Coping with Sustained Traumatic Stress

By Suzanne Spaeth, MS, LPC - Advocate Aurora Employee Assistance Program

We have been living in a state of sustained traumatic stress the last couple of years because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and now the Russian invasion of Ukraine has created another level of uncertainty, stress, and feelings of helplessness. It would not be surprising if you are feeling overwhelmed by the possibility of another global disaster and lost sense of predictability.

You may be noticing that you are feeling more anxious or distressed. Perhaps you are having difficulty eating or sleeping; maybe you find yourself becoming more irritable or short-tempered. These reactions to ongoing stress and uncertainty are normal. But they can also get in the way of living your life. Here are some tried and tested behaviors that might help you gain control of these feelings:

**Manage your exposure**
- Take regular breaks from news and social media outlets.
- Choose unbiased sources of media that report the news objectively.

**Stick to a routine**
- Get up at the same time each day. Brush your teeth. Make your bed. Following a routine helps you feel more in control.

**Look after your body. Practice good habits.**
- Include exercise, yoga, or meditation in your stress management toolkit.
- Eat well, stay hydrated and prioritize sleep.

**Don’t be afraid to cry**
- Crying can be healthy and healing. Give yourself permission to feel your emotions and to express them.

**Connect with others**
- Connect with friends, family or co-workers for company and support.
- Seek professional help if your distress is interfering with day-to-day life.

**Think about how you can contribute**
- Look for ways to help others and engage in a sense of community.
- Share your strengths with others and encourage others to share their strengths as well.

If you find yourself needing additional help, please reach out.
Call your Advocate Aurora EAP
800-236-3231

Adapted in part from article by Sophie Aubrey

Q2 2022 Email Promotional Messages
May 2022

**Time to Check In**

The Covid Pandemic has made it more difficult to physically connect with our friends and family to see how they are doing. As a result, it may be more difficult to tell when someone is struggling. Now, more than ever, it’s important to check in with them. IDONTMIND\(^1\) has created a series of questions that make it easier to catch up and check in with friends and loved ones. The following questions provide a framework for making sure everything is okay. If you hear something concerning, recommend resources such as a doctor or a mental health professional.

The questions are easy to ask.

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<td>1. How are you feeling today, really? Physically and mentally.</td>
<td>6. What did you do today that made you feel good?</td>
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<td>2. What’s taking up most of your headspace right now?</td>
<td>7. What’s something you can do today that would be good for you?</td>
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<td>3. What was your last full meal, and have you been drinking enough water?</td>
<td>8. What’s something you’re looking forward to in the next few days?</td>
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<td>4. How have you been sleeping?</td>
<td>9. What’s something we can do together this week, even if we’re apart?</td>
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<td>5. What have you been doing for exercise?</td>
<td>10. What are you grateful for right now?</td>
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\(^1\)IDONTMIND Copyright Mental Health America 2022

Take this opportunity to check in with friends, family, co-workers and even with yourself. It might make a life-changing difference.

**As always, if you feel you might benefit from additional support, please reach out to the EAP for assistance:**
aah.org/eap or 800-236-3231.
Anyone mistakenly being called “sir” when considering themselves a “ma’am” – or vice versa – will experience an emotional reaction...confusion, defensiveness, or maybe anger. Being addressed in a manner at odds with our sense of self does not compute in our brain; it instinctively elicits uncomfortable feelings.

The use of pronouns is a common and helpful part of communication. It is an abbreviated way of referring to someone without having to repeatedly use their name. Pronouns such as “me, myself and I” are how people talk about themselves. People use pronouns “you, she, he and they” to talk about others. However, traditionally a pronoun in the English language requires assuming whether an individual is male or female. This assumption is based upon appearance, tone of voice and affect. Is this “one or the other” binary approach accurate?

Many people do not feel exclusively male or female. Our understanding of gender identity and expression has come to recognize that concepts of masculinity and femininity exist on a spectrum. But what is gender identity? It is a person’s emotional and psychological sense of their own gender. A gender neutral or gender inclusive pronoun does not associate a gender with the person being discussed.

The English language is slowly integrating gender neutral pronouns into words people use every day. Personal pronouns are used to convey gender identity but don’t necessarily align with the sex assigned to an individual at birth. Third-person singular pronouns express how someone wants to be referred to by others. Common third-person singular pronouns are “she/her/hers” and “he/him/his”. “They/them” can similarly be used to reference a single individual, as can gender-inclusive pronouns like “ze/hir”.

It may seem strange to use the plural pronoun “they/them” when talking about a singular person. Surprisingly, “they” has been used this way for 600 years in the English language. In 2019 the Merriam-Webster Dictionary updated the definition of the word “they” by noting it can be used as a nonbinary pronoun; it was also named “Word of the Year”.

It is important to address someone using their chosen pronoun to show respect for them as a person. Assuming gender identity by using the wrong pronoun can make someone feel invalidated, dismissed, and disrespected. The most basic way to convey respect is to ask someone what pronoun they use and then use it correctly.
Things to Consider:

- Opinions and preferences regarding pronouns are unique to every individual. There is no “right” or “best” way to address the use of pronouns.

  Example: People who know their pronouns may like to be asked; others may be confused or offended. Be respectful and patient.

- Reactions will differ based on how close someone feels to the person addressing pronouns with them.

  Example: Inaccurate pronoun use by an acquaintance may have less meaning than by a parent; personal questions by a stranger may feel intrusive whereas by a close friend may feel validating.

- Underlying intent, feelings, attitudes tend to send the loudest message when talking about pronouns.

  Example: Addressing pronouns using a sarcastic voice verses a curious, caring tone will be received differently.

Remember, Advocate Aurora EAP is here for you.
Please call us at 800-236-3231
to speak with one of our counselors.