

REDUCING ANXIETY AND FEAR IN STAFF DURING COVID-19 OUTBREAK

SUGGESTIONS FOR ICRC MANAGERS

"In these unprecedented times, ..."

"In these uncertain times, ..."

"In light of the ongoing crisis, ..."

What increases stress these days?

In parallel to health-related worries, staff members face stressors related to:

- **Ambiguity of information about the outbreak**
- **Creative work-life-conditions:** working from home might entail new difficulties (responsibility for child care, not having a quiet room to work in, losing the regular routine of the job and the dynamic of working in teams, etc.)
- **Feeling powerless, or helpless of assisting others:** staff might develop feelings of inadequacy in work while supporting others
- **Role ambiguity:** With the rapid progress of the pandemic it becomes increasingly difficult to know what to expect in the near future. Shifting in tasks is also expected as some staff members might be stuck in remote areas, overwhelmed by new needs, or self-isolating
- **Job security concerns:** staff might experience a sense of job insecurity reflecting the uncertainty of future programming
- **Challenges within the host communities:** workers might experience a stigma that prevents them from receiving social support within their communities. Furthermore, especially mobile staff might experience isolation, accusation of bringing the disease in parallel of feeling worried about their families

Why managers can reduce stress

The current situation with COVID-19 puts extra demands on ICRC staff, therefore work-related changes/challenges require special considerations in terms of managing teams.

Studies show the critical role of organisational support in protecting the staff mental health and promoting better work-related outcomes (e.g. engagement, quality) in such times.

With the current work demands, **supportive management attitudes** are crucial resources to help staff to:

- Cope with stress
- Develop a sense of control over the challenges
- Encourage employees to share challenges and learning
- Facilitate the help-seeking behaviour, when it is needed

Suggestions for managers

Have informal check-ins with your team

- **Try to be proactive.** Try to be yourself available and listen to your staff more than ever.

Tell it like it is

- **Promptly sharing information and instructions from Staff Health** on the current outbreak to prevent the tendency to invent/make information up and distort it.
- **Provide access to adequate protective measures** to reduce concerns and feel protected.
- **Give an explanation for decisions** to avoid leaving colleagues feeling unprepared to adapt (ie. Evacuations).
- **Define clear roles and objectives** to convey a sense of control. Reminding people that this is a crisis and that things change frequently will help maintain flexibility and commitment.

Create safe spaces for everyone to share their experiences... and keep sharing them

- **Sharing experiences is crucial.** ICRC works in different contexts and countries whereby managers' experiences represent a great platform of learning.
- **Bring hope to the team.** Encourage your team to share stories of people who recovered, solutions on educating children at home, and innovative communications among people. All can serve as hope-promoting incentives that help to overcome the challenges.

Look out for people having a more difficult time than others

- **Try to be attentive to individual difficulties and needs.** Remember that each staff member, including you, may face unique challenges.
- **Remind team members that it is ok to feel stressed.** Teams who have the space to discuss their challenges are better at problem solving and also feel more supported.
- **Promote the setup of a buddy system or peer support system among staff.** Providing emotional and practical support to peers helps the staff to feel connected and reduce the stress levels (ombuds relais and staff health officers can support with this).
- **Promote solidarity among the team.** Appoint someone to create a space for team members to support each other (e.g. WhatsApp group, email list, skype.. etc.) and try to run regular 'well-being meetings' to discuss staff challenges and share experiences.
- **Make sure to clarify that ICRC offers and confidential psychological support** for staff members who are facing uncontrollable levels of distress or who might want to have specialised mental health professional support. Encourage staff members to ask for individual support whenever they need it and to encourage their peers to do the same.

Trust your team

- **Focus on the essential** to avoid exhaustion and decrease efficiency in the long run, due to dealing with fear, confinement, stress, locked children 24 hours and/or sick relatives.
- **Convey feelings of belonging** to keep everybody involved and decrease possibility of burnout.

Look after yourself

- **Be aware and prepare to manage your own stress.** As a manager, you are very important in responding to the outbreak and more likely to experience an increased level of stress.
 - As a manager, you are more likely to having too much on your plate, with too little resources to deal with them. Therefore, remember to establish your support network and take time to delegate.
- **Create and maintain a self-care strategy,** especially if you are in isolation. Try to incorporate proper rest time, healthy food, exercise, time to communicate with loved ones, time for fun or practising preferred activities, in addition to the work time.
- **Try to communicate your challenges to your superiors as well as to your team.** Build realistic expectations in terms of what can be done in the current crises.

Working under stress may always bring miscommunication or conflict in teams, which will increase your stress level and decrease your ability to control your work.

You may consider using the tips above to manage your team, to promote a healthy environment and to reduce your own stress.

Resources:

The ICRC has made available a collection of resources relevant to the staff mental health consideration during COVID-19. This includes Staff Health teams, including Staff Psychologists or the Organisational Psychologist to help you support your team.

You can always contact the staff psychosocial support team if you have any issues concerning your, your family, or your staff well-being. The team is made available explicitly to support you.

Find the **article on the 6 ways to support staff well-being** by clicking on: [HERE](#)



Print out this image and **hang it in your office** as a reminder of the 6 tips

6 WAYS TO SUPPORT STAFF WELL-BEING

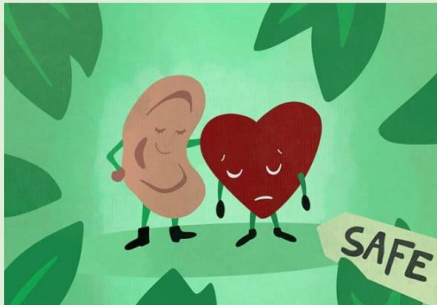
1. Have informal check-ins with your team



2. Tell it like it is



3. Create safe spaces for everyone to share their experiences... and keep sharing them



4. Look out for people having a more difficult time than others



5. Trust your team.



6. Look after yourself.





For more tips and ideas for staff mental health and mutual support go to: [Staff Health Wiki](#)
Feel in need of psychological support? [Get in touch with Staff Health](#)

ICRC Staff Health Centre of Expertise