



Pause.

Combat compassion fatigue by taking a time out

Erin Miller, ED Staff Nurse, Children's at Scottish Rite, knows the importance of taking a breather to recharge.

The winter months bring with them higher census numbers at Children's as well as illness among staff members and an often stress-filled season. This year, add in worries about the economy and personal finances, and the winter months can be a recipe for anxiety, depression and unease in employees. Luckily, at Children's, help is never far away.

"Children's nursing staff and administrators are always in a mode of caring for others, whether it be caring for patients, patient families or our own families," said Anne Peacock, Director, Family Services. "As caregivers, we can experience 'compassion fatigue.'"

As we learned through the development of the "Strong Enough to Care Enough" message, our employees are already strong. But to combat fatigue and burnout, Children's offers programs that help employees build inner

resources, so they can bounce back from stressful seasons of life and work, leveraging their existing strength to build resiliency.

The importance of resilience

"For people working at Children's, the level of compassion and commitment are so high that it becomes a real challenge to attend to one's own body, mind and spirit," said Joan Murray, Coordinator of Chaplaincy and CPE Supervisor at Children's at Egleston. "Resilience means taking care of your own life, so you are better able to care for others."

Johnnathan Ward, Staff Chaplain, Children's at Hughes Spalding, puts it this way: "Resilience is the ability to take a licking and keep on ticking. It gives people the ability to see the big picture and to feel good about their work and their future."

When stress is not managed, it can lead to burnout, which compromises the quality of relationships and care that a caregiver is able to provide. Symptoms of burnout can include staff conflicts, absenteeism, low morale, low motivation, poor communication, avoidance of tasks or the feeling that work is not fulfilling.

Promoting resilience

According to Children's experts, the best way to combat stress, avoid burnout and promote resilience is to be proactive.

"Spiritual distress is like bodily pain or illness—it's easier to prevent than to treat," said Murray.

Ward suggests creating a balanced wellness plan that addresses the five areas of personal wellness: the emotional, spiritual, social, physical and mental aspects of a person's life. Employees can find tips on building a wellness plan as well as a number of other tools by logging on to Strong4Life Online.

Ward also recommends staff knowing their personal stressors, planning ahead for stressful seasons and giving themselves permission to reach out for help.

For each person, the stressors and plans for nurturing himself or herself will be different, which is why it is important to create a unique wellness plan, tailored to individual needs.

Take it from the experts

Experts at Children's offer these tips to reduce stress and increase resilience:

- Be proactive. Know what causes you stress and have a plan for rapidly reducing your stress. Build your reserves early.
- Exercise. Eat well. Rest.
- Discover the power of silence to heal and rejuvenate.
- Express your feelings. Talk to others or keep a journal. Enjoy the outdoors.
- Don't make too many New Year's resolutions. Break up goals into monthly or quarterly goals.
- If you subscribe to a religious faith, participate in meaningful rituals, blessings and the offering of thanksgiving.
- Spend time with people you care about and who care about you.
- Take time for yourself to do the things that renew you. Make your wellness a priority.

"If we're always at the end of our collective ropes, we have nothing left to give. Promoting your own resilience means maintaining yourself in a state that enables you to get up in the morning and do what must be done," said Peacock.

"We're really talking about a way of life that nurtures one's body, mind and spirit," said Murray. "We must be as respectful, committed and compassionate to ourselves as we are to those we care for."

Resources provided by Children's

Employee Assistance Program – EAP Consultants, a professional and confidential counseling service, are available to help you and your family resolve personal concerns.

Chaplains – Children's chaplains offer a variety of learning opportunities for staff that address preventing stress, building resilience and sustaining wellness. Chaplains are available to talk with employees one-on-one and help them refocus their thoughts and energies after a time of high tension.

Critical Incident Stress Management – CISM is a program led by counselors trained to debrief staff members when a death or extreme trauma occurs. The affected employees talk about the event in a group setting with a facilitator who can guide them and suggest ways to care for themselves.

Social workers – Children's employees often find themselves caring not only for patients but for patient families, who are facing extreme and stressful circumstances. Social workers' knowledge and experience can be used by Children's employees who need to set healthy workplace boundaries and deal with escalating emotions.