

Peer to Peer (Buddy) Support Program

Background: COVID-19 is a pandemic that threatens not only our patients but ourselves and our sense of safety and control. Our front line staff are coping with ongoing uncertainty about the scope of the threat, concerns about adequate PPE, financial impact and worry about the complex decisions that will be required of them. In addition, civil unrest and discussions around addressing systemic racism can be challenging. Many of us are experiencing unusual levels of professional anxiety and stress under these conditions. This places all of us at increased risk for burnout and psychological trauma reactions. In order to mitigate these risks, we must develop cognitive and emotional resilience in ourselves and our colleagues. Our goal is to provide you with tools based on the *Anticipate, Plan, and Deter* model fostering resilience in healthcare workers who are deployed in hazardous situations.¹ The first tool is the Peer to Peer (Buddy) system.

What Are Peer to Peer (Buddies)?

The US Army uses the “Battle Buddy” for peer mentoring and emotional support. Having a Peer or Buddy helps you to: 1) Validate your experiences; 2) Identify and address stressors early; 3) Keep work at work; 4) Develop and maintain resilience.

Who Is the Ideal Peer to Peer Match?

Matches can be chosen by a third party but in some instances pair up spontaneously. Usually they’re matched based on a common working environment, clinical responsibilities, level of seniority, and stage in life, but without being close friends. Peers need to be able to be supportive and objective when assessing stress behavior and providing feedback.

What Does a Peer to Peer Supporter (Buddy) Do?

The peer is a listener. They do a brief check-in as they share their reactions to stressors and anxieties and validate each other’s experiences (e.g. “I’m afraid I’m going to bring the virus home”, “I keep doing chart checks on my patients late into the evening”). They understand the daily challenges of a particular unit, provide each other an additional perspective, support resilience and encourage additional help if stresses and anxieties escalate. Listening and validating is not debating or arguing. If this is occurring, it is best to reach out to a mental health professional or to your employee assistance program.

How Do Peers Help to Find Solutions?

Peers (Buddies) support resilience: figuring out adaptive ways to cope with challenges so we can all perform successfully in a less-than-perfect environment. Daily/weekly conversations can also help identify specific issues that need to be addressed locally (within their area) or that need to be escalated to leadership.

What is The End State for the Peer to Peer (Buddy) Program?

1. A working environment where everyone feels supported and validated. No one is left out.
2. Work stays at work. Home is a place for relaxation and recovery.
3. A cognitively and emotionally resilient team culture.

BUDDY CHECK-IN 1-10 MINUTES

- Aim to contact your peer 2-3 times per week or more (daily if needed)
- Contact can be a quick text to check in; a short call to debrief; a zoom meeting to hash something out
- Listen, validate, and provide feedback; identify any issues that need more support or attention
- Identify any operational issues that need escalation

Sample questions for your check-in:

- What is hardest right now?
- What worried you today?
- What went well today?
- How are things at home?
- What challenges are you facing with sleep/rest, exercise, healthy nutrition?

If you and your peer are ready to support one another in anticipating and planning for specific stressors you may encounter, please see the back of the card.

¹ Schreiber et al. Maximizing the Resilience of HealthCare Workers in Multi Hazard Events: Lessons from the 2014-2015 Ebola Response in Africa. *Military Medicine* 184,:114, 2019

Stress Inoculation

Working with Your Peer (Buddy) to Anticipate and Plan for Specific Stressors

In our Psychological Resilience Intervention, after the Peer to Peer (Buddy) program is initiated, a mental health consultant works with small groups of providers in each unit to engage in stress inoculation: they **Anticipate** and **Plan** for the specific stressors they are likely to encounter. The mental health consultant is also available to help **Deter** more serious mental health problems, by working with individuals who experience escalating or cumulative stressors and whose coping responses are getting overwhelmed.

If you do not have a mental health consultant available to you, and if your Peer to Peer (Buddy) relationship is strong, you can work with your Buddy to help each other engage in the **Anticipate** and **Plan** phases of stress inoculation on your own. In your Peer to Peer (Buddy) conversations, support one another to do the following:

	<h3>Anticipate</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipate and identify the specific stressors you are likely to encounter • Describe your likely responses to these stressors
	<h3>Plan</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the stressors and responses that will be most difficult for you • Describe your personal resilience plan: How will you cope with these difficult stressors? What resources are available to you? What strengths and resilience factors will you make use of?
	<h3>Deter</h3>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you or your peer are experiencing escalating or cumulative stressors and coping responses are getting overwhelmed, it is not your job to be a therapist. Please move into the Deter phase by seeking or helping your peer to seek mental health support, pastoral counseling, or connection with EAP.

Here is a list of potential stressors and resilience factors to help initiate your conversations:

Stressors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiencing working conditions that are hazardous or have insufficient supplies • Worrying about the safety of your loved ones and/or being unable to return home • Being worried about contracting COVID-19 • Financial pressures due to furlough/layoffs • Witnessing COVID-19 in coworkers • Being asked to perform duties outside of current skills • Being unable to meet patient needs and/or being responsible for making difficult triage decisions • Being forced to abandon patient(s) • Witnessing an unusually high number of deaths • Civil unrest and violence in your workplace, home or city • Having direct contact with grieving family members

Resilience Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling your work was meaningful and contributed to the greater good • Feeling emotionally connected to or supported by someone (family member, friend, coworker, peer) • Connecting with your peer and receiving validation for your reactions • Getting enough sleep; staying hydrated, having access to food and time to eat • Getting at least 15 minutes of exercise each day • Fostering your positive emotions: expressing gratitude, feeling compassion for self and others; sharing your story; listening to music, spending time in nature, laughing • Spending time with your religious, faith-based, or spiritual practices

For more detail, see Albott, McGlinch, Wozniak, Wall, Gold, Vinogradov: [Battle Buddies: Rapid Deployment of a Psychological Resilience Intervention for Healthcare Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). Anesthesia and Analgesia, 2020.