with some ideas about how to deal with difficult situations. Maybe there is an idea or two here that might be helpful for you....”
- “People can be very different in what helps them to feel better. When things got difficult for me, it helped me to...” OR: “Some of the other people I’ve worked with have found it is helpful to...” “Would something like that work for you?”

Adapted from: Brymer, M., Jacobs, A., Layne, C., Pynoos, R., Ruzek, J., Steinberg, A., ... & Watson, P. (2006). Psychological first aid: Field operations guide. National Child Traumatic Stress Network and National Center for PTSD.



Appendix B:

SFA Examples from the Field





HERE ARE SOME QUOTES FROM EMPLOYEES

in health care, probation, and first responder settings, regarding either the need for SFA or how to implement SFA. These individuals were recommended for SFA focus groups because of their reputation as skilled leaders, peers, or mentors.

Need for Check Examples

"I see stress reactions in group meetings. People who normally might have been engaged and instead are just on their phone or checked out."

"I've seen ultimatums, where individuals say, "I'm not going to do this anymore," and just dig in their heels."

"I think it's an energy too. There's an energy feel to people. It's almost a hollow look and hollow feel. They're just checked out. But you don't even have to see them sometimes and see their face. You can just feel it. I don't know."

Examples of Indicators of Significant Stress

- Weight loss/gain
- Loss of interest in things that once mattered
- Emotional extremes
- Sleeplessness
- Decrease in the quality of work
- Increased work errors
- Anxiety attacks
- Depression
- Stress induced seizures
- Marital stress
- Increased absenteeism
- Medical symptoms with an undetermined cause
- Short temper
- Decrease in productivity
- Increased use of sick leave
- Lack of motivation
- Frustration towards work requirements/change in procedure
- Increased isolation

- Increased complaining
- Poor work performance
- Making more mistakes, even with simple tasks
- Increased drinking
- Giving up
- Trouble keeping up with workload
- Sending emails very late at night
- Forgetfulness
- Hypervigilance
- Less tolerance
- Sleep disruption
- Keeping office doors closed
- Absenteeism
- Lateness
- Irritability
- Engagement with others dropping off
- Closed off body language
- Distorted thinking
- Reduced self-awareness
- Reduced interpersonal boundaries (oversharing of information)
- Less volunteerism
- Uncharacteristic negative changes in social behavior (e.g., calling attention to others' behavior in front of coworkers)





Checking on Self Examples

"I really think a lot of what this is, is permission to take care of ourselves."

"I have made a very conscious effort to keep tabs on myself. The big stress indicators for me are fatigue, having a hard time focusing, being short on the fuse, not exercising, and not doing the things I like."

Checking on Coworkers Examples

Build a Foundation:

"You have to have a foundation of relationship in order to be able to most effectively check on people. At the end of the day, if we're not comfortable talking to one another or we don't even have the relationship to even care about one another on that level, none of this is going to work."

"The groundwork or the foundation that you lay at the human level is going to make a difference when it's time to have a hard discussion or conversation that's way below the surface. Having something else to engage people on a personal level outside of the profession is

hugely important. Caring about your people beyond the task and duty is one of the key top-rated leader characteristics in research studies."

"Leaders may be afraid to ask how they can help because they don't want to promise what they can't provide. Don't be afraid to ask staff about their biggest challenges. But also ask them what is working and ask what they think is needed to solve problems. Let them know up front that you might not be able to fix everything, but that together as a team you can find ways to creatively adapt to challenges."

"In supervising staff, I have a one-on-one meeting with each of them each month just to talk about work stuff or personal stuff, and how they're doing."

"When I was starting, I was on a tough case and my supervisor will reach out to me to say, 'Hey, how are you doing?' I can't emphasize the important of this enough."

"I want to make sure that we're setting up a system where people feel like it's okay to reach out. We also need to set up a system where it's not only okay to reach out, but where we're going to reach out to you so that you don't have to be the one to reach out."

"We had a new boss who came in and literally went door to door, went through the entire district, sat down with each person and said that he wanted to hear from them what was going right, what was going wrong, or how they felt, and that's a really great way to start a job. Even small things like giving a lunch, just to bring people together, talking about late night text messages, and setting aside time to have lunch starts to build a foundation."

"I consider most of the misbehavior or bullying behavior on my team to be the result of unhealed Orange Zone





stress. Then we can approach it as a stress injury that needs mitigation, rather than criticism.”

“When I walk on unit, there are two things that show stress: 1. If there’s a big open bag of candy, and 2. If I can’t hear ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ or ‘I appreciate.’ When people say ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ and ‘I appreciate’ consistently, it changes the tone and builds teams.”

Find Practical or Creative Ways to Start the Conversation

“I use Check with employees regularly – they don’t even know I’m doing it. I will pursue a line of questioning if there is two-way communication and try and get down to what’s going on. It’s active listening. I will instead start a line of communication, get them talking, and look for words, non-verbal signs, and cues as to how they are doing.”

“If you have a close working relationship, let the person know that you have noticed that they don’t seem to be themselves, or seem preoccupied, and it looks like they could use a break. Then invite them to get lunch, grab a cup of tea, etc.”

“I usually start with, ‘How’s it going for you?’ I see if they can offer some information that will give a lead-in. If that doesn’t work, I try to start with something positive like, ‘Hey you’re doing well but it seems like you may be struggling here, is there anything I can help you with?’ It kind of depends on if you know the person very well or not. I might say, ‘I’ve heard what you’re going through.’ Having a specific example helps.”

“You can have a meeting and say, ‘Okay. You know, it sounds like most people in here are sort of Yellow right now heading into Orange. Is that where you guys are?’ kind of thing. ‘Who is stressed out?’”



“There are many different ways to check in. I’ve had management come to my office, close the door, and just ask how I’m doing about a specific situation. I’ve had coworkers walk with me as we leave work together and just ask how things are with a situation.”

“In our office, we have this little stuffed crab. When people are acting a little crabby, somebody will walk by and throw the crab on their desk. It’s meant to lighten them up a little bit. It’s just to acknowledge ‘Hey, we all see that you’re having a bad day.’ But when the crab is thrown on a desk it’s not as serious. It can be whatever you make it. So it’s an easy way to kind of check in.”

“One person in my office who was worried about a coworker left her stress ball on someone’s desk and a note that said ‘It looks like you might need this more than I do. If you want to have a conversation let me know.’ They didn’t have to sign their name because it was a particular stress ball that was obviously hers, and everyone knew it. It gave the person the space to decide whether they want to talk or not, but they didn’t feel pressured to talk at that moment.”



"One of my supervisors, as a way to break the ice and get a conversation started in a light way, would say, 'Everyone has their Kryptonite, even Superman. It seems like you've got the Kryptonite in your life right now.'"

"We just had two people that just started sitting down having lunch together. Then it was three people. Then I pop in every once in a while. Then the next thing you know it's 15 people. You just have to start somewhere."

"Sometimes you've just got to be the person to open the door and say, 'Hey, are you doing all right?' And maybe your follow-up is, like, 'I don't have to be the person you need to talk to. By all means, tell me to leave, but go talk to somebody you trust. I'm just letting you know I'm recognizing something is not right here.'"

"Most of our office partner up on work cases when they can, and it's a great opportunity for them to share experiences and that's when a lot of sharing goes on, whether it's about family, whether it's about the job."

"I've done after-hours calls where I've called and said, 'Okay. We're out of work. Feel free to vent now.'"

"A text just shows that, even though you're outside the work hours, you're thinking about that person. That is so important."

"When my intention is to provide some Stress First Aid, I realize that the folks who are closer in age and position may do a better job. It doesn't raise a threat flag because they're used to having a normal conversation with them. When it's with the supervisor who typically gives them things to do or enforces disciplinary actions, it raises that flag. If you've had enough normal conversations with people, it's less likely to raise a feeling of threat that it's about disciplinary action."

Check in During or After Challenges

"When someone is working on a high-risk case, a good supervisor asks, 'Hey, how are you doing? Are you OK?'"

"I had a particularly traumatic loss at work, and my supervisor called and asked me how I was doing because she knew how much I had been affected. She said, 'Don't be upset. I know you've been working really hard and things just happen.'"

"We had a particularly hard situation happen at work and one of my coworkers said to another, 'I'm in the





Orange Zone. What about you?’ And the other one said, ‘Me too, and all that tells us is that we’ve got to watch out for each other.’ And then they briefly talked about the SFA actions so that people remembered to use them for themselves, for somebody else, and with their family.”

“We had someone at work whose mother had some surgical complications and she was very stressed and emotional. She wasn’t ready to talk about it, but we sent periodic text messages saying, ‘Hey, thinking about you. Want to make sure everything is okay. We’re here for you.’ When she came into the office, because people had reached out to her, she was very comfortable discussing the experience, and has processed it well. Just that little bit of letting her know ‘Hey, you’re on our mind’ helped her to know that she had love and support no matter where she was.”

Check in After Noticing Patterns

“If you start to see someone who’s only sending e-mails between midnight and three in the morning and it’s a pattern, then you probably want to check in with them and say, ‘Hey, how are you doing? How is it going? I know it’s not a time zone thing, so let’s really talk about this.’”

“We are often as a group more direct, for instance we go straight to the person and just make an observation by saying, ‘Is everything OK? I’m just checking on you.’ The same thing is true when we notice withdrawal and isolation. We just knock.”

“As a supervisor, when I think reduced performance might be tied to other things, I might say, ‘Let’s take a walk down and grab a cup of coffee.’ I do this because, firstly, if other people are aware of performance issues, sometimes they will jump to conclusions seeing me talking to that person. Secondly, that person might be more open to talking about things if we’re outside the workplace.”



“When something seems out of place in a person’s demeanor, I will pick up on it. Maybe one day they just need a pick me up. I try to be mindful and observant as a leader in order to be there for them at times like that.”

“During the Covid-19 pandemic, some nurses and physicians were being furloughed because they were not wearing masks. Managers were told to punish workers who weren’t wearing protective equipment. Instead, we asked what was going on in the system. We found out that the hospital had bought cheap goggles that don’t work and fogged up and nurses wanted to see patients. They were willing to risk splash to take care of patients. We started a Check process that resulted in staff feeling supported instead of punished, and a problem-solving dialogue.”

“SFA creates an improved ability to identify issues, come together, and problem solve solutions. It calls attention to systems level issues that are problematic for the workforce. Rather than managers worrying that if they ask what’s going wrong, they will have to fix it, it’s more about having a dialogue. For instance, staff can report that there are activities or issues that are



putting them into the Orange. Then those issues can float up and be discussed. 'A department is in Orange because. . . 'The hospital is in Orange because. . .' It's not the old model of sucking it up, taking two breaths, and going back to work. It's a model of identifying and addressing issues as a team."

Check in After Noticing Signs of Distress

"Someone was on medical leave and she came in for a monthly potluck. Her appearance and conversation were not consistent with someone who was coping well. So we had a frank discussion; she was very receptive and pursued assistance through EAP, and we checked in frequently. Now she's doing great."

"We're quick to say, 'You need to take care of yourself.' There's a sense that while you're on the job you should be able to handle everything. To me, that's nonsense because we all have been affected somewhere along the line. At some point people just aren't able to take care of themselves, and as a coworker that's a good time to reach out and help them because they can't do it themselves at that moment. They're not seeing it. They're too close to it."



Need for Coordinate Examples

"There was some mistrust about utilizing EAP because of how it might affect their career. And even when we've had staff in divorce proceedings who went to counseling, they were worried about that being put on their background."

"We're rural so we contract with different treatment providers who then end up on the EAP list. Sometimes our staff is not comfortable in talking to a local counselor who they see in other settings."

"EAP staff really don't have an understanding about our culture. And in rural environment, many don't feel like there was anybody locally who could provide the needed services."

"We have a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team with people who have extensive training in coworker support, and they reach out to help employees, but there aren't enough trained staff throughout the District to reach everyone that needs assistance."

Coordinate Examples

Set Up A Variety of Resources in Advance

"The vast majority of people are going to be helped by you being a human being and just having a listening ear. It helps just knowing somebody cares and has some simple advice. However, when you run into things where you don't know what to say, it is helpful to have the resources to be able to talk to a local clinician, mentor, coworker teams, or somebody else who provides Stress First Aid and ask them what they think."

"I consider it preventive maintenance to talk with a trained counselor, to be able to have longevity in this job. People don't mind doing preventive maintenance on the car with the idea it's going to protect the car for



long-term use, but we don't think of ourselves in that way. And what you're talking about is like regular tune-ups, changing the oil. All the things you need to do for cars we don't think about for ourselves as often."

"One does not have to be identified as a trained 'coworker support' person to be helpful, but it may lead to greater confidence in reaching out to coworkers."

"We used life coaching because I needed someone who was trained, understood our business, and wasn't a therapist. Coworker support falls in line with something like that."

"Our primary referral process has been to get someone to a counselor, but what I found to be as critically important was referral to support groups and self-help groups. Maybe they don't need to go to a therapist. Maybe they're suffering from a grief situation. Maybe they need to go to a church. I think sometimes we get so locked into professional help we forget that some of these other programs are just as helpful."

"We have found a free, 24-hour, confidential toll-free number specifically for people in our lines of work. They have a better sense of our culture and experiences. We have also found other hotlines, texting support services, and telehealth services that can serve our staff."

"I've found that working over the phone with a very competent life coach has been as effective as meeting with someone in person."

"I have had luck coordinating with local mental health professionals in the community who are willing to provide low-cost services to those who work in our settings."

"I would recommend testing the system prior to a problem. Start dialing numbers and find out if everyone



in the employee assistance chain knows what to do. We can test the strategy and come up with our work-arounds and alternative plans before there is the immediate need for help."

"We have a contact list with information and options, so you have names of people you could contact easily."

Mentor, Problem-Solve, and Normalize Stress Reactions

"As a leader/supervisor, I share openly the effects of accumulated stress and what it has done to me. The stigma is a big target because it runs really deep. To go get help, it's still considered to be a weakness, but it's actually our greatest strength. Getting help doesn't necessarily have to come from a therapist. It can be obtained in a number of ways."

"I try to identify who someone already has in place for support, what resources they have used before or are already utilizing, and how can they work with those."



"Going on retreat is a good option that's been emphasized from day one."

Need for Cover Examples

"The worst part is when you know you're not covered. You can bust your tail and you feel like you're not supported by superiors, that's the worst part."

"I had a boss whose attitude was, 'when I say jump, you say how high?' He just wanted to be in charge. Once he just started screaming and it made me so incredibly scared. It made me feel really unsafe."

"A coworker was going through a divorce, and there was definitely 1 to 2 months where we had to be checking in regularly and asking him, 'How are you doing?'"

"There are instances where staff members have felt targeted by a coworker or supervisor, and this leads to anxiety when coming to work. Even simple phone calls from a supervisor then become anxiety-invoking even though they are benign in nature."

"Sexual harassment by coworkers or people is anxiety invoking, but there is fear of saying anything due to the perception of being overly sensitive."

"Some are concerned about their safety due to a person coming in and destroying or damaging property and making threats."

"A lot of people in this job are Type A. I think it's common to want to be right, to want to be on task, and to not want to fall short, which leads to overworking and burnout."

"A coworker died unexpectedly. The concern shown by leaders following the death seemed disingenuous and created hostility, because prior to their death, the person had been looked down upon and treated poorly by supervisors. It made all of us feel like we couldn't trust our leaders to be authentic."

Cover Self-Care Examples

"I don't know how you know how to make yourself safe to open up to others when you're stressed, other than just knowing that a person or place seems like they can offer it. The safe type of person on the job is someone who makes eye contact. I feel something when I look at someone, that connection. It's either there or it's not."

"Somewhere along the way you have to give yourself permission to take care of yourself."

"I think I recently had a realization that I have to set boundaries for myself to keep myself safe and healthy. At the end of the day all of this work, all the stress I'm putting on myself doesn't always change the outcome. You can still put in all this time and all this effort and you're still going to get more and more work. It just happens. We're important, certainly, but we're not that important that we can't put it down to take care of ourselves."



"I think it's important for people to be really clear as to what their preferences are, and make a list for self-cover, because everyone has to know what works best for them."

"Occasionally I will actually turn my phone off and just say, 'Okay. I'm going to turn it off.' And you need a break. I think giving yourself permission to completely check out is important."

"In terms of Cover self-care, I think one of the most important things is to find someone that you're comfortable being vulnerable with and reminding yourself how important that type of connection is. It's really important to find that one or two people that you can be vulnerable with in an appropriate way so that you can be safe to share and to disclose. The markers of a safe person are that they're not going to go tell everybody else, and they don't tell you what to do."

They just listen. Sometimes I just need to get it out and I don't want a solution. I just want to vent. I just want to be heard."

"Having the Cover in your personal life, that one person to talk with, who is aware of what type of work you do, or if you just have a bad day, is very important. Having that Cover available in your personal life is necessary, because so many times we're still thinking about what happened at work when we get home."

Cover Coworker Examples

Cover as Setting Healthy Boundaries

"I think it's really about a supervisor giving us permission to put the phone down and giving permission and guidance about how to set boundaries and limits with what we're working with."





"Cover is sometimes implemented by setting boundaries, so people feel safe to take care of themselves. Sometimes what I've done with boundaries in my office is to say okay, during our lunch break, we're not going to talk about work. Let's talk about something other than work because it's so easy to get caught up in talking about work all the time. So just setting that boundary. We can talk about work when we get back to work."

"At some point in my career a supervisor told me, 'If you're just having a particularly hard day, you have permission to leave if other people can cover for you for the rest of that day.' He allowed us to give ourselves permission to go home, and to let the job go for that day."

"I had an old supervisor tell me our work is like sweeping sand. No matter how much you sweep, it's going to be there. That helped me realize I can put my work down and go home, because I can come back tomorrow and start sweeping some more."

"I had to have conversations with people and say, 'Don't come in to work on your day off. Get some rest and relaxation. Don't come in.' People's sense of duty and commitment sometimes lead to overworking. I have to make sure that they're getting rest."

"Pretty much everyone I see is burdened by work. We are out taking on more duties as our workforce shrinks and budgets shrink. But to say "You should take time off" may be really tough for someone to do, financially. So, before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off, make sure it won't be more stressful for that individual to take time off."

"Work stress is compounded by life stress. You can't avoid the news anymore, and people's stress levels in general are high, where they're constantly getting bombarded with bad news, and getting crushed by the news. At some point you have to put the phone away turn off the notifications and pick and choose what



you want to hear, in smaller doses. I tell my team, day by day, just keep doing what you can do, try not to go beyond that.”

“One thing I’ve tried to do to set good boundaries. If I send a text or email, I say, ‘You do not need to respond to this.’ Because one of my worries is that everybody is texting that person and they feel a need to respond to all the texts. So, I write, ‘Do not feel like you need to respond to this. I just want you to know I’m thinking about you.’”

“I’ve had several people tell me, ‘Hey, it was only when I went out of the country and couldn’t access my phone that I realized how important it is to check out completely when I go on vacation.’”

“I’m getting ready to go out for six weeks for surgery and was so stressed about leaving work for six weeks. My supervisor said, ‘Why don’t you just relax a bit, so you don’t have to have surgery again. Sometimes you just have to let other people take the burden. You can’t do it all yourself.’”

“As a supervisor, what I’ve learned is to help people make decisions when they may not be making the best decisions for themselves.”

“We had a death a few months ago and the supervisor said, ‘You could’ve done everything perfectly and it still wouldn’t have necessarily changed the outcome of this, so let’s look at what lessons we might learn from the case.’ I think saying that out loud, helps the person.”

“Cover is achieved is by showing vulnerability yourself and by knowing your employees. SFA needs to start well in advance of anything going on. You slowly implement it into any organization, so it is normal. We talk, drop our guards, and show our vulnerability. It has to begin well in advance of anything happening.”

“On the whiteboard, we staff would write our name if we thought we were in the Green Zone that day, to give permission for coworkers to approach us for support without worrying about being a burden. We could erase our name if no longer in Green.”

Cover in Unsafe Situations

“I like to give a briefing before there might be a potentially unsafe situations: ‘This is something we could encounter. This is what we’re going to do if these things happen. Let’s problem solve ahead of this situation.’”

“I had a situation a where someone was making inappropriate sexual comments, and I talked to my supervisor, who stepped in to help make things safer for me.”

“We had a very difficult case. From the very beginning, there was incredible support from everyone, because we knew things were going to be hard. Because of that





team approach from the very beginning, providing Cover, there wasn't the same level of anxiety."

"We have cases that are hard to deal with, and just having a supervisor who is willing to stand by, even if they don't talk, provides Cover and support. Just having supervisors who are willing to oversee without intervening is really comforting."

"During a public health crisis, everyone came together, and upper management kept us informed and with constant updates to everyone in the office, it was just united and all together."

Covering Each Other For Personal Issues

"Our management is now becoming more aware of the impact of having family issues, such as sickness, or the need to care for a parent when they're in the nursing home, those types of things. They are making sure that the person feels that there's a safety net for them, so they don't feel like their job is in jeopardy in any way, and they know that they can go, that they don't have to worry about it, that somebody has their back. So now we're covering duty, or making other coworkers aware, and telling people, 'Go, leave, you're covered, we'll take care of things here if you need to go.'"

"If a coworker has signs of high stress that cause them to make mistakes at work, you can address that person individually to get a pulse check of what's going on. Hopefully you're going to draw them out with active listening to get at what is at the root of problems. There also is a time and place for me to be more abrupt and directive, if there is danger, or if it is a re-occurring thing. Sometimes you need to be more directive or abrupt."

Cover for Family

"I gave my family a general safety briefing so they knew about things at my work that might affect my safety or theirs."

"It's important for family to be educated to be aware of any red flags that you might demonstrate. They should also know the different challenges that might happen from the very beginning of your career, and know that sharing information, whatever is comfortable, is important, so that they can be prepared. It is providing Cover for them too. If you start to shut down and isolate, they might be thinking, 'Okay, what did I do wrong? Are they mad at me? What's going on here?' So it's important to share just enough so that they can provide you Cover, and not take your stress reactions personally."

"My husband works shift work, and sometimes I feel like I'm a single parent for four days a week. Some of the Cover that I do with my kids is that they still don't know about the details of the stressful experiences on my job, because I'm not telling them about it. But I do let them know that there may be times when I act a certain way and that is probably because of stress on the job, so they will know it is nothing that they have done to make me act that way."

"Part of what I do with my husband, is to review as little as possible of the harder stuff because if I were to sit and open his eyes to all of these terrible things that happen, it would worry him, so part of my way of covering him is



kind of shielding him from some of that awful stuff that most people in this world don't have to deal with."

"On my way home I'll call my sons and tell them, 'mom is not cooking so let's go out to dinner.' And then they know that I've had a bad day without me actually having to say anything more. I think that helps us both."

Need for Calm Examples

"When overwhelmed with too many obligations or distractions, I've witnessed coworkers completely 'shut down,' rendering them incapable of doing their job. These overwhelmed states were not just due to the job; it is typically a combination of multiple stressors."

"Calm was needed after a heated exchange during a staff meeting."

"Issues with coworkers create a need for Calm."

"I needed Calm after I came upon a volatile situation at work."

"My work has affected my family and vice versa. As much as we want to believe that whatever dynamic happens at home doesn't affect our work, we're lying to ourselves. For example, an argument at home can affect your work."

"Often times meetings are the place where changes are being discussed, and now you have to deal with things a different way, and negative emotions arise in people. A lot of disagreements happen in meetings. I think after we walk out of a staff meeting, you hear a lot of grumbling and people are just emotional, angry and frustrated."

"Not long ago, I had a case take a sudden turn for the worse. My head was all over the place trying to make sure that the crisis was averted before I could even feel like I was able to effectively address the situation."

Calm Self-Care Examples

"To calm myself, I like physical activity, exercise, motion, and having my family and close friends is good. I have a good female friend up the street. She seems to know when I need to talk. Those are the things you absolutely cherish."

"What helps calm me is breaking down responsibilities into manageable pieces, making lists and being organized."

"Taking a break from work to clear one's head is beneficial. During this break, several different strategies can be used: a short nap, physical exercise, meditation, stretching, having a conversation with a friend, laughing, getting a drink of water and avoiding caffeinated beverages that contribute to agitation or anxiety."

Calm Coworker Examples

Education

"A close coworker died unexpectedly. Education was shared regarding 'critical incident stress' to inform staff





about what they may experience physically, cognitively, emotionally, etc.”

“Preparing people ahead of a very stressful experience can be very calming as well. It’s helpful if people just acknowledge potential stressors. It has to be on your radar instead of expecting people to suck it up and deal with their own stuff. Acknowledge that it could be necessary to have some help. It calms them because they feel they then have a sense of control over that one piece.”

Venting/Connections

“I often have people come into my office and vent their frustration/anger without judgment being passed.”

“I have gone to the gym with coworkers or asked them if they wanted to take a walk or take the ‘friend’ chair in my office to vent.”

“Generally, for me if it is after hours and I need to calm down, I call a coworker. And I find for me talking it out with somebody who’s not as emotionally charged about the situation calms me down.”



“Going to dinner and/or having a beer after a stressful day can be calming.”

“I had coworkers overwhelmed with things and we got ice cream on the way back from a home visit because ice cream solves everything. Sometimes the littlest thing can have a significant impact.”

Making Meaning

“After the death of a coworker, we met as an office and shared stories and memories, and it seemed to help us begin to heal.”

Calming Activities

“During a particularly difficult interview or meeting with coworkers, I’ll often have calming music quietly playing in the background.”

“I paradoxically find that listening to intense hard rock music calms me down.”

“We have an individual who does medical grade biofeedback, which is very calming.”

“When decisions are completely out of our control or not even in our manager’s control and everyone’s trying to figure out how we’re going to handle it, some of the ways that we found for calming ourselves are running, listening to different types of music, gardening, riding horses, or just getting involved in something enjoyable. I personally volunteer in the nursery.”

“Just find something that you can escape to and you and have some simple ways that are calming is good, like breathing or mindfulness practices. In court, one judge starts out with 50 deep breaths before we go into the case.”



Taking a Break

"After particularly tough situations, I've told people, 'It's been a rough day for you. Just go home. Just go relax. Take the day. Do whatever you want to do. Just go home.'"

Prioritizing/Problem-solving

"I think every day we have to prioritize what we need to accomplish. I make lists and there's something very calming and satisfying about scratching things off that list. So when difficult challenges come up, one of the most important questions is, 'what do I need to accomplish?' And then there is that sense of accomplishment and bringing a bit of order to the chaos."

"It's making a list of options and thinking through what the options are. Then I can respond. I can do this, and I can do that. Taking a minute, looking at my options, and figuring out the most practical one, the one that I can handle, the one that makes the most sense, is calming."

Fostering a Positive Work Environment

"It's important to actively not promote agitation, rumor mill spending, and negativity. Reducing all of those helps keep people feel calm."

"There was a policy change that was really affecting morale. Four different people on a team of eight were actively interviewing for other jobs. We kept saying things need to change, but nobody was listening. And then we went into a staff meeting where they essentially told us that we need to stop complaining. And me and two other people lost it. I had just gotten to the point where I just couldn't do it anymore. Luckily, I had a supervisor who said, 'Let's make a list so I can make sure we are going to the appropriate people to bring up this content concerns.'"



"If something is going wrong on a unit, someone will say 'Orange huddle!' That means: 'Everyone take breath, we're coming together.' It's not blaming or shaming. It means there's an issue, we feel it, someone saw it, something is happening, and it's tense. So, we now have a shorthand way to say, 'Let's all take a breath. What do we need to do? This is the shift from hell, but we'll make it through.'"

Distraction / Empowerment

"Asking for help is a good way to calm people. Saying, 'In order to get through this, I'm really going to need your help. I can't do it by myself, if you could just help me out here that would be great.' It's empowering. It appeals to all the parts of us that are doers, fixers, and movers."

"When stress is high, my office laughs at me and says, 'Okay, here comes Mr. Calm again.' The more chaotic things get, the calmer I become in my communication."

"Humor is a big calming influence."



Need for Connect Examples

"There can be a desire to feel more connected to social support when dealing with the death of a family member or coworker, during significant illness, or during work challenges such as disciplinary action or denial of a promotion."

"A coworker recently told me he felt he really had no close friends."

"Reaching out to coworkers during times of sorrow or disappointment can be uncomfortable, and I believe that this is why many do not reach out or say anything."

"When there are work challenges [and] no one reaches out, a person could retreat into themselves."

Connect Self-Care Examples

"I have people I can talk to, call up, and in the conversation, whatever's bothering either of us will come out. I force myself to have conversations with

three or four people who know that when I'm calling, something has come up. We flesh it out by talking."

"I do have that one person that I connect with who is on the other side of the country, but we have that connection that we can come to each other."

"The people I reach out to are honest. It's about calling a spade a spade, not dancing around it. They're able to give their perspective on my problem and show me that it might pale in comparison to another's: 'You need to pick up pieces of your shattered life and move on.' It serves to provide another's perspective, and foster honesty. Or they might say, 'That's not normal for you.' I am skeptical of self-diagnosis. I think you need to get a second opinion—a fresh perspective."

"What makes people calming to be around is genuineness. I tend to try to surround myself with people who are genuine. I don't seek out those who party until 2am; that's not what I want, not what I need. I just need peace and quiet away from incident response. As long as there's someone you have a good feel for, and you know it's what you need right now, you can seek that person out because you know what you're going to get. Rather than trying to put pressure on someone to help me out who can't, I'd rather go seek the person out who can provide what is advantageous for me, and hopefully for them at the same time."

Connect Coworker Examples

Different Ways to Make a Connection: Building a Foundation

"As a supervisor, I state the expectations for conduct right up front to prevent negative office interactions. I say, 'These things are not going to happen. If they do, you and I are going to have a serious conversation. Duty, respect and integrity, all the things we preach all the time, it starts



here and now. So, I'm not going to put up with this.' I think if you lay it out at the beginning, and address it early, and take it case-by-case individually as it's going on, things seem to work out. You give the office expectations about how we will conduct ourselves, so we all hold ourselves accountable, and there are consequences if we don't. It makes it really easy to have that discussion later if you have that base and always go back to those values."

"If someone is having a hard time, I mention nine things that are going on to specifically hit on one thing that is going on, so I'm not singling someone out who has been having a hard time. I'll say, 'These are the kind of things I will not put up with: this, this, this, this, and this.' That way no one is singled out, and no one knows what I'm talking about."

"When people go through training, they should be encouraged to make connections so they could then tap into that network for coworker support when needed."

"We really have a unique opportunity to create our own world. I try to push that 'Everyone's got something to bring to the table, let's optimize our opportunities.' People are far less likely to make someone a pariah if they get to know them. I try to keep it positive and engaging for everyone, which seems to keep stuff from happening."

"Specialists often feel like they're on their own little island and it is their responsibility, and nobody's there to help them. If you have a team, and a team approach, the specialists don't feel like they have to have responsibility for every single problem or come up with an answer for everything on their own. They feel connected with the other people."

"We have someone in our organization who brings everybody treats several times a year. He'll bring a loaf of pumpkin chocolate chip bread for everybody for

Christmas. It's just those little things that are soothing. They make people feel like they are recognized and appreciated. And that really helps with maintaining a friendly cohesive atmosphere."

"I hold a monthly luncheon/potluck for all employees to get together, socialize, and interact."

"Where I work entire teams comes together. We celebrate birthdays usually about once a month. Everybody comes together for birthdays."

"Our staff put on a kickball team for everyone at all levels of the organization. All their families come to watch the games and then they get to know each other's kids and spouses."

"We do use annual staff retreats. After our meeting we always do some sort of activity, and we are in the wellness committee, so we have everybody out doing something like walking together."

"When half of our office staff was out on maternity leave, we made the decision that those who were staying





behind were going to set up a plan to manage the situation so that no one felt lesser because they were going through maternity leave.”

“You walk into our office and somebody has left a treat on your desk, and it’s just those little actions that somebody’s thinking about you, that validates that you are significant person and that you’re important.”

“Every season I give my office a healthcare item for that season, for winter they get a hand warmer and lip balm, and it’s not much, but it is a little something to let them know I care.”

“We go take a walk, just about a 15 minute walk just to get out of the office.”

“If somebody does something and you want to recognize it in a little bit more of an official capacity, we have an ‘on the spot program’ through HR for them to get recognized by management. You say thank you and it is an informal way so they get some credit for it even though they weren’t seeking credit.”



“We have gift cards available so that when a staff member recognizes somebody else and I approve it, they actually deliver the gift card themselves with a little certificate saying great job. For us we get [coffee shop] gift cards or [music downloads] gift cards. It’s just a little something but I think little things add up.”

“We send emails of appreciation.”

“Our deputy chief read the book *The Five Languages of Appreciation*, and she’s come to realize that even though she regularly sends out an email saying, “good job,” some people need something else. So she’s trying to tap into each of us to see what our languages of appreciation are.”

“My supervisor looked at our overalls stats, which showed we were doing above what we’ve been doing. So, he went to the chief and they took us out for appetizers and drinks one afternoon. It just meant a lot to us to know that she could take time out for us.”

“Porch night, is something like a group chat. There are about nine of us in it and sometimes, about once a month, we say that we need a porch night. So everybody goes over and we sit on the porch and we just hang out and talk.”

“We help each other out, and we help the people we serve, so we all have something to contribute and we need to remind ourselves of that.”

Making a Connection after Difficult Situations

“When someone is in the Orange or Red Zone, sometimes they just can’t ask for help and so that’s when we perform anonymous acts of kindness that just show that we’re thinking about them and that they matter.”

“I think sometimes it’s important to say, ‘I don’t have the words,’ and just be there. And depending on



the relationship, give the person a hug, a pat on the shoulder, a handshake, or whatever is comfortable.”

“Showing support or connection includes simply reaching out to show you care through a conversation, phone call, card, lunch, or spending time.”

“You also can’t underestimate the power of laughter because sometimes everyone wants to ask you about a tragic event that happened to you. You kind of feel like you’re trying to hold everyone else up because they’re trying to be there for you. So sometimes someone just wants to laugh and forget about it for a moment. And for me, I’m not the greatest at comforting people; so I’d rather make you laugh, get your mind off it because so many people are coming to you and asking you about it. Sometimes you just want to forget about it and laugh.”

“Especially from a supervisor position, there are a lot of opportunities that come about to lend support to the people you work with, whether it’s a family member who’s sick or somebody has passed away. There is value in a text message saying, ‘Hey, I’m thinking about you. I hope that you’re doing okay. Things will be better tomorrow.’ It’s really important that we maximize those situations, to foster that sense that someone else is thinking about them when things aren’t going well.”

“A subtle, behind the scenes way to develop connection is to leave a snack bar or a stress ball on their desk.”

“Sometimes when people are really stressed they aren’t functioning well and so people around them start to feel like they can’t trust that person or they’re screwing up so your job might be to say, ‘Look they’re really going through a tough time, it’s not right or wrong. Let’s figure out ways to help them, invite them, include them; that’s what Connect is about.’”



“My supervisor’s wife had a medical incident and we talked about how we could cover his work, but also cover him in his personal life, such as delivering meals, setting up a cooler out back so there’s a meal for his two children during breaks and early dismissal, giving rides, having the kids sleep over, and also just giving him an outlet, like asking if he wants you to come over so he can step away from his life for a few moments, or just be with him at the hospital.”

“For a person whose family member died, as much as we possibly could, we helped cover their work for a period of time until they got themselves through that.”

“When my parents passed away everyone brought food, and I told them they didn’t have to because my church already had taken care of that, but it was the fact that they cared and that made me feel connected.”

“Some people block getting support. One of the guys I work with was going through personal stuff and needed to spend time with family. One of his grandparents who he was very close with was not doing well. He said, ‘I



don't need to talk with anyone, I don't need to go home.' I told him, 'If you come to work, you won't be able to concentrate. You are going home to see your family. He was really glad he went home.'"

"A coworker was drinking all the time. He had been through a divorce, but it was hard to get him to talk to us. He had a kitchen remodeling project under way, so I went over and hung out in his home and helped him. While we worked on it, he opened up, and I was able to get him some help."

"Drug overdoses and suicides are more frequent. I check in with myself, 'How are you doing?' And make sure that you're talking to somebody, like your field partner who also knows the person, because they may also want to talk a little about the last time they had contact with the person."

"We have a lot of values in our work, like duty, integrity, and respect, but we need to put more on being good people to each other when things are hard, because the reality is that our jobs can create a lot of problems in peoples' personal lives. You don't have to be lifelong 'brothers' to be

a genuine friend to someone. Reaching out, supporting other people, getting help, and keeping other people's personal information confidential go a long way. For instance, give them a phone call, a text, whatever is simple and how you normally communicate. The genuineness piece is important. We need to look out for each other."

"I would recommend that when there is a lot of stress, leaders should keep people moving and facilitate talking while you do things. Getting people engaged and laughing is also helpful for their stress levels. Or, have people each report out on successes, loose ends, and their plan for the next 24 hours. It only has to take a half hour."

"Connecting means sitting and listening and being comfortable letting the other person talk, so they leave feeling better. It involves learning to listen attentively, recognizing that it could hurt, and if it starts to, figuring out what to do right after. For me, it helps to know that no matter what I say or what I do, there is no right way to do anything. Don't even bother with cliché words, just be with them, nod, pay attention, and just feel it, and it's okay. I know that it's okay to support others, and there are plenty of people I can reach out to after, if I need to, and I have. But I would not walk away from someone."

"We had a senior coworker going through a lot of stress who wouldn't talk to anyone because he was on staff for many years. I asked him: 'What is your coworker support plan? Who can you actually talk to? You need to bother them, whether you want to or not. Now is the time to call them.'"

"Leadership coaching with a confidential, trained coach who understood the business was very effective for me."

Personal Connections

"I've worked it out that when I talk with my spouse or friends, we use this question 'toolbox or trashcan?' Do





you want me to just listen to this, or do you want me to provide solutions to this? It allows me to know my role in the conversation, because I tend to always go to the toolbox and try to fix things, unless you tell me that you just want me to listen.”

“When I’m stressed, I try to spend time with my son so that I’m in a different world and not thinking so much about my own problems. Or maybe I’ll just sit down and have a heart to heart conversation with somebody about what I’ve been through.”

“I would prefer to have some help with practical things like somebody to come over and help me remodel my kitchen.”

“Unless your family is involved with the system somehow, they have no understanding of what you’re dealing with. It helps if family is told early on what’s going to be expected, then it just becomes part of life.”

“Just coming home and playing with my boys, because they’re still young, is a great way to just play at something silly in a way that completely distracts me from serious matters.”

“We often talk in the office that there should be some sort of training course for the spouses and family members to kind of educate them about what is going to happen with this job. Like when you come home, you’re going to be exhausted. Things like that, because we have a lot of staff who have spouses or significant others who are in the same line of work and they know the environment, and atmosphere, and they understand it a lot more. It’s important to know how to get the point across about what the job is all about to somebody who doesn’t know the field.”

“I don’t have a spouse to talk with about work. So when we talk about the importance of social connections,



don’t assume your coworkers will just go home to their significant other. I don’t have one.”

“I have a group of friends who have nothing to do with my job, and part of my comfort with them is not having to talk about work. Sometimes it’s nice not even having to think about it.”

“It’s important to communicate with my husband if I’m struggling with something, to let him know that it’s not him, it’s the job. I let him know he hasn’t done anything wrong, but I’m dealing with this issue at work. So just so that he can be there to help to support, but at the same time he’s not worrying that there something wrong between us. He’s not trying to fix it, he’s just there to support me.”

“My spouse and I have a pretty good understanding that I’m not great with realizing when I’m in that problem zone, and knowing that what I need is for someone objective who’s listening to me talk about work say something like, “Have you listened to yourself lately?” We’ve had the conversation when things aren’t going well, about



whether this is something I want to continue. So he helps me decide if I either need to change something or have a conversation with someone at work. Having someone who can recognize that is really helpful to be able to make an intervention before it gets to be a problem.”

Need for Competence Examples

“During a personal experience recently regarding a significant stress reaction I was placed under doctor’s orders which restricted my ability to execute certain activities. I submitted a plan that would allow me to still do my job, but supervisors did not provide a response to that plan for 60 days. They modified the plan for the remaining 30 days, and the lack of timely communication on their part led to additional anxiety.”

“I was very apprehensive about some aspects of management when I first became a supervisor, and still feel somewhat less than competent in that area.”

“It used to be that if you learned the basics of the job well in the first five years, it kind of carried you through your career. Now every couple of years there’s something new that people are needing to learn, with new skills. No change at all is bad, and too much too quick is also bad. I think that’s where you get a lot of people frustrated and feeling that isolation.”

“Certain aspects of the job are really hard. I think we’ve acknowledged that they’re really difficult, but I don’t know that we’ve suggested a particular way that is effective in dealing with that stress.”

Competence Self-Care Examples

“When I’m under too much stress, I revert to doing something that is easy for me. It gives me a sense of accomplishment, like tidying the garage, or shoveling snow for a widowed neighbor. It doesn’t take much thought, but it gives me a sense of accomplishment.”



"It's just my nature to work hard. I'll go to the office for an hour, and I'll stay late, it's just how it goes. It's hard. It's really difficult to put work-life balance into practice. It comes with time and experience and shifting priorities. It's definitely difficult. But you do have a lot of stuff to do. Sometimes I'll get our junior and senior leadership to do things for us. That takes some of the workload off. There's just so much to do."

"In terms of self-care, I've been through several iterations. First it was, 'I've got to get the stuff done, so, I'm going to take care of the stuff.' Looking back on that, everything was in harmony, but as time goes on, as your situation at home changes, you have to stay attuned to those changes in your family's needs, and where you are in the season of your life."

"I probably take on way too much, but those are the things I accepted when I took this job. For each person it's going to be different. They should be constantly assessing where they are, and where their families are."

"Switching specialties was a struggle for me. I utilized all the resources I could and was not afraid to ask my supervisor or other coworkers for help and guidance. I was honest about my lack of confidence in my abilities, and I sought out (and continue to seek help) from other specialists."

"After we had a difficult situation, I reached out to someone in a different district who had gone through a similar situation. When tough things happen, I establish new relationships: 'What does this look like? Help me map this out.' He gave me tips that have been very helpful and has been a good mentor in some hard times."

"I've been doing one type of job and switched to another, but this is something that's completely new to me, so I had to not feel bad about myself when I needed

help. It doesn't mean that I'm not competent, it just means there's much more to learn."

Competence Coworker Examples

Training in Work-Related Skills

"I had done something in a low-frequency situation that was unknowingly against our rules of policy. After that happened, the supervisor went around to other people and asked if they knew if they were allowed to do this. It came out that nobody knew that we weren't allowed to do it and that people have been doing exactly what I had done. So rather than me getting in trouble, my district provided training so that we could avoid that mistake in the future."

"There is one specific job that involves high levels of stress, and there are a few people who really know how to do it, but a lot of people touching in on cases where they don't have a high level of training. So that is a scenario where high stress occurs as well as low training. So, we made training videos about it. If we have a case where it's needed but the specialist isn't there, they can reference the video to know what they need to do."





Training in Well-Being Skills

"We help people when they're exposed to different things, such as teaching 'flushing techniques,' where you actually work on wiping something from the mind, so that you don't dwell on it."

"We had training in positive psychology that included gratitude journals, where you wrote three things that you're thankful for every day, and it really seem to help us to get a different perspective."

"Our department had a training on conflict resolution because we saw that when some of our staff were under stress, they didn't really know how to effectively manage their irritability and anger. The younger ones also didn't know how to communicate directly, effectively or assertively with others—they were more used to texting than talking. The training helped all of us improve the ways we handle conflict individually, and as an organization."

"We're going to incorporate retirement seminars from day one when people come in. We will bring it up during unit meetings or their annual retreats or something like that, because time goes by quickly. It will help for people to plan if they keep retirement in their mind. We are planning on implementing a program where 18-24 months before retirement they're going to be paired up with some of the younger people and going out there to share experiences, to share guidance, so the younger people can learn from their experience, and they feel like they are leaving a legacy."

Encouragement/Normalization

"My supervisor is an encourager by nature, so it helps me with the day-to-day stress of everything going on. He always has the right words to say. He'll just tell me whatever it was that I did well on. It is great that he actually noticed something, instead of me feeling like I'm just over here swimming. So that helps with competence, putting all the pieces together and just noticing the little things. Sometimes it's a big thing, but a lot of times it's just little things throughout."

"If you're seeing a decrease in someone's level of competence, something that I've seen done is to say, 'Can I share how I've done something similar, or even worse?' or, 'I went through a similar thing.' I think when we can share our experience, how it affected us and how our performance dropped when we were dealing with something, it probably helps the person to understand, 'All right, I'm going to be okay.' It's not permanent and it's a normalizing thing, and it's part of the process."

"Instead of asking people how they're doing I will ask them to tell me how they're doing with something specific. I'll ask, 'What is hard for you? What are you struggling with?' I give them more specifics, and it feels like a way to let them know that you would expect them to struggle."



Re-Assignment

“For one person who needed a break, we have moved them out of a job for a period of time. It’s hard to do in our positions because we don’t have a whole lot to move them to and it’s produced a struggle, but we have temporarily suspended certain job duties.”

“If we have a person who is struggling and see that no matter how much we try to coach or encourage, that it’s not going to work, we sometimes will let them switch to a different position if those positions are open.”

“I had a person who realized that they couldn’t do a certain job anymore because they felt that it was just too stressful given what they’ve been through, so we moved her into a different position.”

Empowerment

“If you’re in a mentor role and someone is struggling with an issue give them the opportunity to come up with solutions and encourage them as they’re developing their own self-confidence, or their competency so they can know that they have the ability to address issues.”

“When you give people more responsibility, and give up control to them, they are more and more in control. Every little thing builds. And to have a successful track record, that you can rely on, and recognize, is huge. It pays to brush up on your Competence a little to help when your confidence is shaken. It also helps to have someone remind you that we’re all just human, and all reactions are acceptable in the right context, and then we can figure out what to do after that.”

Need for Confidence Examples

“After disciplinary action or the loss or denial of a promotion, staff tend to doubt their abilities or

where they fit in the organization. Reassurance by management is key during these difficult times. There is extreme discouragement when a person is working to change or grow, and those around that person will not afford them the opportunity to do so or are seeing only the negative and ‘piling on,’ so to speak. The loss of hope or confidence comes when benign actions are interpreted with negative connotations.”

“There’s a lot more visible accountability now, which kind of cuts both ways. Every month you get this report; and if you haven’t seen someone, it’s in red and you know it’s gone to your supervisor, it’s gone to your chief. In some ways it’s intended to help you not miss stuff, but at the same time, here’s this report that’s staring you in the face of all the things that you haven’t done. The ones that you did fine are not in a color, but the ones that you haven’t done are in bright red or yellow. I think that adds to the cumulative stress too. And then once you clear those things, then you look at the things that are gray because those are the things that are coming up. Then it’s the first of the month and you get another report. It’s like a nonstop cycle.”





"No one really comes to you in other moments and lets you know what you do right. Your first thought when something happens is, 'What did I do wrong?' No one checks in with you to let you know you're doing a good job, that these other things are going well. I think that adds to our stress too, because the only time anyone comes to you is when something is wrong."

"In our workplace every time there was an issue and we would go talk to our leader, he was dismissive, making us feel like we were just complainers, rather than taking our concerns seriously."

"I missed an important detail on a case. I did everything I was supposed to do, but I still missed it. Even if you have a supportive administration who says it could have happened to anybody and you did everything you were supposed to do, that self-imposed responsibility is difficult to overcome."

"It would be nice to have more feedback going to people about successes. If people got better feedback, maybe it would foster a sense of confidence."

"Pending retirement can cause issues with Confidence. It can almost feel like we have to find ourselves again."

Confidence Self-Care Examples

"Sometimes you have to do some self-talk, because there's only so much you can do and you're not going to change someone trying to blame things on you, so you have to be comfortable in saying, 'I know that I did everything that I could.' No matter how somebody else sees it, I have to get to the point where I'm okay with others thinking that I didn't do my job. I know I did my job."

"You have eight cases that don't make it, but you have two that do. Those two that do could be a point of reference to remind you that it does work, and you do make a difference."

"Sometimes I don't get to see how I change people's lives; you just have to take a step back and figure out why you're still doing this."

"Over time, hopefully many of us see that even when you may have a failure, you can still interact with them and treat them in a way that might change their perspective. Did you treat them with kindness? So even in the most severe cases we may still have a family member come back to us and say, 'Thank you for what you did to try to save my child.' And that's success."

"One thing that helped me has been to think long term. Just because you don't see an immediate impact on the person you're working with, doesn't mean you didn't have a long-term impact on them. And you may have touched their lives in a positive way as well. I don't think you can always measure success based on that one particular individual in a short period of time as much as how it might have impacted them or those around them in the long run."



"I know that what I did was the very best I could do and so it is not personal if it doesn't turn out as well as I would have liked. That is something that I didn't understand at the beginning of my career. I would get frustrated or angry. But now in the grand scheme of things, everybody is just trying to do the very best job they can do in their specific sphere of work and it sometimes doesn't go exactly the way you would have liked."

"You can be the most skillful person in the entire world but if you don't have faith in self you are doomed. You're never going to get through it. And vice versa, you can be overconfident but not able to learn from mistakes or be more effective. You're just going to keep circling the drain. There is a fine line between the two. The better you are at one, the better you will be on the other one. Even small triumphs can help with confidence. Trust is hard to rebuild. Confidence is that way too. If you've had a bad outcome at work, it can create self-doubt. You end up talking with a supervisor or reading more self-help books or articles. Then you realize that you were already good at your job, and that the bad outcome had nothing to do with your actions or skill level."

Confidence Coworker Examples

Lay a Foundation

"We had a new chief come in and change our old mission statements. Our old statement put too much pressure on us. She modified it to be more realistic, and it took a lot of pressure off of us."

"If we are not so guarded about our own failures and our own mistakes, they can be learning opportunities for others. It might be embarrassing, but at the same time it could really help those around you."

Reframe Perspective and Put Things into Context

"When I first started, I had to make a shift about taking work home. Instead of bearing that burden I learned that when it's time to clock out, it's time to clock out. My mind now is on my family. My mind is on what other activities I have in my life. I'll take care of the job the next day. It can wait."

"It's important to learn to not let our careers identify us and be the main part of us. This job is going to end one day and then you don't want to be standing there with nothing and say, 'What was it all for?' For me it's been about becoming a more well-balanced, well-rounded person that's not defined by the career and letting go of certain things."

"There was a time where I dropped the ball. It was not earth-shattering, but it was significant. I was completely unable to connect the dots at all until one day my supervisor talked to me and said, 'During that same time period, your mom was terminally ill and had just passed away.' As obvious as it should have been, I was not able to see the connection until he said that to me."





"We have a lot of people who have never had something go wrong, and then once that happens, they're just having a harder time because they're so worried about things that they weren't worried about before. A lot of times you have to help people tone it down for themselves and say that they don't have to be perfect. That's where mentorship comes into play. Just because you're hired on and you had experience on the outside doesn't mean that you come with all the tools that you need in this exact job."

"Sometimes a person in need of Confidence won't listen to anyone but the person who has been through a similar situation. It gives you a role model to show you how to potentially go through things."

"Sometimes it's simple. If they don't feel comfortable doing something at that time for some reason, but they've done it before and know how to do it, you just relate the person back to their skills: 'You do this all the time, you've done it before, you know how to do it. Just take a deep breath, take a step back, let's look at what

we're doing here and move forward.' But let them know you have the confidence in them to be successful: 'Look I trust you or I wouldn't have you doing this in the first place, so I know you can do it, I know you're capable, just get back in there and do it.'"

"Trainees sometimes get overwhelmed. You have to go there and let them know that they are plenty competent, and to relax and get out there. And once they get over that, it's very rewarding to look back and see the development in their confidence."

Focus on Positive Actions and Outcomes

"Pointing out each other's strengths is important because people are often unable to see their own positives. It is important to have someone that is able to provide validation and reassurance. For instance, share a compliment. Gaining Confidence, for me, was being able to see my role and have clarity in what my function was, what my purpose is."

"A coworker had a pretty horrible situation happen at work, so he was thinking of all the things he should or shouldn't have done. But rather than automatically jumping to what he might have missed, his supervisor told him all the things he did right."

"There was a tough incident, and one of my coworkers felt overwhelmingly responsible for it. He was a solitary kind of guy so it was expected that his reaction would be one of retreat. A year ago, I would have let him retreat, but because I was introduced to the SFA model, I included him in discussions and projects that would benefit from his expertise and created collaborative opportunities with coworkers. It gave us the opportunity to include him, take his temperature from time to time. It redirected his energy to get him back to a sense of Competence and Confidence, to get him back into doing something that was in his wheelhouse



professionally. These actions have all the appearances of being effective.”

“I had a couple of tough cases back to back. My supervisor said that I handled it really well. It was nice to get kudos because it felt like I was treading water the whole time.”

“A run of losses can cause us to lose Confidence in what we’re doing. But then we’d get that one successful story, and it would kind of lift everybody up again, so we’d keep going.”

“If someone makes a decision that it’s time to leave, I tell them, ‘There is no shame in leaving that role. It’s not a permanent thing, it shouldn’t be, and you’ve really enriched the program, so hold your head up high. You’ve made a great contribution, so don’t feel that it’s a letdown.’”

“In our district trainings we recognize longevity, success, and service to others in formal and informal ways such as plaques or gift cards.”

Foster Meaning, Values, and Faith

“Spirituality means very different things to very different people. I think it can be good to initiate a conversation with coworkers about preferences, to get a feel for how or if we might want to go down the road with each other.”

“I try to return people to a fundamental notion of why they got into the job in the first place. I also tell them, ‘You’re a valuable part of the mission, and if you’re struggling, maybe we can find something else for you so that you can really believe in what you’re doing.’”

“I had a guy who worked really well, and then his personal life fell apart and he had a divorce and child

issues, and he walked in and handed me a letter of resignation. I knew that his sense of identity was in the job, so I told him, ‘I’m going to sit on the letter for 30 days, and then after that, if you still want to quit, I’ll turn it in, because right now you have a lot going on.’ At 30 days, he came back in and said, ‘Can I have that letter back?’ Last year he walked up to me and thanked me for that, and he always tells me that he was so glad that I didn’t let him quit. And I always say, ‘I’m so glad you’re here now helping out.’ For me, it would have been adding insult to injury to allow him to quit at that particular time.”



Stress First Aid

for HEALTH CARE
WORKERS

