

ROUGH EDITED COPY

National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management
SUPPORTING EMOTIONAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE
DURING COVID-19

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>> WILL EISERMAN: For those of you who have signed on early would you mind letting me know if you're receiving our audio transmission? We want to make sure that we're having success with that. We've had a little bit of a technological glitch this morning.

Thank you for your feedback. That makes me feel better.

>> ELIZABETH SEELIGER: I'm here. Can you hear me?

>> WILL EISERMAN: I can now, yes.

Good, I think we are set to go, but Elizabeth if you could be prepared for that backup plan as we talked about, that would be great.

For those of you who signed on early, you're in the right place for today's webinar brought to you by the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management, and Hands & Voices and the Family Leadership in Language and Learning project, in recognition of Better Hearing & Speech Month.

We will be starting at the top of the hour.

>> WILL EISERMAN: Today's coffee break webinar is on Supporting Emotional Health and Resilience During COVID-19.

We'll be starting in just a few minutes.

For those of you who have signed on already, note that today's webinar will be recorded, and posted on infanthearing.org in the next couple of days, so if anything interrupts your full attention or participation in today's webinar, you'll be able to stream it again in the next day or so, and/or share it with others whom you think might benefit from the information that is discussed today.

While we wait to get started, I just put up a slide of all of the webinars that we are doing in recognition of Better Hearing & Speech Month. Take a note of those that have already occurred, as well as those that are upcoming, as you'll be able to access the previous ones on infanthearing.org, and hopefully can attend live the ones that are coming up.

I'm going to initiate recording of the meeting, and we'll get started.

Elizabeth, are you set to go if I get things going here?

>> ELIZABETH SEELIGER: I sure am, if you can hear me okay.

>> WILL EISERMAN: Yep, you sound great. Thank you.

Good day, everyone. I'd like to welcome you to today's webinar in recognition of Better Hearing & Speech Month, bright spots and innovations related to COVID-19, sponsored by the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management, also known as NCHAM, and Hands & Voices and the Family Leadership in Language and Learning project. We are delighted to have you all join us for this series of webinars.

If you haven't been aware that today's webinar is a part of a series, you can view the previous webinars on infanthearing.org, or stream them there, as well as this one and the ones that are upcoming if you're not able to attend live. So we encourage you to do that, or share it with others who might benefit from joining in and receiving this information.

Today's webinar topic is entitled: Supporting Emotional Health and Resilience During COVID-19, presented by Elizabeth Seeliger, Audiologist from Global Impact Audiology in Wisconsin. I'm going to turn the time over to Elizabeth, but before I do that, I'd like to give a generous thank you to our captioner today. I never want to take for granted the skills and talents of the individuals that help make our meetings more accessible, so thank you for your time today in doing just that.

We will be opening up the Chat field as Elizabeth proceeds with stirring our thoughts about what we're experiencing during this unusual period. So without any other delay, Elizabeth Seeliger.

>> ELIZABETH SEELIGER: Thank you so much, William. Good day to everybody. Thank you for taking time out to join me today. I want to start out by congratulating you by doing the first hardest thing which is to actually carve out a period of space and time to learn about ways to support your own emotional health and resilience during what has been a really difficult and unprecedented time, so thank you so much for being with me today. I am really hoping as much as possible to create a communal learning opportunity today, so I have asked William to open up the Chat box, and there will be a couple of different opportunities for you to share with the other participants ways in which you're finding to cope with your own emotional health and resilience during this time. So I will ask -- let's see, can I move this? Oh, I can, good, okay.

So what I would really wish to be doing with you all today is to be taking some time to guide you through some actual self-care practices and activities that would leave you walking away feeling a little better than you came. Unfortunately with the time allotted to us today and with the platform that we're working with, that's not as optimal as I'd like so what I'm going to do instead is I'm going to give you radical permission to walk away and try to put some of the things that we're going to discuss into practice in both your personal and your work lives.

I'm also going to invite you to support one another in ongoing self-care and mindfulness practices in the time after we depart one another, so we're going to start out by just doing some noticing so I'm going to just invite you to notice who you are in this moment. What is your breath rate like right now? Just take a moment and notice your breath, your heart rate, check in with your own attention. Are you feeling like you

can give this talk your undivided attention, or are you managing multiple different things in your life right now: Kids, partners, dogs, pets that might also be asking for your attention. As you consider who you are right now I'm going to actually ask William to put up a poll and have you take your attention back to the last couple of months.

What has your experience been like as far as anxiety, fatigue, stress, depression, since the COVID pandemic has begun? Go ahead and just cast your vote so that we can check in with one another about how this unprecedented outbreak has been impacting our own well-being. Okay, people are chatting in or registering their votes, and not unexpected or unanticipated, folks are experiencing an increase in sort of a decrease in overall wellness, or an increase in anxiety, fatigue, stress, or depression since this pandemic began.

This is not unexpected, because our biological system is constantly scanning the environment for threats, and because our routines have been disrupted, because our workplaces have been changed dramatically, because for the first time we might be trying to juggle a home office and home-schooling children, because our attention might be divided between our typical work in EHDl and additional responsibilities around the pandemic, we're really being asked to deal with quite a lot right now. So I think that the topic that they've asked us to consider, our own emotional health and well being during this time, is an important one, so that's why we're all here together today.

I did anticipate that some people would be experiencing a decrease in some of these things, and that can feel confusing because sometimes it might feel better, and sometimes it might feel harder. Some of us might have had a long, complicated commute to work, for example, typically, and working from home might actually alleviate the stress of a long commute. So, you know, there can be a variety of experiences happening for folks right now.

We live in a time and culture that highly prizes our thinking and doing self above our feeling and being selves. Sometimes we can feel like work, family, social commitments, or the balance, the ever-challenging balance between them, is too much. This may have been true for many of you before the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. With the outbreak come additional changes and unknowns that can add to this feeling of uncertainty. Our biologic nervous system is wired to be checking for safety, and all of this can cumulate to create this feeling of additional stress, like life is really pushing us down.

It's a really evident some of us are directly responsible for supporting the health and well being of children and families. It's nearly impossible to find the energy or the collective resilience to support others if we don't first attend to our own mental health and well being.

So add COVID-19, and if we weren't feeling this before, we may very well be feeling this now.

So what happens if we don't attend to our own emotional health and well being? We do not exist in a vacuum. If we don't attend to our emotional health and self-care to bolster our own resilience, we can begin to feel like we're drowning. This feeling of drowning can be also labeled as overwhelmed. I'm sure that this feeling of overwhelmed may resonate with many of you.

If we don't attend to our own feeling of overwhelmed, we can begin to splash our own anxieties on to other people. So the impact of our inattention to our emotional

health is that we sort of splash those unprocessed emotions onto those around us so that might be our family members. That might be our colleagues. That might be an overall anger or resentment at the government, at other people in our community. An example of this happened to me when, because I'm now working from home and have a child at home, setting boundaries around when work begins and when work ends is very difficult. I also have a home office that is in my living room, without a door, so my daughter was asking: Are you done with work yet? And then I would say not quite yet because I had a deadline, an impending deadline.

And an hour later she'd come back and say are you done with work yet? Just a little bit longer, I've got to finish this. She sort of sat down on my couch and waited, and I lost it. I said: I am not done with work yet! This is my office. I need you to pretend there's a door and knock next time you come in!

And she was really upset, because really, I was not upset with her. I was really upset with the fact that I didn't feel like I had boundaries around my work anymore, that my boundaries around the time of my work and even around the space where my work was happening was all blending together. But I took that frustration out on her.

So it can be really tricky, right, to be able to find time to process our own emotional well being so that it doesn't sort of come out and splash on to other people. And none of us really want that. So how do we deal with this feeling of overwhelmed?

Well, one simple strategy is to start to really think about and not only think about but I would encourage to write down and do as an exercise a process of really determining, what are the things that I can control? And what are the things that I can't control?

So this slide is really around the COVID-19 outbreak. So I can't actually control the spread of the virus, although I can do my part in limiting how I engage with and prevent the spread of the virus in my home or my family or my community. I really don't have a lot of control over how the virus is being spread within my community, within my state, and worldwide.

That's really hard, right? Like, I want to control it and I was worrying a lot about that.

What can I control? Well, I can control what I consume. I can control my own thoughts, actions, and behaviors. I can control how I ask for and engage with others around help. I can control the ways in which I connect to others. And then when I can actually balance those things out and put my energy toward the things I can control, I can begin to conserve some energy, and conservation of energy is a really important part of self-care.

If we're spending a lot of energy spinning our wheels or feeling anxious and worried about things we can't control, then we may not have the energy to attend to our own emotional health, and attend to our work and attend to our families in the way that we want to.

So you can do this around whatever particular issue is making you feel the most anxious in the moment, whether that be a work issue, whether that be the greater pandemic, whether that be a family issue. So just sort of sorting things into the buckets of what I can control and what I can't.

Another way, another exercise that might be helpful to you, is something that was taken from a book by Shawn Achor called the Happiness Advantage, and it's called the

Zorro Circle Exercise.

There we go, I'm back on. So this is one that I find particularly helpful when thinking about the things that are stressing me out or causing me anxiety around my work environment, so it's just a series of concentric circles. The bottom one is where you list 100% -- things that are 100% within your control, and the reddish circle is 100% not in your control, things that no matter how hard you try, how much effort you put in, how creative you get, you cannot do anything about.

And then because things are not always so cut and dry, there are circles for things that while it's not completely in your control, you may have the opportunity to influence, and things that you may be able to influence but might be more difficult to influence. And what this does is allows you to begin to sort out again where you can put your energy where you'll be able to see impact, or change.

This sense of feeling like you have some control in your life when so much of the world feels out of control can really help ground you in your own well being.

So one of the things about resilience is that if we come to this pandemic with quite a lot of resilience that has been nurtured throughout our childhood and early adulthood and adult lives, if we are coming to this pandemic with quite a lot of resilience, we can still look very functional. Many of us are doers by nature, are quite functional, are high achievers. That's why we work in the EHD system that we do.

But functionality is not actually a measure of wellbeing. Health is, and from talking to many people during this, I'm hearing a lot about more headaches, more stomach issues, maybe small things like breakouts, an acne breakout or just indicators that health might not be optimal right now. And we're two months into this and we're not exactly sure when we're going to see this -- life back to some semblance of normal so just be paying attention. Just because you're able to get out of bed and be functional at work does not actually mean that you're living in true health or wellbeing, so pay attention to that.

So how do we nurture wellbeing in the time of COVID? Well, it turns out that nurturance we can learn a lot from nurturance from what happens to us actually from the time we're in utero. The way humans have nurturance is food, touch, and movement. When you think about an infant inside of the belly, they're most of the time getting all their needs automatically met. They're being constantly nourished through the umbilical cord. When the mother is breathing or walking or even turning in their sleep, there's this sense of movement, of gentle movement, that they have from living in a bag of waters, and that there's constant touch that is just the very nature of living in the placenta, so we're getting all our needs met. Once we're born, we're beginning to have to navigate those needs in the outside world, so it's really easy to think about in terms of whether or not we're being nurtured by thinking about: How is food, touch, and movement being met? Pre-pandemic we may have also gotten many of these needs met without much negotiation at all.

Maybe we had a routine. Maybe we took a walk at lunch with a colleague every day. We had movement embedded into our daily pattern. We might have counted on touch from a partner at night, and social distancing may have really interrupted this. I know of people who work in the health care system who have moved their immediate family, their children and their partner, out of the house while they're having to negotiate coming back and forth from the hospital.

So this situation has really interrupted normal patterns of food, touch, and movement. Maybe you were in a habit of packing a healthy lunch to take to work with you, and now maybe instead of getting a small bag of chips from the vending machine, you're like me and can eat an entire bag of chips throughout the day and forget to take lunch. Just kidding. I try really hard not to do that but have found myself more likely to just grab something like that, because it's accessible to me, whereas -- and because my kitchen and my office are literally right next to each other, being way less thoughtful or mindful about eating is really easy to do.

So one of the things I'd like to have you think about is: How are you navigating food, touch, and movement now that your regular, in different ways, now that your patterns might have changed due to working from home or due to other implications of the COVID-19 outbreak?

So food, a couple of examples on here, is actually taking food outdoors to be nurtured by the environment while eating. Mindfully eating, so stepping away from your computer or your office space, and actually attending to the smell, touch, texture of the food that you're eating.

Touch can be sensory touch. It can also be emotional contact, so how are you in contact with people while being socially distant? It can also be feeling moved by something, so reading or watching something moving, that's also touch.

Movement can be walking, like, physically moving, stretching. Movement can also be breath work, just deep breathing. So I'm going to ask you to just go ahead and chat in how you're approaching these three essential ingredients of nurturance differently during the COVID-19.

This is a way for you to learn from one another for a second strategies and coping mechanisms and self-care approaches for getting nurturance now that COVID-19 outbreak is in place.

Go ahead and just take a second.

Chat in strategies that you have used to access nurturance through food, touch, and movement.

I see lots of walking, exercise platforms virtually. Great.

As you are listening, if you think of other ones, go ahead and continue to chat that in. I really want this to be a collective opportunity to learn from one another what's working right now.

I'm going to take a second and do really brief teaching piece about the window of tolerance. So each of us biologically innately has an upper and lower threshold of our nervous system, so this graph is by Dr. Daniel Siegel and it's really giving you a visual representation of our nervous system. The yellow line represents kind of your natural ebbs and flows of your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system throughout the day so on the lefthand side of your screen, that might be when you wake up. Maybe you're pretty sleepy still. Your heart rate is still pretty slow. Your respiration is pretty slow and then you get up and you have a cup of coffee or you take a brisk walk, and you're sort of increasing your nervous system, and then maybe you find out that something happened at work and you get this little blip up towards the top of your window of tolerance.

And then you kind of settle back down, and then maybe, yep, there you go, thank you for that. Now you're at the bottom. Maybe this is your 3:00 break where your

lunch is wearing off and you're starting to get tired and all of a sudden your kids have a huge fight outside and your boss calls at the same time and you pop into hyper-arousal where you're feeling anxious or nervous, and you might stay there a little bit of time because it's the end of the work day, and you want to get some work done, but also feel like you need to be making dinner, and then you get all that accomplished and then you crash, right, and go back into that hypo-arousal state.

But mostly, right, you're within this window of tolerance between hyperarousal and hypo-arousal in a fairly regulated state. Now, this is your best-case scenario. This is when your window of tolerance is not being stressed in any way. So we do ebb and flow kind of through these two different states throughout the day, throughout the week. But we have the ability to increase or decrease our typical biologic natural window of tolerance.

So when we are talking about those three essential ingredients of nurturance, if we are without those we can shrink our window of tolerance so let's say we forgot to eat breakfast, and then got sort of really busy throughout the day and didn't eat very much, and didn't really drink any water. You'll notice that more of that yellow line is now outside of our window of tolerance. Our window of tolerance is what allows us to cope, right?

And it's where we do our best executive functioning. It's where we have the greatest access to our creativity, to our reasoning brain, to our logical thinking, to our planning. When we're in hyperarousal or hypo-arousal we don't have as much access to that so we really want to stay within that window of tolerance. Being without food, being without touch, being without movement can shrink that window of tolerance.

If you sacrifice two of those essential ingredients, your window of tolerance will shrink even more. This might mean that you just feel crabbiest, you feel like it takes less to make you feel like you need that nap, or it takes less for you to go from annoyed to angry, for example, with your kiddos.

If you are really not getting your needs met in most ways, right, if you're not getting food, if you're not going outside to take walks, if you're not making time for contact, because making emotional contact with others is harder when you can't just pop over to somebody's desk and check in with them, when you actually have to make an effort to connect online with people who might have been part of your daily sphere in the past, your window of tolerance can become very small. This can be sort of a chronic experience of anxiety and fatigue.

So just remember that you do have some control over increasing your window of tolerance by paying good attention to how you are being nurtured and how you're getting your needs met. So how do we nurture resilience? I think oftentimes when we think about how to increase our own resilience, we think about physical, so how do we get emotional needs met? How do we get physical needs met?

I think that this concept of social distancing that we've been engaging in is really shining a light on how much we depend on our social connections for our own resilience. Some folks might be accessing resilience in different ways now. For example, whereas you might have been getting your emotional needs met or your social needs met through having a Saturday coffee with a friend at the coffee shop, that might not be available to you anymore, and you might be finding that instead, you're really focusing on your creative needs, or your intellectual needs.

Maybe you're learning a new skill via YouTube. Maybe you're reading books that you've never had time to read before because you have more time at home, so I have a little checklist, a way for you to start to document: How do you care for your different areas of needs? And you can actually make this for sort of pre-pandemic and post-pandemic.

So how did you used to get your social needs met? How are you getting them met now? How did you typically get your physical needs met? Maybe you used to go to the County park every day and now that County park is closed. So how is it different you're getting your physical needs met?

So it's really important, I think, to take some time and start to document in these different areas how you're getting your needs met, because you might be surprised. For example, church might have been something that was very important to you and was regularly available to you, and now that it might only be available through an online platform, you find yourself not going as often.

So what are some other creative ways to get your spiritual needs met? Just different ways to think about those things.

So go ahead again and if you have ways that you're finding to meet your spiritual, creative, intellectual and social needs, go ahead and chat those in. And some of them, like this chat around organizing virtual game nights, sounds like a great way to meet both your social and emotional needs. So go ahead and continue to chat in creative ways that you might be accessing these different spheres.

I see that there's also a handout that you can download for yourself. So self-care is a buzzword these days. Many people think of self-care as the commercialized versions of self-care that are no longer available to us, so massages, vacations, travel, fine dinners out. A lot of the things that I consider macro self-care are no longer acceptable with the "safer at home" and other sort of social distancing policies that are being put into place, so instead of thinking about natural self-carried like to invite you to think about micro self-care. Micro self-care is available in real time.

It has immediate impact on stressors, and like macro self-care, it does have cumulative effects. So what is micro self-care? Micro self-care is something you can do in the moment. So, for example, if you're going to eat lunch when you get off of this call, instead of just consuming the food, take a second and smell your food. Close your eyes, and really concentrate on the texture and the flavor of the food.

Pay attention to your breath rate while you're eating. Eat in silence. Take some time to really find a quiet space. Check out of your Facebook or social media and really allow just 5 to 10 minutes of quiet reflection time.

Think about dropping into your breathing, taking 5 deep breaths. Thinking about touch. Do you have a fuzzy blanket or a fidget you like to have next to your desk? Just really taking time to do whatever it is that you're doing mindfully. If you have to do dishes, instead of allowing your thoughts to go to worry, really focus on the sensation of the warm water on your hands, the bubbles, the sense of the soap. Those are actually really effective strategies for taking care of yourself in the midst of what is a busy day.

You have control of your own breath. You have control of whether both of your feet are planted solidly on the ground while you're working. Just taking a moment to have some quiet peace.

Micro self-care is completely accessible to you even during this challenging time. And I encourage you to take it.

I also for those of you who know me I'm a big proponent of community care. I'm so thrilled that NCHAM and Hands & Voices have picked self-care, emotional health and well being and resilience as a topic because we as a community of providers are responsible for supporting and helping families who are also struggling with accessing health care, accessing their own fears around doing what they might think is best for their child, and we have a responsibility to create a culture of community care in the EHDI system.

So self-care is acute self-preservation. We have to attend to it for ourselves and I maintain that it's important to take what we're doing, what's working for ourselves, and encouraging our colleagues and the families that we work with to also engage in self-care practices, in slowing down, in mindful wellbeing. We do have a Facebook page that is 100% dedicated to embedding health and wellness within the EHDI system.

You can find it at @IMHinEHDI or by searching wellness and mental health in EHDI. I encourage you to like or follow that page and we will continue to offer supportive ways that we as a community can be engaging in caring for ourselves and walk another.

So I'm going to leave you with this quote that self-care isn't always chocolate cake and trips to the spa. Sometimes it's meal planning, going to bed early or letting go of a bad friend. It's forgiving yourself for not meeting your own impossible standards, and understanding that you are worthy. Always. Self-care isn't just luxuries but a way of survival.

So my hope, the light at the end of my COVID-19 tunnel, is that we actually have some time and space to think about ways of connecting, the importance of connecting, the ways of taking care of ourselves and one another that we can continue to bring into our lives as businesses begin to re-open, as life as we once knew it begins to come back into play. I hope that we can actually engage in a slower, more mindful way in that process so that's my hope for myself. It's my wish for you. If you want to kind of take note of where you're at with your own personal wellbeing or with your own resilience, there's a couple of self-assessments. These might fun things to do with your team just to check in and build that community care, begin to just take note of where we are.

The heart math assessment not only gives you your score in different wellbeing categories, but also some really good resources around how to increase your wellbeing in those areas, if you're struggling.

There's also a lot of different tools out there for Supporting Emotional Health and resilience. I've put a couple of links here to the compassion resilience toolkit, to the positive psychology activities and exercises, and also to the CDC website that specifically talks about coping and managing stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 virus.

I hope that this was helpful, and I hope that this community has given you some ideas for ways to support your own emotional health and resilience, and I am happy to answer any questions you might have, or to entertain any reflections you want to share with the group.

And I know we're almost out of time.

>> WILL EISERMAN: I just put a "questions" box up there for particular questions. Thank you so much, Elizabeth. That was a good reminder for all of us to think about these different ways of taking care of ourselves. And there was a very active sharing in the chat field throughout all of that. I think people want to take the time to smell their lunches and eat them and do whatever spoke to them. So thank you, everybody, for taking your time today to be with us.

Remember, this webinar has been recorded, and will be posted on infanthearing.org in the next couple of days. So if you want to hear it again or share it with others, you can do it that way.

Remember also that we have upcoming webinars, so check out what we have in the next week or so, and before you go, if you wouldn't mind clicking on this final link, and giving us feedback on this webinar today. Again, thank you to our captioner for your time and talents today.

And, of course, to Dr. Seeliger for your wisdom and insights. Thank you.

>> ELIZABETH SEELIGER: Thank you, everybody. Bye-bye. Be well.

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