

# **Preparing Well**

A Guidebook for Coping Emotionally and Physically before, during, and after a Trauma Anniversary

#### Written by Virginia Beach Strong Center Clinicians

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Managing distressing thoughts and strong emotions can be challenging during anytime, however they can be especially difficult to handle as a traumatic anniversary date draws near. Oftentimes, physical sensations such as aches, pains, or feelings of fatigue are evident first. These initial symptoms are often mistaken to stem from another etiology, before the symptoms are identified as a trauma reaction. It is normal to experience trauma reactions and it is also normal not to. Each person will experience the anniversary of this event differently due to the dynamic and diverse workforce that is the City of Virginia Beach and makes up the composition of our *communities.* This *e-book* was prepared to assist you in your journey to wellness. We hope you find Preparing Well, allows you to reflect, *plan, and create an experience that honors the trauma anniversary* and your unique experience.

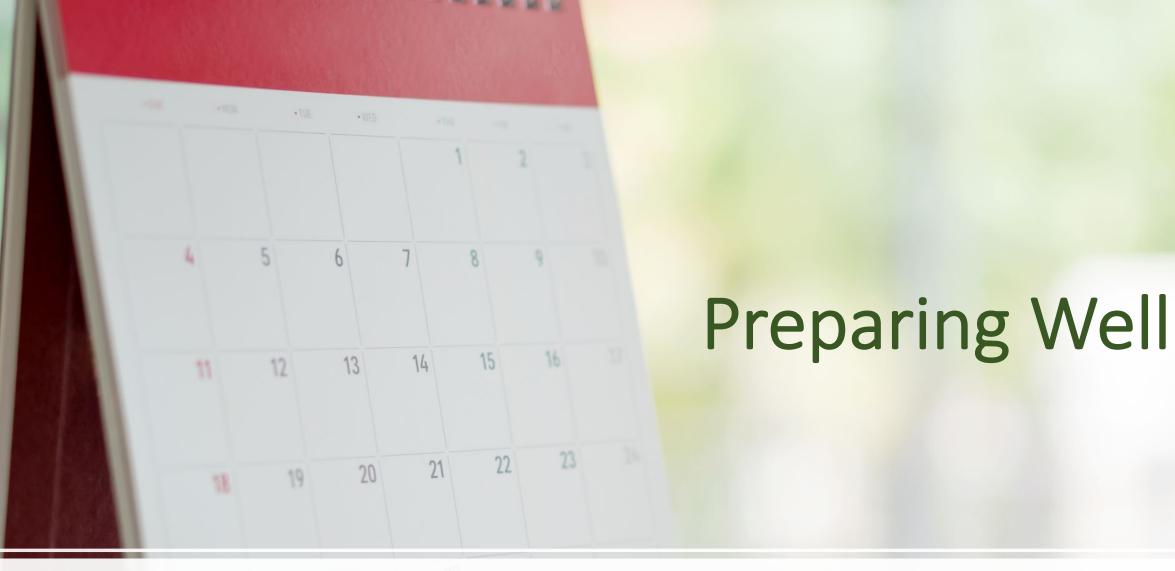
It has been an honor to walk with employees of the City of Virginia Beach and surrounding communities during this journey of healing. Thank you for allowing the VBSC to walk along this journey with you.

Respectfully,

Benita L. Thornhill, LPC, CCTP, CFTP, CDBT, BC-TMH, RYT Virginia Beach Strong Center Clinical Team Lead

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# Understanding and Managing Trauma Reactions

# Understanding Trauma Reactions

A trauma anniversary is characterized by the re-experiencing of psychological distress (trauma reactions) around or on the anniversary of a major life event that was distressing. These thoughts and feelings can span several days to several weeks before the actual date of the trauma anniversary. Reactions often include grief, anger, anxiety, numbness, or a combination of many emotions. These feelings are normal. It is important to recognize and and acknowledge your feelings as they are part of your recovery process.

Everyone will have a different reaction to the trauma anniversary, even those who experienced the traumatic event collectively. Some individuals may not experience trauma reactions. This is because each person will perceive the event and the anniversary through their unique life experiences, individual perception of the world, and core values.

Do not compare yourself with your family, friends, or co-workers. Remember everyone is at a different place in their journey. Because of these differing variables, individuals will honor the day differently.

#### **Physical Reactions**

- Backaches
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Exhaustion
- Nausea/ vomiting
- Dizziness
- Increased heart rate
- Sleep disturbances

#### I am experiencing the following physical reactions: <sup>21</sup>

6

#### **Emotional Reactions**

- Anxiety
- Grief
- Numbness
- Withdrawal
- Depression
- Avoidance
- Guilt

# I am experiencing the following emotional reactions:<sup>21</sup>

7

#### **Mental Reactions**

- Difficulty recalling information
- Recurrent thoughts about the traumatic event
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feeling disorientated

#### I am experiencing the following mental reactions:

#### **Behavioral Reactions**

- Avoiding reminders of the traumatic event
- Immersed in recovery-related tasks
- Inability to continue normal daily schedule
- Substance abuse
- Increased caffeine consumption



# Check-In:

- It is normal to experience a range of physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral emotions as the date of the trauma anniversary approaches.
- You can effectively cope with your thoughts and feelings and be more in control of your behaviors
- The recovery process takes time, be patient and compassionate with yourself.
- It is okay to look back at the past year and reflect on challenges and fears as well as your courage, resiliency and resourcefulness.

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- If you are experiencing difficulty coping it is okay to seek professional help.
- Your recovery journey is unique and will be different from others.

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#### **18 Strategies to Cope with Trauma Reactions**

The following are ways you can effectively cope with trauma reactions.

- 1. Sharing your feelings through art, writing, dance, or other expressive arts
- 2. Ensuring you continue with proper nutrition
- 3. Getting adequate sleep
- 4. Creating support networks (family members, friends, co-workers, therapist)
- 5. Scheduling extra time to reflect
- 6. Limiting acceptance of new duties or tasks 20
- 7. Practicing self-compassion
- 8. Creating and using positive affirmations
- 9. Scheduling regular check-in with friends, family, or co-workers

#### Strategies to Cope with Trauma Reactions (Cont'd)

The following are ways you can effectively cope with trauma reactions.

- 10. Preparing meals in advance or prepping them
- 11. Practicing meditation
- 12. Practicing yoga
- 13. Creating a motivational playlist
- 14. Practice mindfulness skills throughout the day
- 15. Practicing breathing techniques daily
- 16. Keeping a gratitude journal
- 17. Creating an emotional first aid kit
- 18. Practicing grounding techniques

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#### **Coping through Creating Virtual Connections**

Connecting with others helps to reduce feelings of sadness and anxiety. Due to COVID-19 traditional ways of connecting may not be recommended. Below are 10 ways you can stay connected with others while practicing social distancing.

- 1. Host a movie party
- 2. Schedule a lunch date via video chat
- 3. Host a dinner party
- 4. Take a virtual tour (zoo, museums, etc.)
- 5. Share a virtual mid-morning coffee break



#### THE R. M. M. M.

#### **Coping Through Creating Virtual Connections**

- 6. Schedule morning check-ins
- 7. Schedule after work check-ins
- 8. Host a remote game night
- 9. Participate in a group video chat while working
- 10. Participate in an online yoga or exercise group

List other ways you can connect virtually?

## My Plan to Cope with Trauma Reactions

How will you engage in for self-care in the upcoming weeks?



List names and contact information of individuals in your support network or individuals you would like to add into your network.

# My Plan to Cope with Trauma Reactions

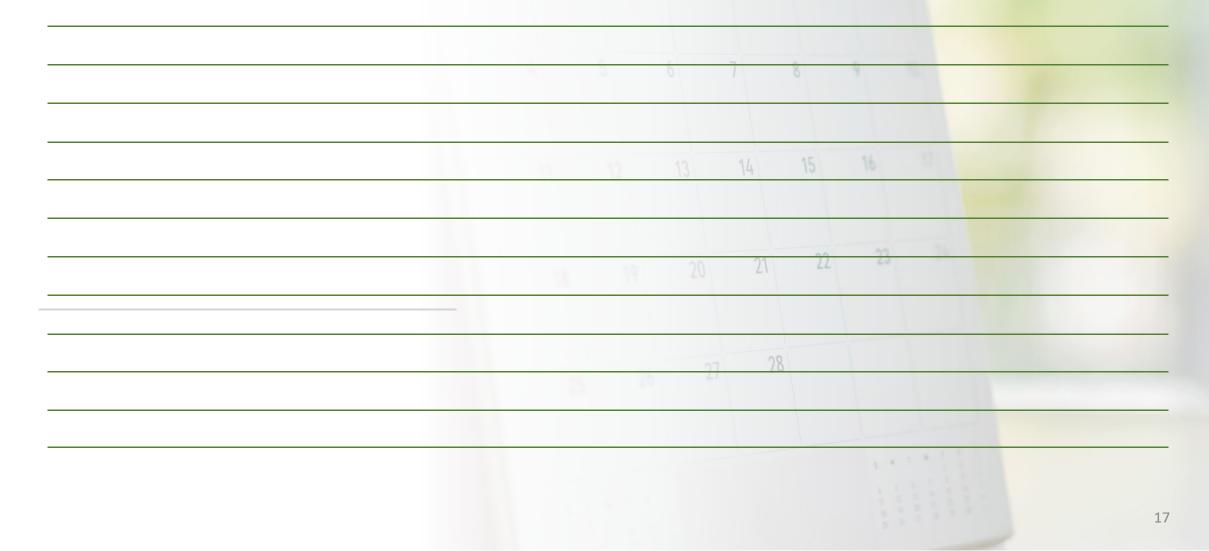
List the activities most important for you to engage in *leading up to* the trauma anniversary.

List activities most important for you to engage in *on the day of* the trauma anniversary.

What meaning do these activities for you?

# **My Plan to Cope with Trauma Reactions**

How will you create a day to include the things that are meaningful and purposeful to you?



Daily Schedule	My Top 3 and 2 Maybes	My Notes
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# **Preparing Well**

Helping Children Cope with a Trauma Anniversary



# Helping Children Cope

Parent and caregiver attitudes influence how the child will cope with the trauma anniversary. Be careful not to place your worry, sadness, or anxiety on the child by sharing too much about your feelings causing the child to become overwhelmed.

#### Helping Children Cope

It is important to remember just like adults, trauma reactions will be different for each child. **Reactions will depend on the age** of the child and the developmental level of the child. All feelings experienced by your child is valid. Focus on giving your child attention instead of punishment.

# Responses differ.

# Differentiate feelings.

It is important for parents and caregivers to differentiate between their own thoughts and feelings and those of the child.

CHILDREN 0-2	SYMPTOMS
<ul> <li>Will not understand trauma is occurring, but will know their parent or caregiver is having strong emotions</li> <li>May mirror the emotion of parent or caregiver, demonstrate a totally different emotion</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Does not respond to being soothed/comforted</li> <li>Heightened startled response</li> <li>Fear of being separated from parent or caregiver</li> <li>Sleepiness</li> <li>Irritability</li> <li>Withdrawal from normal activities (playing with toys, siblings)</li> <li>Speech difficulties that were not present or worsening of existing conditions</li> </ul>

CHILDREN 3-5	SYMPTOMS
<ul> <li>Will understand trauma is occurring but will look to caregivers and parents to help them regulate their emotions.</li> <li>May experience difficulty adjusting to change</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Tantrums that are difficult to stop</li> <li>Aggression towards others</li> <li>Verbal abuse toward others</li> <li>Re-enacting the traumatic event</li> <li>Bedwetting</li> <li>Acting out</li> <li>Sleep and eating disturbance</li> <li>Clinginess</li> <li>Fear of adults</li> <li>Fear of sounds, sights that remind of the event</li> </ul>

### **STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN 0-5**

- Check your emotional state before interacting with them
- Continue to create an environment where they feel safe
- Be present when you are with them
- Maintain routines as much as possible
- Show them extra love

#### CHILDREN 6-10

#### SYMPTOMS

- Will understand trauma is occurring but will look to caregivers and parents to help them regulate their emotions.
- May experience difficult adjusting to change
- May show new fears, stop playing with friends
- Increase in aggressive behaviors
- Regress to a younger stage of development

- Aggressive behavior/sadness
- Verbally abusive
- Bossy
- Suicidal ideations or gestures
- Somatic complaints
- Withdrawal
- Confusion
- Acting out
- Poor self-confidence
- Sleep disturbance
- Appetite disturbance
- Overreact to situations
- Excessive anger

#### CHILDREN 11-19

#### SYMPTOMS

- Are already experiencing tremendous physical and emotional changes which impact their ability to cope with trauma
- May deny their feelings and thoughts to themselves and others

- Excessive anger/sadness
- Aggression towards others
- Suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Substance abuse
- Risky behaviors
- Somatic complains
- Argumentative
- Engage in unhealthy relationships
- Sleep and appetite disturbance
- Difficulty trusting others
- Low self-esteem
- Avoidance

#### **STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN 6-19**

- Talk to your child-ask about their worries and what could help them cope better
- Spend more time with them, just your presence can make a tremendous difference.
- Offer comfort with gentle words or hugs
- Try to keep children on their regular routine as much as possible
- Relieve them from their chores for a couple days, but be sure to reinstate them ensuring have age-appropriate chores
- If your child wants to spend time with friends (virtual) or having quiet time alone support and monitor these activities
- Encourage them to write or create art

# Some Children Might Need Increased Support

- Children directly affected by the event will have a more personal meaning attached to the anniversary.
- Children with a history of trauma, violence, or sudden loss may require additional support due to their personal histories in combination with the trauma anniversary.
- Children who are normally anxious may be more anxious, more reactive to "threatening information," and more susceptible to misunderstandings or speculations, which may result in difficulty calming or comforting them.
- Any perception of danger can result in a heightened feeling of vulnerability or or exposure for children with physical, developmental, or mental disabilities.

# Notes:

# Answer Honestly. Answer Appropriately.

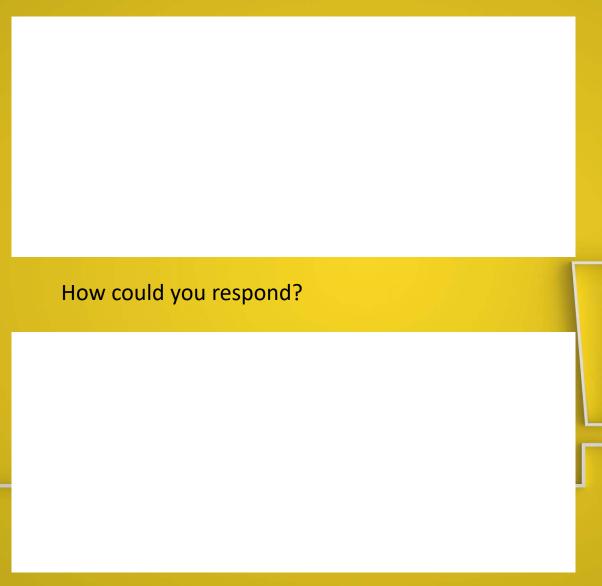
• Will it happen again?

Tell children many people are working hard to keep the country and everyone in it as safe as possible, but you cannot promise something like this will never happen again.

• What if I don't know the answer?

Remember, the important thing is to listen and meet your child where they are. It is okay to say I don't know.

#### What questions does your child have?



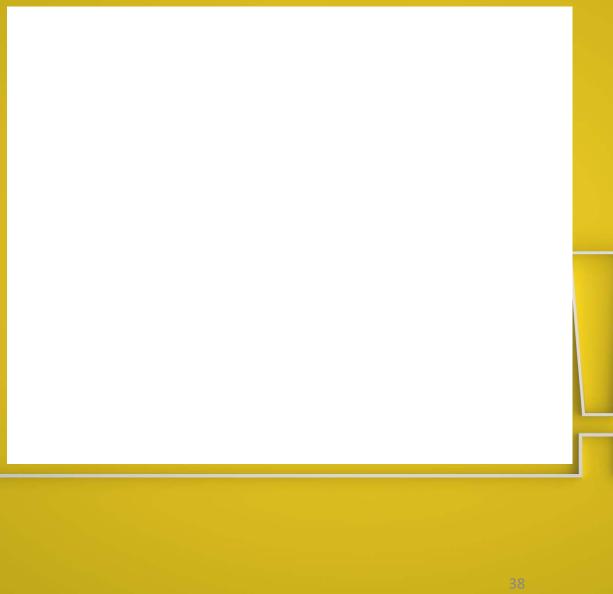
#### Please Do...

- Be prepared to help your child as they may not fully understand why they are thinking or behaving in a certain way
- Maintain routines as much as possiblebedtime, mealtime activities -this will help your child feel more in control of their environment and of what to expect next
- Listen to your child. Refrain from lecturing and encourage questioning and refrain from giving absolute answers you are unsure of
- Limit access to social media, news coverage, and your discussion with others around your child
- Encourage your child to participate in fun activities



#### Please Do...

- Give your child choices about how to spend the day-don't force them to participate in events
- Provide opportunities to make a difference in the community-discuss prospects as a family-acts of kindness- i.e. creating rocks of kindness, participating in virtual community events
- Find ways to honor the event together that are meaningful
- Help your child plan/outline their day to help them feel more in control of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors



#### Activities for Younger Children

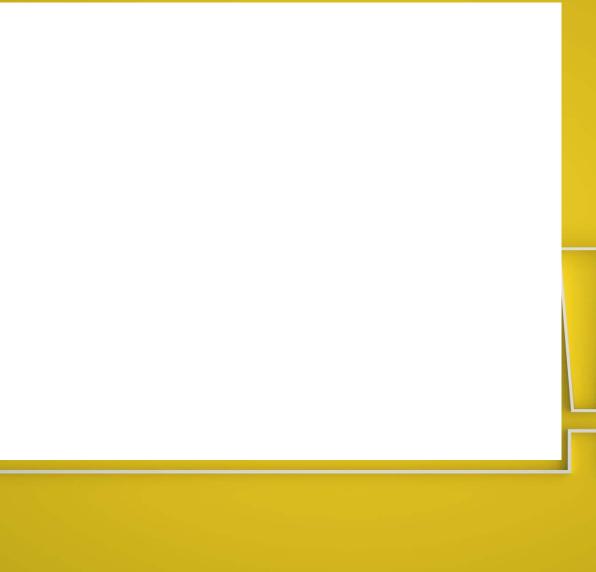
- Bubble play
- Breathing activites-5 finger breathing
- Painting/coloring emotions
- Create a postcard
- Create a safety box
- Costume play
- Storytime
- Karaoke night

What does your child enjoy doing?

#### Activities for Older Children

- Reflective journaling
- Art journaling
- Vision boarding
- Guided mediation
- Explore a new hobby
- Painting

What does your child enjoy doing?



- Age and development level impact how children respond to trauma anniversaries.
- Validate your child's feeling's even if they seem silly.
- Check to see what your child already knows so you can clear up misconceptions.
- Encourage your child to express their thoughts and use open ended questions. Refrain from lecturing.
- Discuss with your child how they would like to honor the event and help them to create an outline of their day
- Be watchful of behaviors that continue to worsen as professional interventions may be needed
- Give your child extra attention and love
- If you notice your child continues to struggle, contact a professional counselor.

#### "Children learn more from what you are, than what you teach."

Check-In:

#### W.E.B Dubois



## My Plan to Help My Child Cope



## **Preparing Well**

# Increasing Resiliency

#### **Understanding Resiliency**

#### What is Resiliency What Resiliency is Not **Resilience is the process of adapting well** Being resilient doesn't mean that a person in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, won't experience difficulty or distress threats or significant sources of stress Ability to adjust well over time to life-**Resilience isn't necessarily a personality** changing situations and stressful trait that only some people possess situations More ordinary than extraordinary **Involves profound personal growth Empowers you to grow and improve your** Takes time to develop and doesn't happen life along the journey over night

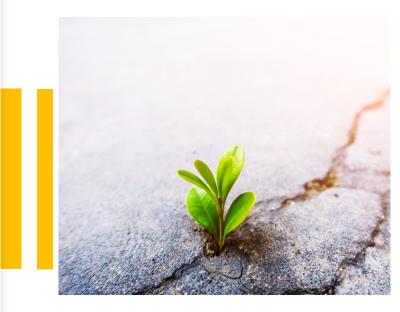
#### **Characteristics of the Resilient Individual**

- ✓ Internal locus of control
- ✓ High self-esteem
- ✓ Optimism and hope
- ✓ Gratitude and appreciation
- ✓ Viewing change as a challenge or opportunity
- ✓ Action oriented
- ✓ Realistic sense of control/having choices
- ✓ Good self-awareness and good emotional management



#### **Strategies to Improve Resiliency**

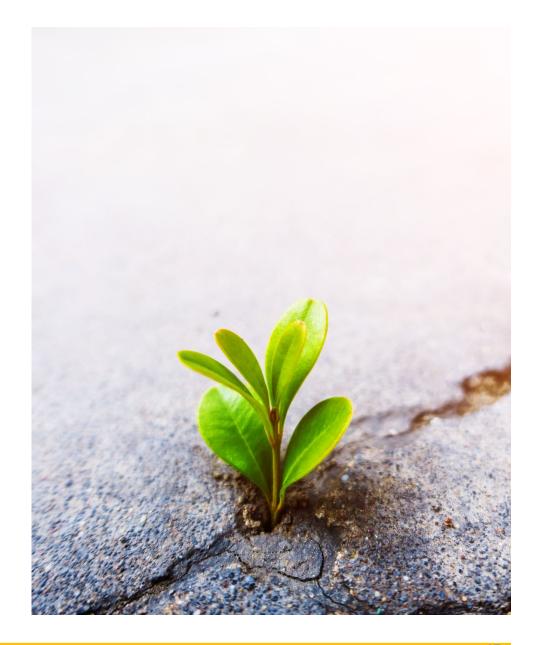
- ✓ Recognize Personal Signs of Stress
- ✓ Strengthen Relaxation Responses
  - Practice Mindfulness
    - Meditation Grounding techniques (54321 technique) Deep Breathing (4 square breathing) Journaling
  - Participate in Self-care daily
- ✓ Identify Personal Strengths
- ✓ Increase Positive Emotions Daily
  - Practicing Gratitude Daily
- ✓ Engage in Meaningful Activities
  - Explore your purpose in life looking at what you feel you are meant to do in this life-time.
- ✓ Counter Unhelpful Thoughts
- ✓ Increase Social Supports



## Reflection

How have you shown resilience over the past year?

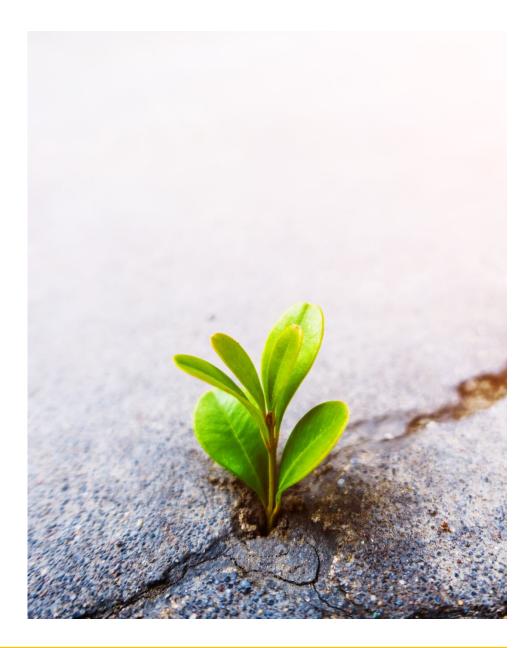
Were do you have room for growth?



## Reflection

Which characteristics of resilience do you demonstrate?

What steps can you take today to improve your resiliency today?



## Preparing Well

### **Regain A Sense of Control**

#### **Prioritize what is needed and set goals**

- Determine for yourself what is necessary to accomplish and which task are "nice to do".
- Be sure to use a SMART approach when setting goals.

#### **Determine what is within and out of your control**

- This will allow you to look at things from a different perspective and allow you to see the things that you are in control of in a state where you may feel like you are not in control of anything.
- By focusing on what you are able to control it will offer a sense of power in a situation where you may feel powerless

#### Silence the inner critic

- Think about the situation that is causing you stress. Ask yourself "what is the worst thing that can happen, and could I survive. What is the best thing that could happen? What advice would I give a friend in a similar situation."
- Remember to be kind to yourself and practice selfcompassion and patience

#### **Release stress by practicing self-care**

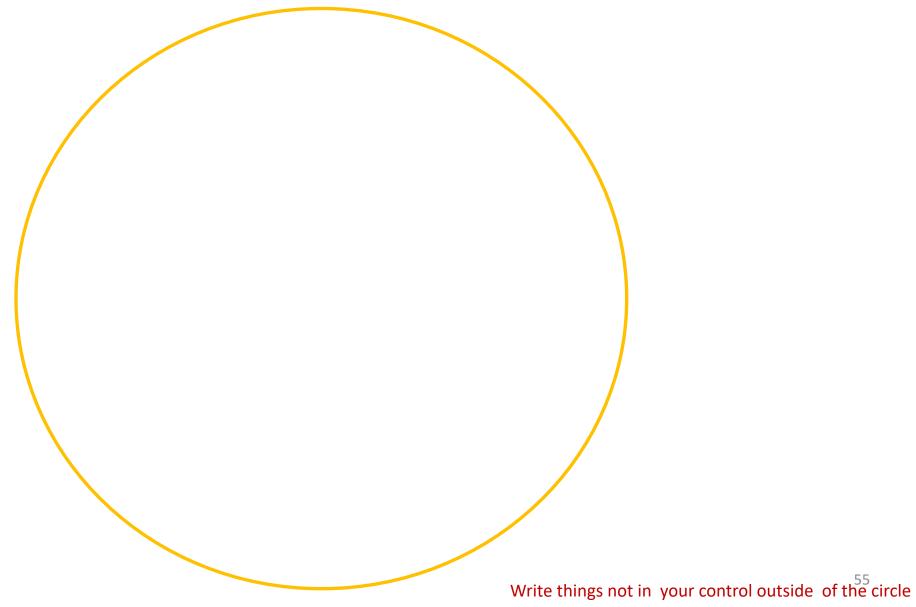
- Self-care is a positive activity that is done deliberately, to take care of mental, emotional, and physical health
- Allows you to recharge your body's batteries
- You can't pour into others with an empty cup

#### **Release stress by practicing self-care**

- Self-care is a positive activity that is done deliberately, to take care of mental, emotional, and physical health
- Allows you to recharge your body's batteries
- You can't pour into others with an empty cup



Write things in your control inside of the circle



## **Preparing Well**

## **Tips for Reclaiming Identity**

- Core personal values are principles that guide and dictate behavior and action.
- Values create a guide. Values are beliefs and convictions that support everything that you do in your life.
- If a person knows their values, they can utilize them to accurately assess their actions and behaviors.

## Examine Core Values

- Know that you will at times recall the person you once were. Reflect on some of the things you miss the most. You may find that these are characteristics that you have even now.
- Remember you are the author of your life and you can decide what is written on the pages of your book.

Celebrate who you once were and envision who you would like to be

- Self-compassion is extending compassion to one's self in instances of perceived inadequacy, failure, or general suffering.
- During this time of self-discovery know that it may be difficult at times. When these times occur be sure to be extra kind to yourself and practice patience.

Practice selfcompassion and patience This means separating our own point of view from other people's expectations of us.

- In order to find ourselves, we must all seek out our own personal sense of purpose.
- Evaluate what you feel your purpose is in present day as it is able to change following life circumstances

Explore what you believe to be your purpose in life

- Mindfulness is utilized to bring an individual back into the here and now
- Mindfulness is useful when reclaiming one's identity because it helps us learn to develop new skills and shift unhelpful views.
- Mindfulness helps an individual to be able to continue to move forward even when faced with difficult emotions.

## Practice Mindfulness

## Check-In:

- Examine Core Values
- Celebrate who you are including your flaws
- Work towards who you would like to be
- Practice self-compassion
- Be patient with yourself
- Explore your life's purpose
- Practice mindfulness

## **Core Values:**

Core values are the building blocks of your life and they shape your identity. You filter the world through your core values and decide what actions you will take. Some examples of core values are; love, truthfulness, authenticity, loyalty, dependability, open-mindedness, consistency, optimism, security, and peace.

List your top 5 core values:

How do they guide your decisions and behaviors?

## Preparing Well

## Tips for Seeking Meaning and Purpose in Life

## Life is never made unbearable by circumstances, but only by lack of meaning and purpose." -Viktor E. Frankl

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#### **Importance of Purpose**

A 2010 study published in *Applied Psychology* found that individuals with high levels of eudemonic well-being—which involves having a sense of purpose along with a sense of control and a feeling like what you do is worthwhile—tend to live longer Research links feeling as if you have a sense of purpose to positive health outcomes, such as fewer strokes and heart attacks, better sleep, and a lower risk of dementia and disabilities.

#### Meaning can be found through

- Experiencing reality by interacting authentically with the environment and with others.
- Giving something back to the world through creativity and self-expression.
- Changing our attitude when faced with a situation or circumstance that we cannot change.

Having a sense of purpose is linked to better emotional and physical health.

#### 7 Tips for Finding Meaning in Life

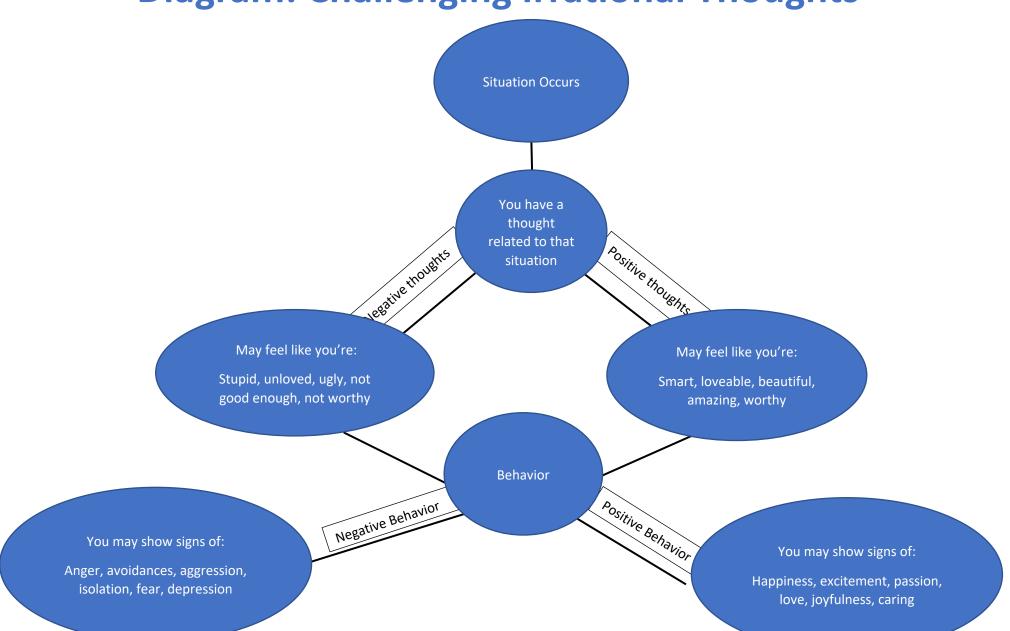
- Participate in Altruistic behaviors such as volunteering, donating money or just helping someone.
- Listen to feedback of others and the strengths they see within you
- **Surround yourself with positive people**
- □ Make an effort to meet new people
- **Explore your interest**
- **Determine injustices that bother you**
- Self-explore and reflect focusing on things that you love and energizes you

Which will you choose?

#### THESE ARE WAYS TO ADD MORE MEANING TO MY LIFE

# You can do it!

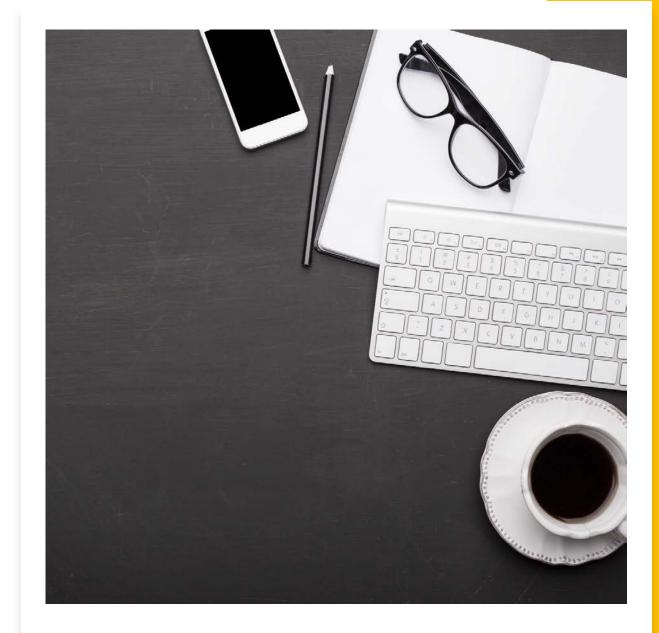
#### **Diagram: Challenging Irrational Thoughts**

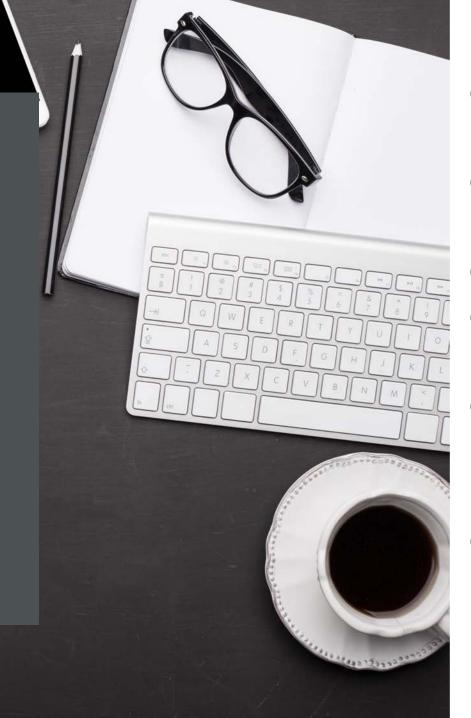


## **Preparing Well**

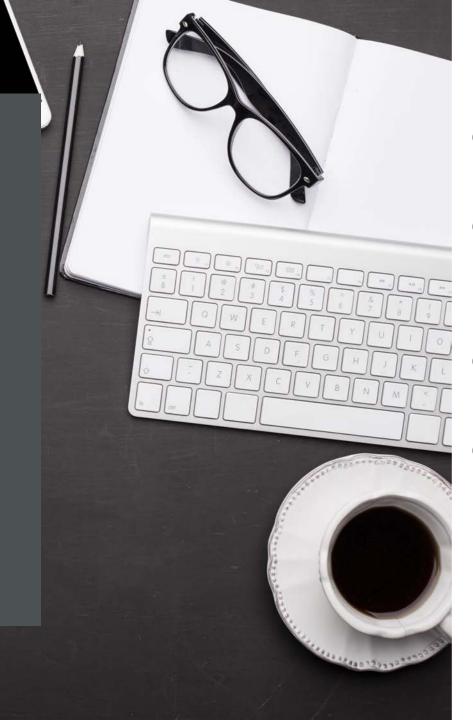
Improving Communication Among Co-Workers

When There is Fear of Retaliation

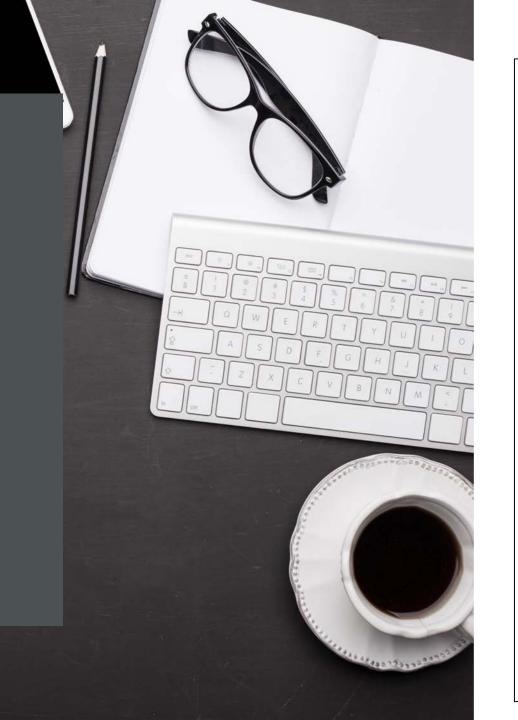




- Healthy communication in the workplace is essential for efficiency and productivity.
- Everyone is responsible for setting the standard.
- Harassment or threats are not tolerated.
- Try to resolve the issue with the individual.
  Speak in a calm, assertive, and kind manner.
  If this isn't able to be done, the next step should be to go to your manager and express your concern.
- It is important to follow the guidelines and protocol of your organization.



- It is essential to remember you can't control the behaviors of others.
  - If you begin to experience negative thoughts about what another person might do to you, speak with your supervisor.
- Don't be fearful to advocate for yourself, your feelings are valid
- Everyone deserves to feel safe at work and to feel pride in a job well done



## **Preparing Well**

# Supporting Yourself While Supporting Others

#### Have a Self-Care Plan

Explore and learn which self-care options bring you to a state of calmness or relaxation. For example, yoga, meditation, music, dance, reading, or connecting with family or friends.

Know When it's Time to Take a Break Recognize your own triggers and know when to take a break. Certain situations that occur at work can trigger a touchstone event from another time in your life. This can interfere with your ability to be unbiased or to make difficult decisions regarding the issues. When you are able to recognize this, you are able to take appropriate steps to move forward. Create a self-care plan.

Take Time Away from Work Ensure you are taking vacations and time off to engage in activities you enjoy. Many of us get energy and joy out of supporting others, but it's important to know when to take time away and promote your own self-care.

#### Be Patient With Yourself

It's easy to practice patience's with our client it's imperative that we practice that same patience's with ourselves. Recognizing it's a lot of work helping others and taking on their emotional needs it's vital that you take care of your emotional needs as well. Create a self-care plan.

#### What activities can you add to your self-care routine?

1.

2.

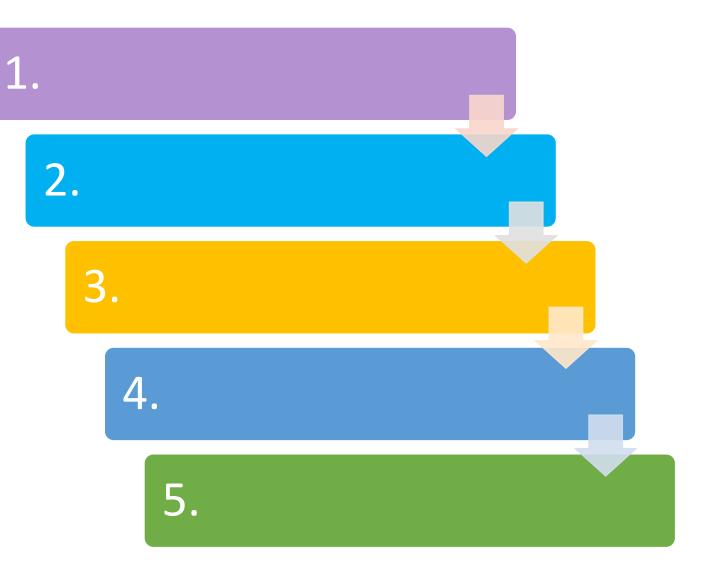
3.

4.

5.

Choose 2 Self-care activities from the previous page for the upcoming week.

What steps are you going to take to stay committed to your plan?



### Preparing Well

# Finding Balance in Uncertainty



During periods of uncertainty we often feel off-balance, lost, confused, depressed, or anxious about what our future holds.

Describe a time you felt any of these or other emotions

You can ground yourself and bring yourself to the present by engaging in mindfulness-based strategies such as: calming imagery, breathing exercises, grounding, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, and walking.

Which of these could you commit to doing on a regular basis?

Assess areas of your life that cause you to feel off-balance. List what is in your control. Make a conscious decision to create balance in your life. Set goals in each area of your life (physical wellbeing, relationships, spiritual, financial, career, etc.)

Physical wellbeing	
Relationships	
Spiritual	
Financial	
Career	
Others	

Reassess your motivation and progress on a daily basis. Be patient and kind to yourself, throughout the process.

Write 3 positive affirmations 1.

2

3.



### **Preparing Well**

Survivor's Remorse

#### Survivor's remorse, also known as survivor's guilt, stems from **counterfactual thoughts.**

Thoughts that you could have or should have made a different decision or changed an action.

If you have been struggling with these thoughts, use this space to write them out.



#### Questions to Ask Yourself:

Is it logical to believe that you can control someone else's fate?

What would things look like if you did not have thoughts of guilt?

Are you able to release your counterfactual thoughts and replace them with positive thoughts?



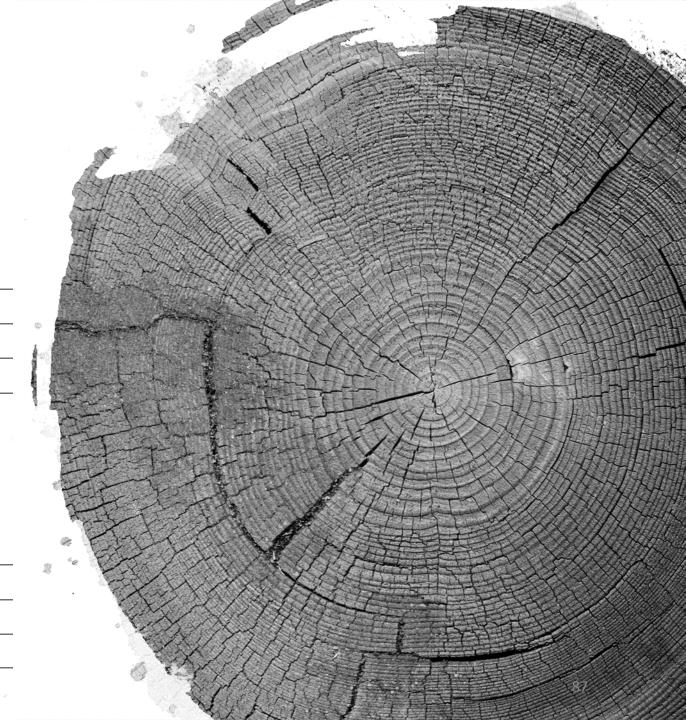
#### Managing Survivor's Guilt:

Be patient with yourself.

What are ways you can demonstrate patience with yourself?

Remember that you are not alone.

List individuals in your support network.

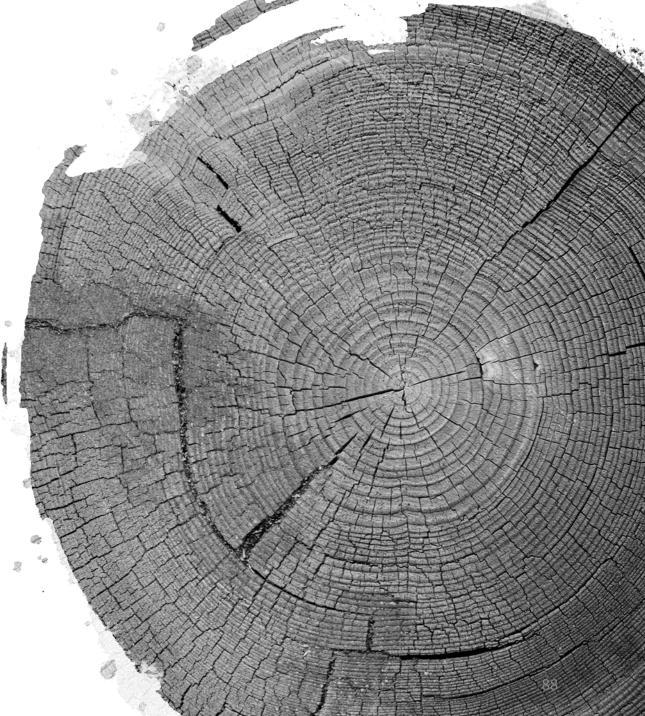


Other Ways to Manage Survivor's Guilt

Consider journaling your feelings

Share your emotions with someone you trust

Speak to a professional to support you with processing all that you are experiencing



## Tips to Manage Survivor's Guilt

- \*Be patient with yourself
- \*Remember that you are not alone
- \*Consider journaling your feelings
- \*Share your emotions with someone you trust
- \*Speak to a professional to support you with processing all that you are experiencing




### **Preparing Well**

# Gratefulness

#### Gratefulness

Gratefulness can be defined as looking at experiences through a perspective of appreciation. Being thankful and seeing continuous positivity from situations, people, and all things.

### Gratefulness

- Increases the value of interpersonal relationships
- Improves physical wellbeing
- Decreases irritability
- Improves sleep quality
- Enhances empathy
- Improves sleep
- Boosts self-esteem
- Boosts resilience
- Vitality

### The Absence of Gratefulness

- Seeing the glass as half-empty
- Inability to be fully present
- Lack of joy
- Subconsciously seeking the negative in experiences
- The need for perceived perfection

### Barriers to Gratefulness

- Needing admiration and approval from others
- Focusing too heavily on what we lack
- Comparing ourselves to others
- Dwelling on the past
- Worrying about the future
- Magnifying negative aspects of a situation
- Blaming yourself when negative things occur
- Always expecting the worst

#### Understanding the Mindset of Gratefulness

- Being open and receptive to positive thinking
- The ability to find the positive in all circumstances
- Actively seeking ways to experience joy
- Utilizing self-compassion and positive self-talk

#### How to Shift to a Focus of Gratitude

- Assess your current mindset
- Allow yourself to the freedom to explore what you want to change
- Seek the silver lining
- Work to reframe negative thoughts to positive thoughts
- Regularly utilize positive self-talk
- Implement positive thinking

### Positive Mantras/Affirmations

- I am only going to focus on a positive outcome.
- I am capable of doing amazing things.
- I will focus on the best in myself and the best in others
- I am worthy of happiness and it is my job to choose happiness, in every way I can.
- I have the power to create positive change in my life.
- I will not be defeated
- I am ready to grow.
- I can handle this.
- I am enough.

#### Identify Where There is Absence of Gratitude

How do you react when things do not go as planned?

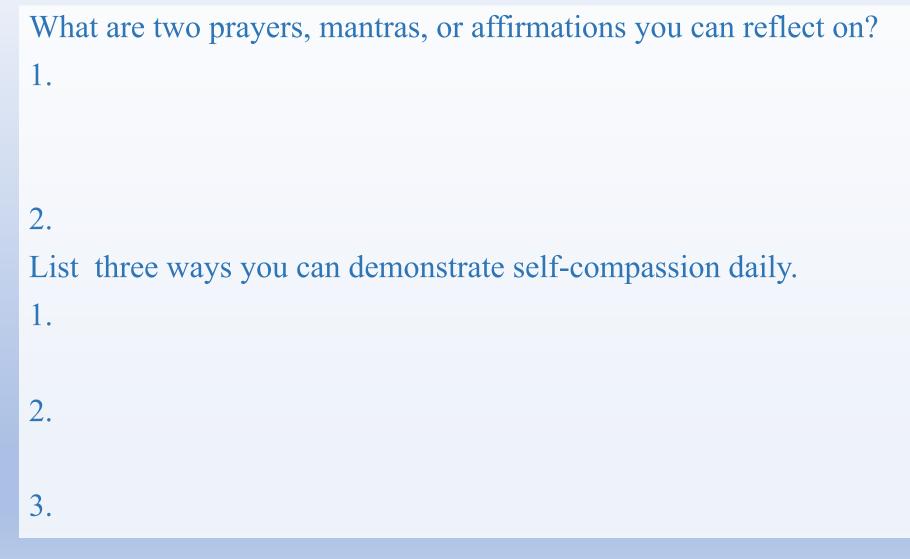
What are you critical of yourself about?

What thoughts/feelings need to be quieted? (Which thoughts keep you from focusing on the positive?)

#### Shifting to a Mindset of Gratefulness

### List what you are grateful for. 1. 2. 3. What thoughts/feelings do you want to amplify? 1. 2. 3.

### Shifting to a Mindset of Gratefulness






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The Virginia Beach Strong Center in partnership with Sentara offers strength-based support and recovery resources for individuals seeking help on their journey.

For additional information contact the Virginia Beach Strong Center Clinician. Please call us at 757-507-7200, send an email to <u>vbstrongcenter@sentara.com</u>, or visit or website at *thevbstrongcenter.org* 

