

# Massachusetts Municipal Human Resources Association

**Kudos to HR Professionals:**  
You Survived and Thrived During Covid

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# This is who I am and what I do...

- **35 year town employee – “retired” from system in 2017**
- **Therapist and certified Suicide Prevention Trainer**
- **Have facilitated over 125 webinars during Covid**

Presenter on topics such as anxiety, suicide, stress, self harm, and other mental health challenges.

Most requested talks:

**The Secret Lives of  
Teens and Tweens**

**Resilience Required: Mental  
Health During The Covid Era**

**QPR Suicide Prevention**

Audience: town employees, parents, caregivers, adults, educators, private industry, and youth.

Consultant to cities/towns on projects such as:

**Dysfunctional and/or  
Struggling Departments**

**Post-Covid Workplace  
Challenges/Issues**

Projects typically involve interviewing staff, creating reports detailing issues and concerns that impact the work environment, and providing specific recommendations to address areas of deficit.





**Context is  
Everything**

**COVID-19**  
**Black Lives Matter**  
**Contentious Election**  
**Riots in DC/Political Unrest**  
**Economic/Budget Impact**  
**Mental Health Impact**  
**In, Out, & Hybrid School/Work**



## How Covid Crunched Our Personal and Professional Worlds...

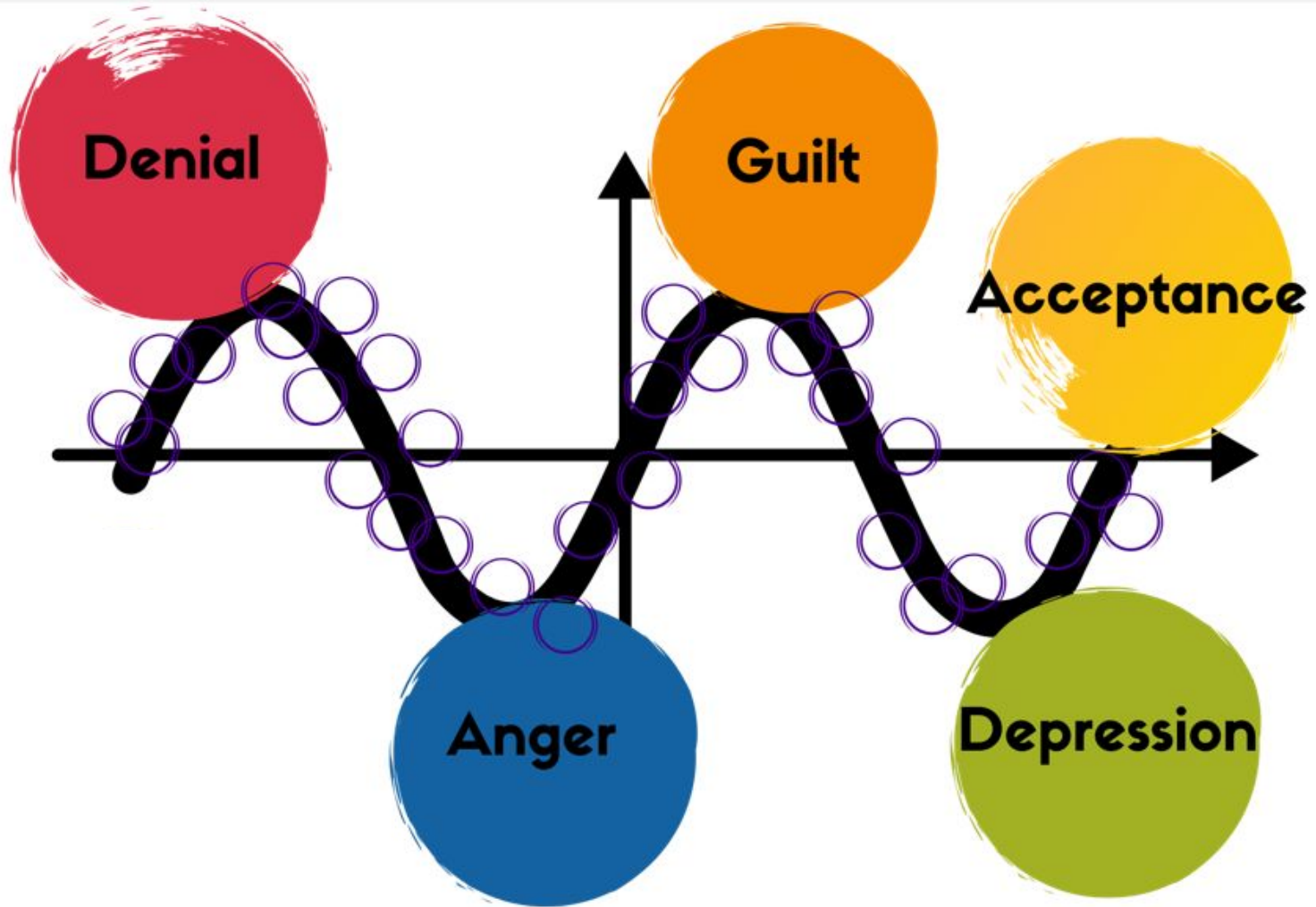


“You suddenly realize how  
abnormal your sense of normal  
has become...what should be so  
familiar feels so unfamiliar”

*Craig Spencer, MD and MPH*

RESILIENCE

# Grief and Loss - Individual and Community







## HR Staff are Human

While you were supporting others and working so hard, you may have had to deal with your own challenges:

- **Relationship and family issues**
- **Financial stressors**
- **Physical challenges and conditions**
- **Unusual work stressors**
- **Mental health challenges and conditions**



"How should I know,  
it's my first pandemic"

Anonymous MA HR Professional

**You had to learn and support staff in new ways regarding Mental Health**

**You had to learn and support staff in new ways regarding Covid safety and protocols**

**You had to be thoughtful and support staff working from home and those at your work site, in new and innovate ways**

**And this was on top of the zillion other things HR does everyday such as health benefits, retirement support, creating and enforcing policies, investigating injuries at work, negotiating contracts, hiring, firing, onboarding, trainings, etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc., etc...**

# The Impact of Covid on Mental Health

- Suicide
- Self Harm
- Depression
- Substance Use/Abuse
- Anxiety

## During late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use<sup>\*</sup>

### ANXIETY/DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS



### STARTED OR INCREASED SUBSTANCE USE



### TRAUMA/STRESSOR-RELATED DISORDER SYMPTOMS



### SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE<sup>†</sup>



<sup>\*</sup>Based on a survey of U.S. adults aged ≥18 years during June 24-30, 2020

<sup>†</sup>In the 30 days prior to survey


For stress and coping strategies: [bit.ly/dailylifecoping](https://bit.ly/dailylifecoping)



# Types of Anxiety

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
  
- **Return to Work/School**





Generalized Anxiety Disorder  
Social Anxiety Disorder  
Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder  
Panic Disorder  
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Return to Work/School**

**Anxiety**

- Excessive stress or worrying / What if?
- Feeling powerless
- Having a sense of impending danger/panic/doom
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling jumpy or tense
- Irritability



**EMOTIONAL**



# PHYSICAL

- Heart palpitations/increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing (hyperventilation)
- Shortness of breath, chest pains
- Dizziness, light-headed, nausea
- Sweating
- Trembling, feeling weak or tired





# Behavior

Sleep  
Issues

Over-planning

Lack of  
Focus

Defiance

Avoidance

Outbursts

Negativity

# Anxiety

# Feelings

Anger  
Frustration  
Embarrassed  
Ashamed  
Disgusted  
Overwhelmed  
Stuck  
Jealous

Disrespected  
Helpless  
Hurt  
Insecure  
Regret  
Uncomfortable  
Grief  
Lonely



"While many staff were amazing and pulled together, some acted like teenagers...or sometimes even like little children"





# **A sampling of the positive actions and ways that HR professionals played a major role during Covid**

- Focused on what you can control
- Focused on what is going well
- Talked to other towns, other HR professionals for ideas
- Acknowledged and validated thoughts/feelings of others
- Modeled calm
- Learned new ways to communicate
- Problem solved in areas that were entirely new
- Cared a lot, worked a lot, sacrificed a lot

**...while you have achieved a lot over the past 15 months, it has been grueling and it is not a sustainable pace and level of stress long-term**

**Moving Forward, what you can do.... for you**

## **The 5 M's**

- **Me (meaning you)**
- **Moving (being active)**
- **Mental Health (attending to this)**
- **'Mergency Joys (Credit to Scott)**
- **Mindfulness**

# FOCUSING ON YOU --- SELF CARE

- Not selfish
- Is intentional
- More deeply understanding your priorities and needs, what actually makes you feel rejuvenated?
- Implementing boundaries - time, space, money, energy
- Making “peace” with discomfort of saying “No”
- Less tech, unless it’s fun
- Asking for support and/or delegating
- Listening to/trusting your internal voice
- Limiting time with people/places/things that are draining



# WHAT SELF CARE MAY LOOK LIKE

Laughing

**Mindfulness**

Therapy/**Mental Health**

Medication

Napping

Healthy eating/drinking

Self Generosity

Being in the moment

**Moving/Exercising**

Faith

Volunteering

Being in nature/outside

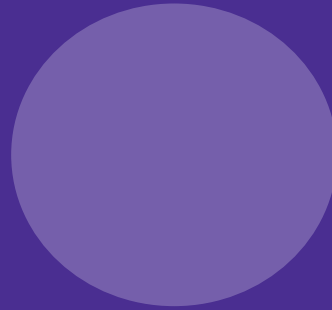
Showering/taking a bath

Identifying your strengths

Being creative

**'mergency Joys** (credit to Scott)





# Let's CHAT

(enter your response in the chat box)

**What self-care strategies have you used?**

**What self-care strategies might staff in use?**



# **Your Questions**

---

**Please type your questions into the CHAT box and Jon will address the issues and challenges that concern you.**



- I want to acknowledge how stressful this time has been
- I want to acknowledge how hard you have worked and how much you have cared
- I want to acknowledge that your contributions are/were important and made a difference
- I want to acknowledge that you may be tired, and perhaps even burned out (that's ok)
- I want to acknowledge that most of you have not been acknowledged enough
- I want to acknowledge that you have made it this far -- amazing -- even if there are still more challenges ahead

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