

# QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

## LEADING THROUGH UNCERTAIN TIMES

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# Foreword

The way we lead is important – especially during unconventional and uncertain times. We want to appreciate you for being invested in effective leadership, and in your own personal and professional growth.

This quick reference guide was assembled from the content shared during our live webinar, [which is available for replay](#). We've curated and collated our best resources and we hope that this guide shows you new paths to find serenity, and that you will share it with those around you.

*Joan, Kelsey, and Tim*

# Caring for Yourself

There is no standard playbook for uncertainty and ambiguity. Know that that this state is temporary and there is hope for the future so keep moving forward. As you look to the needs of your team, take care of yourself too.

## MINDSET

Focus on tasks that you know will help. Take things one step at a time, and one step *forward* at a time.

## OPENNESS

Everyone is experiencing the same events but their feelings about it will manifest in different ways. Be open with your trusted circle. As a leader it can be too easy to maintain professional distance to the exclusion of being authentic with your team.

## SILVER LININGS

It's a good time to think about growth and learning - consider this time to be something you are learning; and like any new tasks or abilities it will take time to master.

## FIND SUPPORTS

If you have access to one, take advantage of your employer's Employee & Family Assistance Program (EFAP), and don't hesitate to call for professional help if you need it.

## TAKE ACTION

There are proven ways to improve your mood and mental state:

- Read fiction
- Exercise
- Meditate
- Walk in nature
- Talk to a friend
- Stay hydrated!
- Journal or keep a diary
- Make a post-covid activity list
- Upgrade your workspace
- Pay attention to your sleep routine
- Learn a new skill or develop a fun talent

Seeing each other is important, even if the only tool available is video conferencing.

On a videoconference, try **hiding your self-view** (but leave your video showing to other participants)!

Humans aren't used to looking at ourselves in the mirror during authentic social interactions and it makes us feel anxious, self-conscious, and distracted.

Kelsey

If your team is remotely collaborating on something technical and transactional, turning off your video can be appropriate so you can focus on the material.

**But** try to make time at the beginning or end of the meeting to connect "face-to-face".

Joan



## Useful Tools



Pay-What-You-Can Counseling, Cultivate Calgary:  
<https://www.growthelife.com/>



Fact Sheet: Psychological Impacts of the Coronavirus COVID-19), Canadian Psychological Association:  
[https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PW\\_Psychological\\_Impacts\\_COVID-19.pdf](https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PW_Psychological_Impacts_COVID-19.pdf)

# Caring for Others

Whether or not you manage staff directly, you can be a leader through the power of your example and your empathy. As a leader, you can take the lead and go first. Acknowledge and share some of your struggles and what you are doing about them.

## GET SOCIAL

- Book a social coffee with team members - either individually or as a team.
- Play matchmaker and help your team to make connections beyond their immediate peers: intentionally pair people up from other parts of the organization to drive social connections, networking, and development.
- Invite people to share their interests and talents so they can make new connections.

## HAVE FUN

- Find new ways to involve others (be creative for both introverted and extroverted staff).
- Suggest fun team challenges as a weekly or daily break (scavenger hunt, puzzles, games). Sharing talents and interests (talent show, show & tell).
- Find creative ways to connect with your team before the Christmas break. Think about virtual plays, virtual movie-nights, book clubs, virtual concerts, and online party games!

## BUILD ROUTINES

- Protect staff's safe spaces and time – set team norms for when it's ok to email or text.
- Set aside times for personal conversations. Book times in calendars and protect it from delay and interruption.

## RECOGNIZE GROWTH

- Help your team to reflect and see how far they have come. Recognize success and challenges, build optimism for the future, and affirm the team's ability to meet whatever comes up in 2021.
- Rotate some leadership tasks - as the burden for helping the team to move forward should not solely rely on the line leader.

## BE CURIOUS

- Be curious in your interactions - engage in conversations not related to work. Try probing past "how are you?" to understand how people are doing.
- Allow time for banter and non-work chat during online meetings - create virtual substitutes for informal water cooler chat and lunchroom conversation to connect.

Consider using your workplace's existing safety culture to promote mental health and emotional resilience. Use a safety moment to talk about stress, and post resources on your safety board.

Normalize mental health as a key component of safety and let people know what resources are available to them.

Joan

You might know the ABCs for standard first aid (airway, breathing, circulation). Do you know ALGEE?

### ALGEE: The Action Plan

Assess for risk of suicide or harm

Listen non-judgmentally

Give reassurance and information

Encourage appropriate professional help

Encourage self-help and other support strategies

**Mental Health First Aid**  
([mhfa.ca](https://www.mhfa.ca))



## Useful Tools



**Mental Health First Aid Guide for Managers**, Mental Health Commission of Canada  
<https://www.mhfa.ca/en/workplace-resources>



**Local Distress Resources and Support**, Crisis Services Canada  
<https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/looking-for-local-resources-support/>

## Specific Issues

<b>I worry I am micro-managing</b>	Ask the question and listen to the answer. If the answer is that you are not micromanaging, trust your people.
	If the answer is yes, then stop, and plan a conversation specifically about the team's conversation preferences and work styles. Try to point to desired outcomes instead of specific approaches.
	If this feels too exposing or uncomfortable, ask for help.
<b>What if someone starts crying?</b>	This is a stressful and emotional time and crying at work isn't intrinsically unprofessional. If someone is upset, help them save face if it happens in public. It's ok to cry.
	Provide a private space if they want it, or go for a walk together, and let empathy guide you instead of the potential awkwardness. Get curious, and make sure to validate their feelings. Try saying: "This is important, what do I need to know?" Then listen to the answer.
	If someone is in psychological distress, get help by calling your HR team, a support person suggested by the employee, and/or the local distress center. Always call 9-1-1 if someone is in immediate danger. (Consider attending a <a href="#">mental health first aid course</a> to better prepare yourself for mental health emergencies.) If it becomes a regular occurrence for an employee or you need advice, get support from a workplace health professional.
<b>Am I a good listener?</b>	Paraphrase other's points back to them and ask, "did I get it?"
	Ask curious follow-up questions instead of talking or telling.
<b>Am I coming across as inauthentic?</b>	When you ask someone how they're doing, is this something you do by rote? Or are you asking because you are truly interested? People can't always tell.
	Try probing beyond their initial superficial answer. Or try pairing your inquiry with an observation, a shared interest, or something you'd like to know more about the person. You can also try narrowing your question to something like "how is your <i>day</i> going?"
<b>Constantly asking others how they are doing is emotionally fatiguing.</b>	Approach each conversation from a place of curiosity. What is something about each person you don't yet know?
<b>Doing it over and over feels disingenuous.</b>	Risk asking probing questions, not just what you're supposed to ask. Keep it safe for work and use this as a time to get personal and go a little deeper into the things that make each of us unique individuals.



### Useful Tools



Course: **Mental Health First Aid (Basic)**, Mental Health Commission of Canada:  
<https://www.mhfa.ca/en/course-type/basic>



**Mental Health First Aid Guide for Managers**, Mental Health Commission of Canada  
<https://www.mhfa.ca/en/workplace-resources>