

Urgent Action Needed to Protect Faculty

First 30 days after trauma are critical!

I am sending another message to you because research shows that we must act quickly to protect the mental health of faculty and students. I see on numerous posts on “teaching during COVID” groups and hearing from administrators, that faculty are stressed! In fact, when educators are describing some of their feelings and behaviors right now, they are describing symptoms of trauma. When stress is severe enough or prolonged, it can become Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that can be very detrimental to mental and physical health in the short term and, worse, can become chronic, creating life-long problems.

Research shows that about 23% of people who experience trauma develop PTSD. A study by Price, et al, in 2019, found that the **first 30 days are a critical time frame** when symptoms can turn into a disorder, such as PTSD. Their research suggests that intervening in the first 30 days to treat symptoms of anxiety, stress, and trauma may prevent the symptoms from turning into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The statistics are alarming. Even before COVID 19, research from the University of Michigan showed that 93% of elementary school teachers and 94% of middle school teachers reported experiencing high stress. Research from the Higher Education Policy Institute by Dr. Morrish indicates that faculty are under greater risk than students.

For your faculty you may be the first responder. For your students, you may be the first responder. Parents may not know how to help their children handle stress. They, themselves, are stressed and may not be handling it well. You have the expertise to help.

However, if faculty are stressed, they may not be able to help students. Research shows that faculty stress is actually contagious to students. Faculty may be having symptoms such as trouble focusing or regulating their emotions (see next newsletter for help on this). This can negatively impact their work.

Worse yet, what condition, mentally and physically, will faculty be in when they *do* return to work after long periods of stress? The good news is that it is the *periodic recovery* that is important. We are all exposed to stress, with or without this pandemic, but it is **what you do about it** that matters. **(See below for things you can do right now.)** If untreated, it can become serious and even have life-long consequences. Utilizing frequent strategies for recovery, you may be able to escape chronic conditions such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

I am trying to do my part to help since I am experienced in providing information and strategies to people who have experienced natural disaster or community/school violence. I am now ready **to provide my workshop on reducing faculty stress remotely** to provide your faculty with experiences and strategies to help them reduce their stress as they live through this pandemic and prepare to return to the classroom when this is over. You can find out more [HERE](#) about the presentation and you can **CONTACT ME** with questions.

You will also find more information about mental health on my web page at [PTSD, Stress, Trauma, Mindfulness Resources For You](#).

I have spoken with leadership who are providing their faculty with many mental health resources during this time. I see that Governor Cuomo has made the app **Calm** available free to everyone in New York to encourage them to engage in mindfulness meditation. Indeed, engaging in mindfulness meditation (or other types of meditation) may be the single most important thing that you can do. You can do it alone or with your family or students.

Here is some immediate help:

1. **Guided imagery:** This can be a quick intervention available to you anytime you have 3 minutes or more and a device. All you have to do is listen and imagine what the speaker is describing. Here is one that I like very much. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XwHGGKz8gCE&t=36s>. You can find more by searching for guided imagery meditations. Even better, you can get an app. Governor Cuomo provided the app Calm to New Yorkers. I saw for a time that teachers could get that for free. I use Buddify and Insight Timer. Headspace is also popular. Most of these allow you to choose a purpose (sleep, overcome fear, calm down) and the amount of time you want to listen.

2. **Mindfulness meditation:**

take quite some time of good enough for it to difference. Not true, from Yale, Cambridge, people who had no

REDUCE NEGATIVE
EMOTIONS NOW

and mindfulness and gave them a 20-minute introduction into mindfulness meditation concepts. Then they put them in a brain scanner and created pain in the form of heat application to their arm. They also presented negative images to them. They were asked to apply mindfulness meditation at one time and respond normally at another.

You may think that it would practicing meditation to get make a noticeable according to researchers and Harvard. They took formal training in meditation

When the participants employed mindfulness meditation, not only did they feel less pain and fewer negative emotions, but researchers could see the difference in their brains! They had reduced activity in areas associated with pain and negative emotions. These changes were not in the frontal lobe, indicating that it wasn't conscious willpower making the difference.

This study indicates that even without long meditation practice, just staying in the moment and being mindful can provide benefits.

Mindfulness meditation is one form of meditation that can be done in a variety of ways. As with other types, it is focused attention. With mindfulness meditation, it is *being mindful*, focusing attention on something you are doing. Mindfulness meditation should not seem like something you *have* to do, but rather as a pleasant escape and something you can look forward to. It will calm your mind and renew your energy. No time for a nap? Meditate.

1. **Sit comfortably:** Don't worry that people in pictures of meditation are sitting cross-legged in a certain posture. That is not necessary. You can do mindfulness meditation while you are walking or doing dishes, just not driving! If you want to do it seated, just sit comfortably. You could lie down, but the danger there is that you fall asleep. If you have time to sleep, then no

problem. Of course, ideally you would do this in a quiet place where you can be comfortable. If you can do it outside, even better.

2. **Start with your breath:** Begin by focus on your breathing. Bring your attention (and your hand if possible) to your belly. Feel it move as you breathe in and out deeply through your abdomen more than your chest. Just breathe naturally at first and pay attention to your breath.
 3. **Release the tension in your body:** Be aware of your body. If you feel tension in any area, tighten the area and then release.
 4. **Bring attention back to the breath:** Every time your attention wanders, and it will frequently, bring your attention back to your breath. Think “breathe in” as you breathe in and “breathe out” as you breathe out. Just stay in this state for as long as you want to meditate, staying mindful of your breath and tuning out distractions by just letting them go and coming back to the breath.
3. **Moving meditation:** When you are tense and upset, it can be hard to settle down and sit still. Therefore, you may want to select one of the types of moving meditation, such as qi gong, tai chi, yoga, or meditative drumming. Experiment and see if one of these works for you. Here are some links you can try and you can find many more on youtube.
- a. Tai chi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkp5TewRWsA>
 - b. Qi gong (sitting version) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppM9FRRX-Uo>
 - c. Meditative drumming (this drummer is offering online lessons and sessions for a fee if you are interested. You can find him at Russell Buddy Helm on Facebook or the internet. I studied with him after Hurricane Katrina. I am not trying to sell or promote anything, please! I am just offering what worked for me. Here is a video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KrfwcqpSgs>

I hope these activities help. Until next time, stay well in all ways!