



It's Up to Us[®]

to Create a Healthy & Supportive San Diego

A bulletin regarding the behavioral health of frontline workers and their families



Edition 34

About the Campaign

Today, like all Americans, San Diegans are navigating a new way of living due to COVID-19, including its impact on mental health. Frontline workers are particularly vulnerable to behavioral health challenges, more so than their peers in the general population.¹ Their repeated exposure to trauma on the job and inflexible schedules put them at greater risk of challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Three out of four frontline workers report that they could have used more emotional support than they received.¹ But many workplaces and programs, like the San Diego Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program, are working to change that.

By raising awareness, encouraging dialogue, and providing access to local resources, the It's Up to Us campaign aims to inspire wellness, reduce stigma, and prevent suicide in all San Diegans, with a particular emphasis on San Diego's most at-risk populations.

This campaign is developed through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and supports the County's *Live Well San Diego* vision to promote a community that is healthy, safe, and thriving.

Up2SD.org[®]
LINK UP FOR INFORMATION AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Access & Crisis Line
(888) 724-7240

COMMUNITY RESOURCES 2-1-1



Shine a Light On: Frontline Workers' Behavioral Health

Frontline workers can range from healthcare professionals working in hospitals and clinics, to first responders like police officers, EMTs and lifeguards. They can also be essential workers, like bus drivers, janitorial and sanitation staff, grocery store clerks, or in food service. These people are on the job at all hours of the day to make sure we are safe and taken care of. The nature of their job requires that they put the needs of others before their own while they are working which can result in compassion fatigue and burnout.



Compassion fatigue is the exhaustion experienced from caring for sick or traumatized people. Symptoms may include difficulty sleeping, irritability, feeling emotionally numb, and self-blame. Burnout is complete mental, emotional, and physical depletion after exposure to prolonged stress. Signs of burnout include sadness, feelings of isolation, indifference, and hopelessness.² Burnout and compassion fatigue can have a profound effect on overall health if not addressed. But there is hope in offering support and seeking help.

If you know a frontline worker, consider checking in, showing appreciation with a caring gesture, or providing support. If you are part of the frontline worker community, there are actions you can take to protect your behavioral health, build resilience, and nurture your well-being.



¹American Psychological Association. (2021, March 11) Essential Workers More Likely to Be Diagnosed with a Mental Health Disorder During the Pandemic [Press Release: <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2021/one-year-pandemic-stress-essential>].

²Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018) Emergency Responders: Tips for Taking Care of Yourself. <https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>

Nurturing Your Emotional and Social Well-Being

Being a frontline worker means putting the health and safety of others first while on the job, and it can be easy to put yourself on the back burner. Don't forget to practice self-care if you need to recharge.

Try These Self-Care Activities

Emotional

Bringing peace to our inner thoughts can reduce stress and anxiety, lead to a better understanding of ourselves, and create greater compassion.

- Download a free app like 5 Minute Journal or Shine to help bring yourself back to center with journaling and meditation when you're tight on time.
- It is OK to not be OK. Navigating stress and trauma is challenging, and giving yourself grace is an important part of the process.
- Try limiting your exposure to certain types of content, like social media or the news, if you notice a rise in negative emotions. Identifying what affects you can help you find new opportunities for self-care.



Mental

These strategies stimulate your mind or give it a chance to rest and heal. This will allow for learning and growth.

- A short breathing exercise can help ease stress. Slowly inhale and hold for three seconds, then slowly exhale and pause for another three seconds. Repeat as needed.
- Take advantage of behavioral health resources offered through insurance, Employee Assistance Programs, or local organizations like Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program.
- Try listening to a podcast during your break to give your brain a rest from your surroundings.



Social

Staying connected with friends and loved ones is more important than ever and key to improving overall well-being.

- Take walks with friends or coworkers on breaks to decompress.
- Make an effort to set aside quality time, whether it's in person or virtual, by setting a reminder on your phone or calendar.
- Join a community such as a social group, support group, or sports team.



Physical

These practices address your fitness, eating, and sleeping habits, as well as overall physical health. Taking care of your body will boost your self-esteem and help you and your family flourish at home.

- Get in 30 minutes of movement daily, even walking around your neighborhood counts.
- Eat nutritious foods and stay hydrated with plenty of water.
- Limit intake of caffeine and alcohol.
- If you can't get a full, uninterrupted 8 hours of sleep, power naps (15-20 minutes) can help you recharge.



Read Up: Families of Frontline Workers

Tools and tips to help frontline workers and their families find ways to cope with the challenges, support each other, and enjoy time together.

Quality Family Time: Working as a frontline worker means sometimes working nontraditional hours, which can result in limited family time.

- **For the family:** Try to enjoy family quality time when you can, even if it means creating a schedule or a standing event to look forward to.
- **For the frontline worker:** Whether it's breakfast, lunch, or dinner, having meals together is a great way to connect. If you can't make it for dinner, a morning coffee or breakfast can be a nice way to catch up.

Communication and Support: It can be challenging to experience stressful situations at work and leave it all behind.

- **For the family:** It could be helpful to develop cues that work for the family, such as code words, notes, or gestures, so your frontline worker family member can clue you in on how they are feeling without going into detail if it is too much.
- **For the frontline worker:** Experiencing repeated trauma is exhausting, and shouldn't be something anyone has to deal with alone. Consider reaching out to peers and support groups to share experiences and find comfort.

Connect with Each Other: With busy and changing schedules, it's not always easy but it is possible to know how everyone's doing.

- **For the family:** Take regular temperature checks to see how the family is feeling so challenges and concerns can be addressed. Keeping a watchful eye can help in deciding when additional outside support may be needed.
- **For the frontline worker:** Keep it light when you can. Making time for fun activities like game nights or cooking together can be a nice change of pace and create something to look forward to.



10-minute Relaxation Response Exercise

Although vaccination rates continue to increase, variants of COVID-19 have left frontline workers as busy as ever.

If the stress leaves you feeling like you've reached your limit, see if you can take a 10 minute break to try Dr. Herbert Benson's evidence-based breathing and relaxation response exercise shown to help with stress.

You can do the relaxation response anywhere, all you need is a chair. Follow the steps.

- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face.
- Breathe easily and naturally through your nose, becoming aware of each breath.
- Continue for at least 10 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened.

Don't worry about "getting it right" the first time, just let yourself progress at your own pace. It is ok if you notice your mind wandering, just redirect your attention to the relaxation task at hand.

The Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program

First responders are at a greater risk for experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, substance use disorders, and suicidal ideation. Many first responders are reluctant to seek behavioral health services due to the stigma and shame associated with mental illness.

The Fire Captain Ryan J. Mitchell's First Responders Behavioral Health Support Program was created to provide first responders in San Diego County a free and confidential space to seek behavioral health services 24/7 - 365 days a year.

This program aims to increase awareness about local behavioral health resources and decrease the stigma and barriers associated with first responders seeking behavioral health support services.

You are there for us, we are here for you.

SAN DIEGO FIRST RESPONDERS PROGRAM

- Free, confidential helpline
- 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- Staffed by active and retired first responders
- Get connected to local behavioral health and substance use resources

24/7 HELPLINE:

1 (833)-YU-FIRST / 1 (833)-983-4778

Visit: SDFirstRespondersProgram.org

WHO WE SERVE:

First responders in San Diego County

- Emergency Medical Services/ Paramedics
- Firefighters
- Law Enforcements
- Lifeguards
- Probation Officers
- 911 Dispatchers

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS

- **For the Frontlines:** Text FRONTLINE to 741741 for support in dealing with anxiety, stress, fear, isolation, or other difficult emotions you are experiencing during coronavirus.
- **Physician Support Line:** 1-888-409-0141 Psychiatrists helping physicians and medical students navigate intersections of their personal and professional lives.
- **Mental Health America:** MHA created a library of resources to help all frontline workers with everything from setting boundaries to emotional overload and managing frustration. <https://mhanational.org/covid19/frontline-workers> front lines of the pandemic with a trained peer coach.
- **Nurses' Guide to Mental Health Support Services:** This guide highlights the support systems available to nurses and how to access them. <https://www.nursingworld.org/~49d911/globalassets/covid19/nurses-guide-pdf-003.pdf>
- **Therapy Aid Coalition:** Find free and low fee short-term therapy for frontline and essential workers at www.therapyaid.org.
- **Decompress mini-podcast:** Decompress is a free daily short form podcast created to promote compassion and wellness. Visit www.decompresshow.com to get started.

SAN DIEGO ACCESS & CRISIS LINE

- Free confidential support
- Crisis intervention and suicide prevention
- Referrals for mental health and drug and alcohol needs
- All languages
- 7 days a week / 24/hours a day

(888) 724-7240

LIVE CHAT:



- Chat with a counselor today!
- Available Mon-Fri 4-10 p.m.

Visit: OptumHealthSanDiego.com

COMMUNITY RESOURCES:

DIAL 2-1-1

