



Managing the Marathon

Dealing with the stress of a prolonged emergency

Disclosures

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 - Professor of Psychology, Scientific Director for CIPSRT
 - No relationships with commercial interests
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Potentially Psychologically Traumatic Events (PPTEs)

- PPTe – a stressful event that can cause diverse mental health injuries
 - Significant threats of harm to the self or loved ones
 - Direct – e.g., happened to me; witnessed it first hand
 - Indirect/vicarious/secondary – (e.g., witnessed the aftermath; learned about happening to a loved one; part of providing support or care)
 - Can lead to several different mental health injuries
 - Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Panic Disorder
 - Typically lasts seconds, minutes, or hours; rarely lasts days or weeks
- Not everyone exposed to a PPTe becomes injured

Protracted PPTEs

- PPTEs that typically last or repeat for days, weeks, or months
 - Can lead to increasingly comorbid mental health injuries
 - Can distort a person's sense of self and core personal and social identity
 - Can cause significant emotional dysregulation
 - Can cause difficulties with behaviour, cognition, relationships, physical health
 - Most people can be expected to be impacted by a protracted PPTE
- Can cause diverse mental health injuries
- Not everyone exposed to a protracted PPTE becomes injured

COVID-19 as a Protracted PPTE

- The threat has lasted months, likely will last for months or years
- The threat is effectively invisible
- The threat is ambiguous
 - Difficult to identify, qualify, and quantify individual levels of threat
- The threat is pervasive and very difficult to definitively avoid

COVID-19 as a Protracted PPTE

- Pervasive uncertainty, which is also problematic for mental health
 - Length of threat
 - Effective protective actions
 - Changing requirements/public health measures
 - Children's education
 - Houseful finances
 - Personal health
 - Family health

COVID-19 as a Protracted PPTE

- Grit, avoidance, and short-term strategies alone are unlikely to be sufficient
- Managing COVID-19 as a protracted PPTE requires
 - Reframing expectations
 - Implementing, maintaining, and supporting sustainable individual, organizational, systemic, and structural coping strategies
 - **A multi-faceted series of tailored solutions**

Burnout

- Overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism and detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment
- Negative change in reaction to others, depersonalization, inappropriate attitudes towards coworkers, irritability, loss of idealism, and withdrawal

Burnout

- Possibly influenced by high caseloads, lack of control over agency policies and procedures, unfairness in organization structure and discipline, low peer and supervisory support
- Specific to occupational contexts and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life
- Distinct from compassion fatigue, vicarious stress, and vicarious trauma because not necessarily or exclusively related to PPTE

Burnout

- Burnout is associated with symptoms of other mental health injuries (e.g., anxiety, depression) as well as absenteeism
- Burnout can occur even in psychologically supportive environments if the psychological demands remain high for protracted periods

Possibly Beneficial Actions

- CIPSRT COVID-19 Readiness Response Project Materials
 - <https://www.cipsrt-icrtsp.ca/en/crrp>
 - Webinars, summaries, recommendations, mindfulness tools



Possibly Beneficial Actions

- Constructive supportive communication
- Demonstrably value and empower your team members
- Facilitate consistency
- Manage internal expectations regarding uncertainty and change
- Manage external expectations regarding capacity
- Recognize and emphasize success, including sustained performance
- Systematically support self-care with workplace structures





Possibly Beneficial Actions

- Regular, brief (re)training based on the latest research
 - COVID-19 responses, standard duties, mental health care, self-care
- Frequent, consistent, transparent, interactive communication
- Algorithms to help reduce uncertainty and anxiety
- Remain visible and express empathy
- Social connections and peer support
- Support healthy, sustainable routines

Possibly Beneficial Actions

- Self-care is not a luxury
 - Mental health monitoring
 - Maintain routines
 - Sleep hygiene
 - Daily exercise
 - Healthy eating
 - Avoid substances
 - Take breaks
 - Stay connected



Solutions

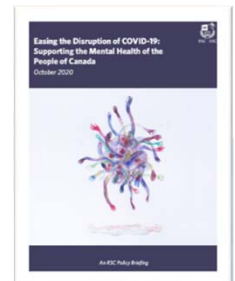
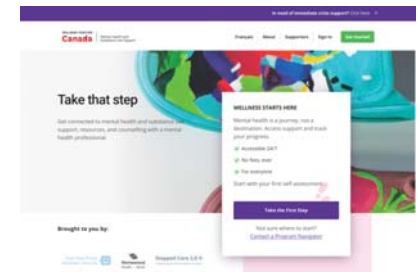
- Professional Care
 - Avoid pseudoscience
 - Use evidence-based registered mental health care options
 - Colleges
 - Registered Provincial Associations
 - Nurses, Physicians, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Social Workers
 - Get help early and as needed



www.pspnet.ca

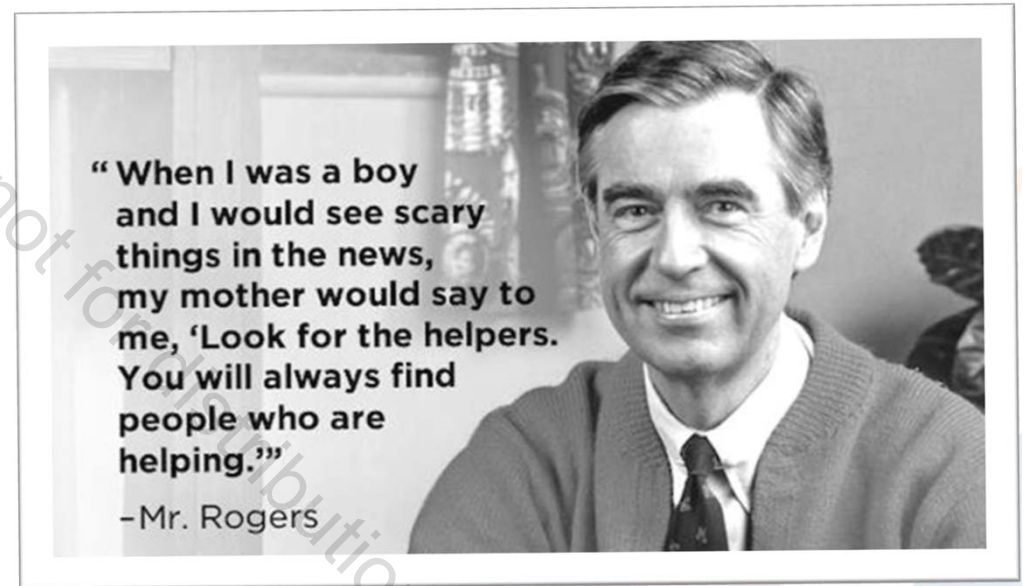
Solutions

- Remember
 - We are in a marathon
 - Reframe expectations
 - Implement sustainable, multi-faceted, tailored, structural solutions
 - You are not alone
 - CIPSRT COVID Readiness Response Project
 - Wellness Together Canada
 - Royal Society of Canada



Solutions

- Remember
 - It can be easy to focus on challenges and hard to focus on successes



Thank You!

Questions and Discussion