MinnRAP Program: (aka Battle Buddies) Introduction (Part I)

Minnesota Resiliency Action Plan

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Disclosures

- No disclosures
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Q1: Please identify your top three stressors the last two weeks

- Risk of infection or harm to self/family/colleagues
- Concerns about limitations in resources (inadequate PPE, ICU beds, testing, lack of vaccine)
- Institutional betrayal
- Social isolation/loss of teamwork
- Childcare issues/managing distance learning/other caregiver responsibilities
- Zoom fatigue
- Uncertainty about future
- Financial impact/possible job loss
- Racism/aggression/fear of police brutality
- Acute risk of civil unrest or violence
Q2: Please identify your top three emotions the last two weeks

- Fear/anxiety/insomnia
- Anger/rage/short fuse
- Grief/depression/sorrow/despair
- Guilt/shame
- Cynicism
- Helplessness/hopelessness/inadequacy/frustration
- Renewed sense of purpose/altruism/commitment
- Healthy coping
- Unhealthy coping
Q3: Identify the top three coping (resiliency) strategies that have been effective for you over the past 3 weeks.

- Exercise
- Connected with a friend or colleague
- Been hydrated, had access to food, and had time to eat
- Had enough sleep
- Laughed
- Felt emotionally connected or supported by someone
- Engaged in a meaningful hobby
- Felt that your work was meaningful and contributed to the greater good
Background:

Observations during first weeks of COVID-19 pandemic at the University of Minnesota
Common experiences & reactions to COVID-19
Stress has direct effects on brain function and brain information processing.

**ACUTE STRESS**

- Concentration and decision-making decreases
- Fear & Fight/flight/freeze reactions increase

**Chronic stress**
- inadequate sleep
- poor nutrition
- emotional distress

**Decreased regulation of cortisol**
- attention
- perception
- short-term memory
- learning
- word finding

**Cellular changes in the hippocampus**
Stress induces unhelpful patterns of thinking (self-monitor for these)

• **All or nothing (binary) thinking**: right/wrong, safe/unsafe, productive/unproductive, helpful/unhelpful, strong/weak
• **Catastrophizing**: imagining / extrapolating to the worst outcome
• **Mind reading**: making assumptions about what another is thinking and then filtering their behavior through that lens
• **Fortune telling**: predicting outcomes without recognizing their inherent unpredictability or the biases imposed by current situation / state
• **Discounting the positive**: focusing on negative; loss is more painful than gain is rewarding
• **Over-generalization**: applying one observation / piece of data to a broad outcome
Building a Model: Minnesota Resilience Action Plan (MinnRAP)

Mentality health consultants

Buddy System

Anticipate
Plan
Deter
What is the Buddy System?

• Model used by US Army for peer mentoring and support.

• Battle Buddies helps to:
  – Validate experiences
  – Identify and address stressors early
  – Keep work at work
  – Develop and maintain resilience
Who Is the Ideal Battle Buddy?

• Usually chosen by a third party, but can pair up spontaneously

• Matched based on:
  – Common working environment
  – Similar clinical responsibilities
  – Level of seniority
  – Stage in life

• Battle Buddies (BBs) should not be close friends. BBs need to be able to be supportive and objective when assessing stress behavior and providing feedback
What Does a Battle Buddy Do?

• Primary purpose is to listen
• Check in regularly to share reactions to stressors and anxieties and validate each other’s experiences
• Understand daily challenges of a particular unit, provide each other an additional perspective, support resilience and encourage additional help if needed
• Support resilience and growth during challenge
Goals of the Battle Buddy Program

• A working environment where everyone feels supported and valued. No one is left out.
• A cognitively and emotionally resilient team culture.
Battle Buddies Check-ins

How often?
- Try to connect with your Battle Buddy 1-3 times per week
- Do whatever works: a quick text, phone call, Zoom check-in
- Listen, share a story, validate, give feedback
- Vary your topics: share observations, a life event, & humor.

What do I say?
- How are you doing?
- What worried you today?
- How are you coping with things at home?
- How are you doing with sleep/rest, exercise, meals?
- What are you doing for relaxation, joy, satisfaction?
Battle Buddies are *not* just for battle.

- Connect with your Battle Buddy anytime - *before* things get really stressful.
- It’s like training *prior* to a marathon.
- Brief conversations *now* will strengthen individual and team resilience and ensure endurance for what happens *next*. 
Role of Dedicated Mental Health Consultants

• Present at the kick-off/launch meeting with the unit
• Provides contact information to members of the unit
• Takes their cues from the unit, responding to unit-specific needs
• Connects with the Unit Lead or Champion regularly to track needs
• Offers to facilitate small group sessions customized to each specific unit and focused on needs of unit (validation, stress inoculation)
• Establishes brief, non-intrusive “touchpoints” with the unit to maintain visibility of the program (the goal is culture shift and not formal “compliance”)
• Assesses the amount of patient/family distress and deaths that their unit is handling and any additional patient-related mental health needs the unit is experiencing
Anticipate

- Anticipate and identify stressors
- Describe your likely responses

Plan

- Identify most difficult responses to stressors
- Describe your personal resilience plan

Deter

- If coping is overwhelmed move into Deter phase by seeking or helping your BB to seek mental health support, pastoral counseling, or connection with EAP.
• **Anticipate and identify** the specific stressors you are likely to encounter

• **Describe your likely responses** to these stressors
Plan:
Identify the stressors and responses that will be most difficult for you
Describe your personal resilience
How will you cope with these difficult stressors? What resources are available to you? What strengths and resilience factors will you make use of?
Deter:
If you or your Battle Buddy are experiencing escalating or cumulative stressors and coping responses are getting overwhelmed, it is not your job to be a therapist. Seek mental health support, pastoral counseling, or connection with EAP.
Assessing Outcomes

Cohort Stratification

Group A: Early-start
Group B: Delayed-start

Delayed-group starts active intervention

INTERVENTION

Comparison phase

INTERVENTION

Intervention phase

WAIT-LIST

time
How do we manage our stress reactions and work together to move successfully into a new future?

Individually

- Acknowledge negative emotions: anger, fear, anxiety, sorrow, despair
- Foster your positive emotions: gratitude; compassion for yourself and others; solace from music and other creative outlets
- Spend time with your religious, faith-based, or spiritual practices; spend time in nature
- Honor your unique story and the unique story of each person around you

Collectively

- Embody optimism
- Find connection
- Foster self-efficacy
- Engage in collective efficacy
Resilience/ Gratitude Practice

Be proud of the contributions you made to your team today.

Thank a team member for their contributions.

Allow yourself to appreciate the impact that your group is having during this unprecedented challenge.
“The most clear-sighted view of the darkest possible situation is itself an act of optimism.”

--Jean-Paul Sartre

“Optimism is always the primary justification for its own existence. It can seem naive until it is gone. The assumption that things can get better, with the expectation that they should, creates the kind of social ferment that yields progress.”

-- Marilynne Robinson