

# BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IMPACTS OF COVID-19

## **Workplace Trends, Resources, and Strategies**

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# Agenda

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**The Behavioral  
Health landscape  
for the next few  
months**



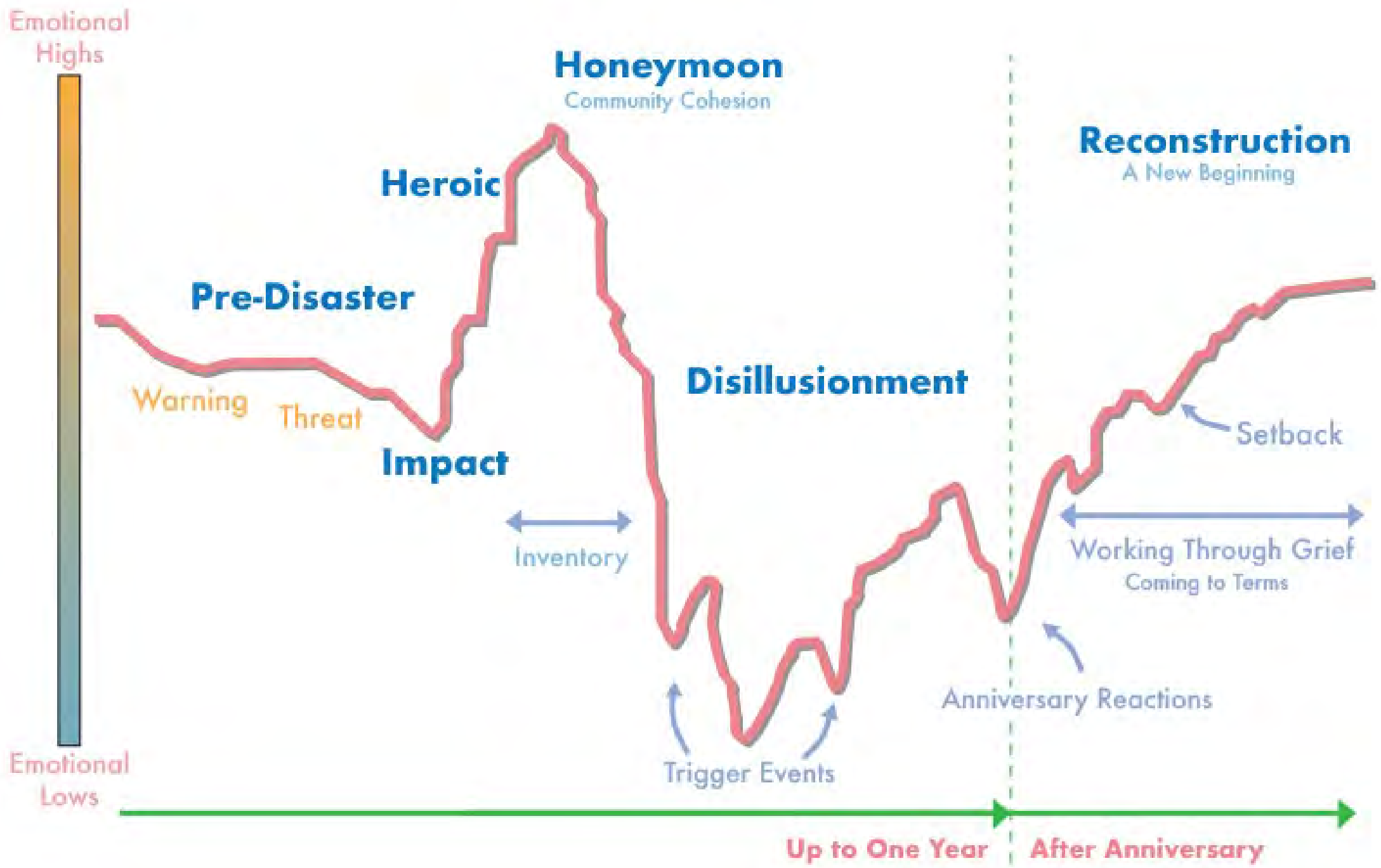
**What we are  
experiencing  
neurologically: the SAM  
and HPA systems**



**LEARN model for  
workplace support  
of behavioral  
health**

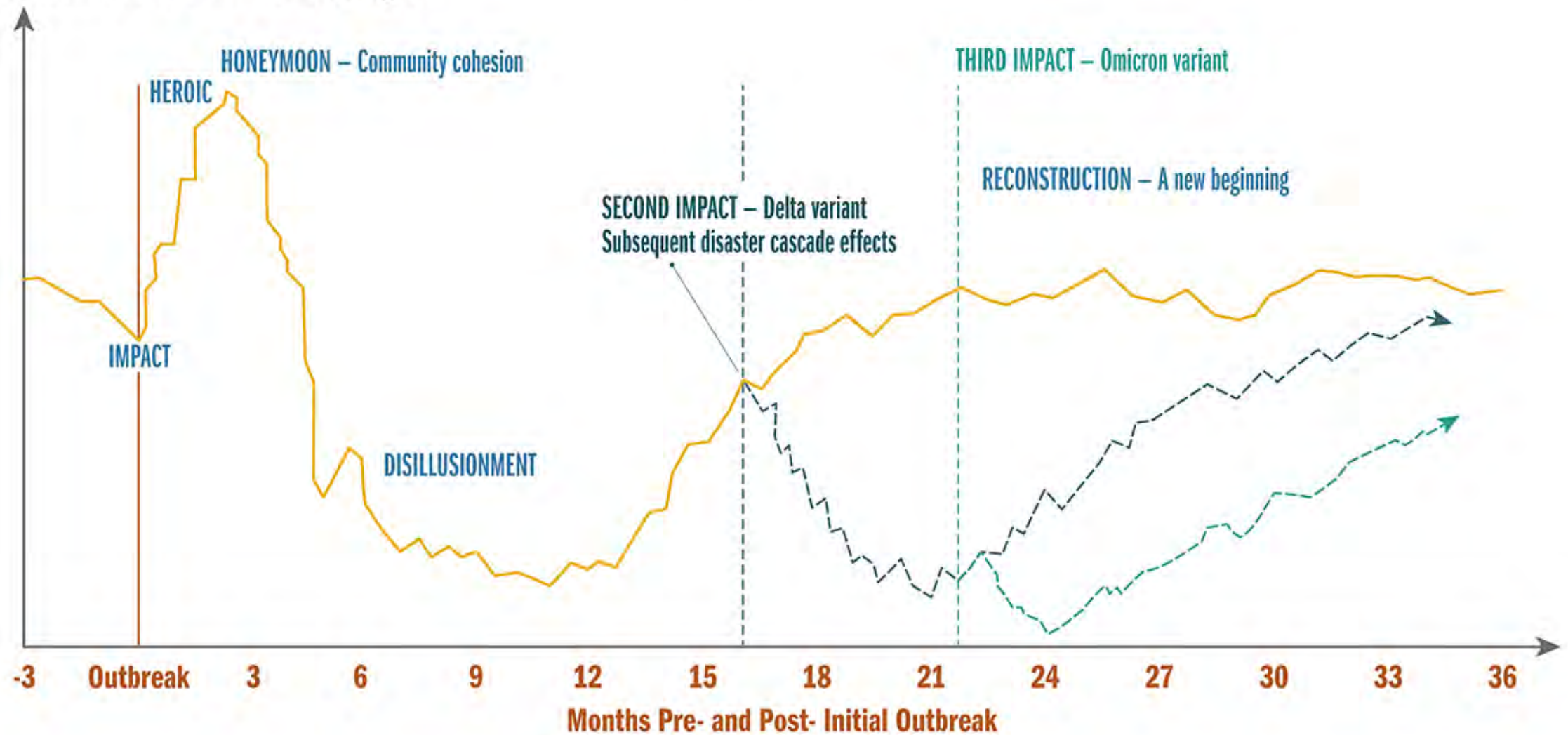


**Resilience and  
vitality**



# Reactions and Behavioral Health Symptoms in Disasters – COVID-19

Emotional Response – Lows to Highs



# Examples of Stressors

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## **Systemic**

Marginalization

Discrimination

Racism

Social / Economic  
status



## **Primary**

Loss of loved one

Loss of job

(unintentional or  
unplanned)

Sudden or unexpected  
move

Critical event (medical  
emergency or other)



## **Secondary**

Financial burdens

Strained relationships

Educational changes  
or missed  
opportunities

Unexpected expenses

# Making sense of where you are now

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Understanding where you may be in your personal recovery cycle starts with identifying the main stressors that you are experiencing.

The type of stressor influences the stress response. There are TWO main types of stress response:

1. **The SAM system** (sympatho-adreno-medullary or sympathomedullary) concerns the release of adrenaline/noradrenaline which produces the fight or flight response (this is the FAST response).
2. **The HPA system** (hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal) concerns the adrenal cortex which produces corticosteroids such as cortisol, which we need, but only in moderate amounts. When too much cortisol is released and builds up over time, there can be negative health effects (this is the SLOW response).

## Why does it matter which system is involved?

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***When you understand the process behind what triggers a stress response, you can choose the intervention that is most appropriate and helpful.***

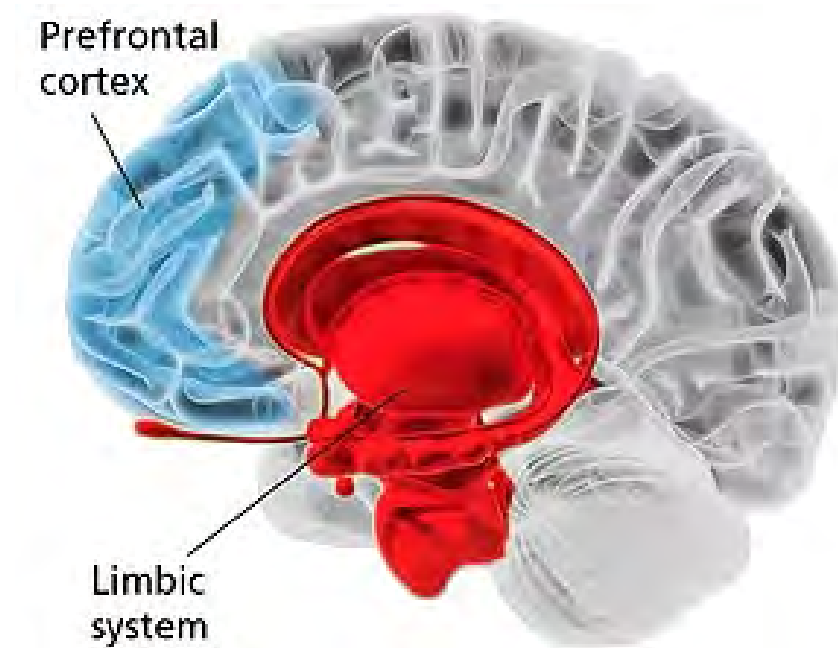
- When adrenaline is released (SAM -fast- system) it will take a person about 30-60 minutes to calm down to baseline (assuming that the threat is removed).
- When too much cortisol builds up over time (HPA system) it can take days to months to re-calibrate.

# The neuroscience of response and recovery

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Prefrontal cortex:  
higher-level functioning,  
planning, organization,  
details, filtering.

Limbic system: emotion,  
impulse, pleasure and  
safety, memory





# Common Experiences



## EMOTIONAL

Irritability  
Nervousness  
Grief / Sadness  
Anger  
Fear



## PHYSICAL

Trouble Sleeping  
Headaches  
Stomach problems  
Stress eating /  
Snacking / Not eating



## COGNITIVE

Forgetting  
Distractibility  
Trouble Concentrating  
Memory Problems



## BEHAVIORAL

Withdrawal  
Isolation  
Aggression  
Substance Use



## SOCIAL

Strained Friendships  
Disagreements  
Lack of Participation  
Conflict



## SPIRITUAL

Questioning Faith  
Stronger or more distant relationship with God or Higher Power



# Areas of Focus for July & August 2022

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- 1. Economics- Inflation, Gas prices and cost-of-living (typically HPA response)**
- 2. High intensity social issues (SAM or HPA)**
- 3. Aggression & Violence (typically SAM system response)**

# **Economics- Inflation, Gas prices and cost-of-living [typically HPA (slow) system response]**

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- Prices and supply chain issues may be preventing people from accessing life—saving medications, foods or other interventions.
- Gas prices are influencing choices and options about work travel and meeting expenses as well as time off, or overtime choices that influence family vacations and recreational activities during the summer months.
- Financial influences on behavioral health may be more subtle- influencing sleep, increasing cortisol, and building over time (the slower HPA system response).
- Families and communities may be affected by these issues in very different ways. Be aware of assumptions you may make about everyone “being in the same boat” on this issue.

# High- Intensity social issues [SAM (fast) or HPA(slow) system]

- You don't have to look very far to find an issue that people feel strongly about or are divided on.
  - Roe v Wade, Mass Shootings and Firearm responsibility , Vaccine mandates, New variants, Climate Change, the war in Ukraine, etc.
- Depending on the scope or personal 'sense of threat' that a person may experience as a result of these issues, either system can be activated.
- Be aware of the communication practices you are engaging in, and what you are contributing to (positive and negative).
- Think about your personal active listening skills and how you can benefit yourself and others by practicing those a little more.
- ***Consider this:*** "when was the last time you changed your mind about something?"

# Aggression & Violence [typically SAM (fast) system response]

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- Working together to understand and reduce risks related to impulsive and aggressive, potentially violent behaviors is essential.
- Learn more about how mental illness is and is not related to violence. Start with the understanding that “mental illness doesn’t CAUSE violence”.
- Participate in de-escalation training if you haven’t done so already. Email [DOH-BHAdmin@doh.wa.gov](mailto:DOH-BHAdmin@doh.wa.gov) for additional training dates and times.
- Have a communication plan in place for work, home and family in case of emergency.
  - Being prepared for critical incidents or disasters of all kinds lends itself to better outcomes (physical, emotional, financial, etc).

# What to DO?

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## For SAM (fast) system

- Movement / exercise / physical activity.
- Develop a personal coping plan and a set of emergency plans for yourself and family.
- SLOW DOWN in your responses for generally better results when frustrated.



## For HPA (slow) system

- Monitor personal levels of exposure to media (news and social).
- Diet / Food choices play a BIG role in this.
- Sleep hygiene practices.



## For either one

- Apply “challenge” oriented thinking (rather than threat):
- “What are my resources, and what is my next step?”.
- “What can I learn or do that is *helpful*”.

# GET YOUR DAILY HAPPINESS CHEMICALS

The happy brain chemicals that make you feel good



## DOPAMINE

- Enables motivation, learning, and pleasure
- Gives you determination to accomplish goals, desires, and needs

## OXYTOCIN

- Feeling of trust, motivates you to build and sustain relationships
- Known as "Cuddle or Love Hormone", plays a role in bonding

## SEROTONIN

- Feeling significant or important among peers
- Calm form of accepting yourself with the people around you

## ENDORPHINS

- Releases a brief euphoria to mask physical pain
- Response to pain and stress that alleviates anxiety and depression

# How Deficiency Affects You

- procrastination
- low self-esteem
- lack of motivation
- low energy or fatigue
- inability to focus
- feeling anxious
- feeling hopeless
- mood swings

- feeling lonely
- stressed
- lack of motivation
- low energy or fatigue
- disconnect of relationships
- feeling anxious
- insomnia

- low self-esteem
- overly sensitive
- anxiety/panic attacks
- mood swings
- feeling hopeless
- social phobia
- obsession/compulsion
- insomnia

- anxiety
- depression
- mood swings
- aches and pains
- insomnia
- impulsive behavior

**DOPAMINE**

**OXYTOCIN**

**SEROTONIN**

**ENDORPHINS**

# How to Increase Happiness Levels

- meditate
- daily to-do list
- long term goals
- food rich in L-Tyrosine
- exercise regularly
- create something:  
writing, music, or art

- physical touch
- socializing
- massage
- acupuncture
- listening to music
- exercise
- cold shower
- meditate

- exercise
- cold showers
- sunlight
- massage

- laughter/crying
- creating music/art
- eat dark chocolate
- eat spicy foods
- exercise/stretching
- massage
- meditate



# Active Listening

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Clarify

Ask open ended questions



Reflect

Summarize what you think you heard



Express Empathy

Listen with the intent to Understand and Care, **not** **problem solve**

# When YOU are the scarce resource

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- Learn more about “Languages of Appreciation”.
  - For leaders: Ask your team members how they most prefer to be acknowledged and appreciated.
- Practice more active listening.
- Orient your choices, behaviors and communications around your core values.
- Contribute to a workplace culture that you want to be a part of.
- Work on “challenge” thinking, rather than “threat” responding.

# The LEARN Model<sup>©</sup> :

## A brief assessment & intervention model for behavioral health in the workplace

**Listen:** what are the serious concerns? Is substance use among them? Use ACTIVE techniques to try to more fully understand the other person's experience.

- Start with open-ended questions- Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
- Listen for "yeah, but"s
- Don't try to problem solve
- Express genuine care and empathy



# L. E.A.R.N

**Engage** with listening and then further support as needed:

Engage with de-escalation or calming techniques as appropriate:

- Stand or sit NEXT to the person, rather than directly in front of them, or “walk and talk” along side them.
- Don’t block access to exits in case of escalation or anger.
- Take slow deep breaths, slow down the rate of your speech
- For anxiety or panic- work on getting the person to focus on something directly in the room with you (colors, sounds, etc)

Pay attention to how YOU are engaging with them- tone, non-verbals, etc

Create a list of resources that are available in your organization. Engage with the information you have available to you, so that you can use it in support of yourself or someone else when needed.

- This should include but is not limited to: EAP contact information, Suicide, Crisis and Warm lines, Substance use support, DOH and HCA resources as appropriate (see final slide).

# L.E.A.R.N

## Assess urgency:

- is it Medical? Emotional? Is there immediate Danger?
- What is the change from “baseline”? – this is a hard one to answer if you don’t know the person well.
- It does **NOT** increase risk to ask someone about their own safety. If you have concerns about suicidal thinking, please ask kindly and directly.
  - Plan, Means and Intention are the three risk assessment areas for harm to self or others.
- Evaluate both speech process (speed, tone) and content (subject matter, train of thought).
- Does their story make sense? it is coherent or are they jumping from one thing to the next?
- Does it change if they repeat it? Do key elements change?
- Is there a tone of paranoia or hopelessness?
- ASK directly what it is that they would like to do or to see happen (magic wand question). What outcomes are they wanting or hoping for? Are the outcomes realistic?

# L.E.A.R.N

## **Resources and Resilience** identification

This means **Internal** AND **External** resources- either directly or subtly help them identify:

Internal: coping skills and abilities that they have developed over time.

- Often people who have experienced significant adversity have very well-established coping patterns that work for them
  - Examples: Perseverance, Compassion for others

External: friends, family, and other external sources of social support in the area.

- Do they have a religious or social group?
- Do they feel strongly about a social cause or hobby that could orient them with others who feel the same way?
- What about co-workers or other people who can help get them through a rough time?
- What about kids and pets? Often both children and animals are key factors in helping people get through a difficult emotional time.

# L.E.A.R.N

## **Needs and Next steps:**

Based on your assessment of resources, strengths, and concerns, what are the immediate / urgent needs and what options are available to meet them?

Are there professional referrals needed or could the person benefit from peer support?

What are the EAP / HR resources available to you?

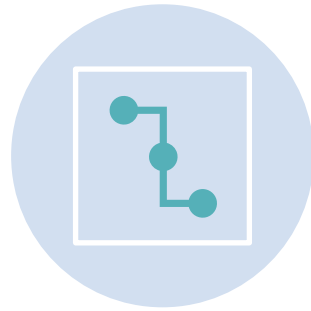
*What is the next best step in support of this team member?*

# Resilience

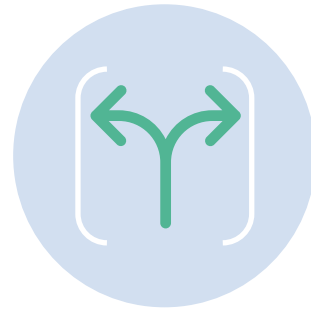
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Purpose



Connection



Flexibility/  
Adaptability



Hope



# Resources for Behavioral Health and Crisis Support

<https://doh.wa.gov/emergencies/covid-19/healthcare-providers/behavioral-health-resources>

[Workplace Resilience](#)

[Combating Moral Injury for Healthcare Workers](#)

Crisis support

[Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): 988 and 800-273-8255

[Crisis Text Line](#) provides confidential text access from anywhere in the U.S. to a trained crisis counselor.

Text HOME to [741741](#) (24/7/365)

[Crisis Connections](#) is a 24-hour crisis line that connects people in physical, emotional and financial crisis to services. Call 866-4-CRISIS ([866-427-4747](#))

[Teen Link](#): call or text 866-833-6546

National [Disaster Distress Helpline](#): 800-985-5990 or text “TalkWithUs” to 66746.



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