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Addressing Mental Health Key to NDW Fleet and Family Support Center During Pandemic

By: Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jason Amadi, Naval District Public Affairs

WASHINGTON (NNS) –Naval District Washington (NDW) Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC) continue to offer mental health resources for service members, Navy civilians, and their families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

NDW’s FFSCs have offered resources to help personnel cope with the effects of the pandemic since April 1. The FFSCs offer several courses including Suicide Prevention, Helping Children to Navigate COVID-19, and How to Manage Stress and

Anxiety to help ease the burden of Navy personnel and their families.

“I think it’s gotten harder for folks,” said Jodi Pallet, NDW counseling and advocacy program supervisor. “We’ve been at this stay-at-home posture for a lot longer and people are starting to feel the fatigue and the strain of having restricted movements. It’s hard for folks who are homeschooling kids, home with their partners or don’t have time to themselves to recharge during the pandemic. We also now have other crises going on with the economic crisis and racial tensions in America.

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The outbreak of COVID-19 may be stressful—it can be difficult to cope with fear and anxiety, changing daily routines, and a general sense of uncertainty. Although people respond to stressful situations in different ways, taking steps to care for yourself and your family can help you manage stress. (U.S. Navy graphic by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sarah Villegas)

DEFEATING COVID-19

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Mental Health During the Pandemic: Understanding How Your Mind Responds to Disasters

By Capt. Jamie Reeves, MD, Mental Health Director, Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Public Affairs

Falls Church, Virginia (NNS) -- The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges on many levels, from how we work, to how we socialize or exercise, to how we educate our children. The pandemic has also created a lot of fear and uncertainty regarding the extent of its impact on our economy, our health and the health of our loved ones, and how life will look going forward.

These major changes can obviously have an impact on our mental health. If you are not sleeping as well you were prior to the pandemic, if you find yourself more irritable or frustrated, if you are more worried in general and don’t feel your normal self, you are not alone.

In fact, such reactions are quite common when you experience a major stress or change. This is happening to us all in some fashion as we adapt to our “new normal.”

The important point to remember is that we are resilient, and just as we adapted to previous major societal changes (9/11, major wars, economic depression), we will adapt to the pandemic’s impact and hopefully emerge stronger than before.

Adapting to new and stressful changes in life may not be easy, but there are things you can do to help make the process easier. For example, one difficult part of the current situation has been the loss of control we have over what is happening. Decisions that impact almost every part of our daily life are being made by leaders in consultation with public health experts, not by us.

It can be helpful therefore to regain some control of your life by developing new routines involving things you enjoy, maybe exploring things you have wanted to do but never had the time to. It’s a great time to catch up with friends or families (physically distanced of course), learn a

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IT'S OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND WHERE TO GET HELP, VISIT MILITARYONSOURCE.MIL OR CALL THE MILITARY CRISIS LINE: 1-800-273-TALK

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People are suffering in a lot of different ways and these are unprecedented times.”

As spring shifts to summer, some seasonal childcare services aren’t available to parents as they would have been prior to the pandemic. The FFSC is offering some courses after working hours to accommodate parents who are too busy to attend during the day.

“I think a big mental health factor right now is just working from home and educating your children from home,” said Martha Karandy, life skill facilitator for FFSC. “A lot of our families are stressed because they’re working full-time and there’s no daycare available for them this summer. There may not be summer camps available to them to take their children to. We’re trying to offer

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new hobby like cooking or watch a series or movie you have always wanted to see.

Ideally, part of your new routine should include some daily exercise, to include getting outside for some sun. You should try eating well balanced meals, and get enough sleep at night, preferably 7-8 hours if you can. The more you develop your own daily personal routine that is healthy and filled with things you enjoy, the more you will feel a sense of control and ability to adjust to our new reality even with its limitations.

Talking with others can be another important way to adjust to the current situation. Even though we may be social distancing, we are all going through this together. Conversations with your friends, family or colleagues can help you realize you are not alone in how you feel. Chances are they are just as frustrated, confused or anxious as you are. Knowing that can be validating and empowering.

Human beings are social by nature, and establishing these connections can be comforting and healing. By reaching out to others you are helping them just as much as you are helping yourself. In fact, helping others has been shown to increase self-esteem and improve your mood. So, pick up the phone, use your favorite face to face app (Skype, etc.) or talk to a neighbor (6 feet apart). You will be glad you did.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, “We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.” We can remember this as we all experience this difficult period. It’s important to remind yourself “this too shall pass” and know that things will get better. Each day that goes by we are one day closer to a vaccine, one day closer to more effective treatment and the additional medical supplies needed for patients impacted by COVID-19, one day closer to businesses and schools opening up,

people resources and different activities to help reduce their stress when it comes to navigating their household. We know people are at home with their children during the day, so we are also providing a lot of our training after 5 p.m. so people can have access.”

In addition to the online webinars, Navy personnel and their families can call and schedule one-on-one counseling from their FFSC.

“People can call and tell me about their stress on travel, for example, and I can give them resources from TSA and the CDC on how to protect themselves on an airplane. We are fully open and ready to help. Parents have been extremely grateful because they

one day closer to a better economy and one day closer to returning to our pre-COVID lives.

Consider trying an app for mindfulness. Mindfulness teaches concepts such as the transience of all things so you do not become too overwhelmed by what is happening at the moment. You learn to ride life’s ups and downs allowing you to remain even-keel in accepting the current state without fear or judgment.

One caution is in how much media, especially social media, you consume. Technology can help you connect to loved ones, friends and colleagues, but there are risks. Because social media is largely unregulated, it is difficult to discern well vetted (i.e., evidence based) information from opinion, and may therefore contribute to misinformation. Although research indicates that accurate and clear information can relieve distress during a crisis, too much media exposure can have the opposite effect and amplify distress.

If you have tried these methods of adapting and still find yourself impacted by symptoms such as anxiety, irritability, depression, loss of sleep or appetite, you may consider asking for help to aid you through this transition. If you feel these symptoms are impacting your work, family or other important aspects of life, it is even more important to get help. Asking for help is a sign of strength. It shows that you are working to make yourself better.

The Navy has adopted the “No Wrong Door” approach to counseling. We have many ways to get help, and all are equally good. You can talk to a friend, shipmate or family member, a chaplain, someone at the Fleet and Family Support Center, your primary care provider, a mental health provider embedded in your command, a provider at a mental health clinic, or you can speak to a counselor over the phone via Military One Source. In order to protect you and your loved ones from the

knew they had a place where they could get help. At the end we always give our contact numbers and they refer their friends and family to us. This is a hard time for everybody and people can reach out to us for assistance. Our counselors are here to help,” said Karandy.

To register for the interactive webinars, visit www.navymwrwashington.com/registration-form or log into the classroom a few minutes before the scheduled start time at <http://ffr-learn.adobeconnect.com/nsawfleetandfamilyvirtualtrainings>.

For more news from Naval District Washington, visit www.navy.mil/local/ndw/.

virus, these “doors” for help may involve telephone or virtual appointments right now, but the doors are all open waiting for you to enter.

If things develop into a crisis, and you find yourself thinking about hurting yourself or someone else, please get immediate care via 911 or by going to the nearest emergency room. Hospitals have systems in place to screen all patients for COVID-19 and to separate COVID-19 patients from other patients.

As with all situations, the mental health impact of a crisis is varied. A crisis is a stress on the status quo and a rapid increase in uncertainty about the future state. Although this environment is ripe for feelings of anxiety, depression and generalized distress, it is also an opportunity for people to come together and do incredible things toward a common purpose. We have seen that in our shipmates who have experienced the largest deployment of medical forces since Operation Desert Storm nearly 30 years ago. We see that in the many doctors and nurses taking great risks and working relentless hours to provide care to tens of thousands impacted by COVID-19. We will no doubt get through this pandemic as we have gotten through many other crises and emerge stronger as individuals, as a Navy, and as a country.

Information about stress and how to cope can be found at <https://navstress.wordpress.com/>.

If you or someone you know is in need of immediate assistance, the Military Crisis Line is available 24/7. Call 1-800-273-8255 (Option 1), text 838255 or visit <https://www.militarycrisisline.net> for free and confidential support.