



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER.

# Healthcare Workers and Moral Injury During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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# MORAL INJURY

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- Moral injury was first described in military service members in combat settings.
- The COVID-19 pandemic is routinely exposing healthcare workers to circumstances previously seen only in combat or severe disaster.
- Moral injury in healthcare workers is increasing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

# MORAL INJURY

- “Moral injury occurs when clinicians are repeatedly expected, in the course of providing care, to make choices that transgress their long standing, deeply held commitment to healing.”
- “Moral injury results from the inability to care for patients the way you know is possible, or could be possible, with appropriate anticipation and preparation of resources. It also results from conflicts between your own needs for safety and a patient’s need for care.”

# FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO MORAL INJURY DURING COVID-19

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- Lack of essential equipment and supplies
- Extent and severity of disease
- Healthcare worker staffing shortages
- Need to ration healthcare resources
- Interference from administrative and policy decisions
- Forced to make life and death triage decisions without sufficient training or guidance

# FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO MORAL INJURY DURING COVID-19

- Uncertainty in decisions
- Worries about personal health
- Fear of infecting loved ones
- Guilt about need to care for or protect oneself by limiting work
- Experiencing grief, anguish, and anger from patients and families
- Grief over patient deaths

# CONSEQUENCES OF MORAL INJURY



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- Reduced sense of competence in the face of demands
- Reduced sense of belonging and meaning in work
- Increased shame and guilt
- Increased self-condemnation
- Altered sense of self and identity
- General loss of sense of well-being

# DEALING WITH MORAL INJURY

# TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Source: Moral Injury of Healthcare, LLC a 501c3 nonprofit | [info@moralinjury.healthcare](mailto:info@moralinjury.healthcare) | [www.fixmoralinjury.org](http://www.fixmoralinjury.org)



## Take Care of Yourself



### Maintain Your High Performance Machine

Eat, sleep, hydrate, move, flex.



### Remember Your Purpose

In the midst of crisis, a guiding purpose is grounding. There is no more vital purpose right now than taking care of those in need, and supporting those who do.



### Grieve

The grief of losing those close to us, or patients in our care, is obvious. But disrupted routines, social interactions, and the sense of a predictable future are losses, too. Give yourself permission to grieve, if those feelings break through.



### Forgive Yourself

When resources - of staff, stuff, or space are limited, you may not be able to provide optimum care for every patient. Do whatever you can with the resources you have.

# TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER



## Take Care of Each Other



### **Battle Buddies**

Find an individual or a group you trust, and support each other.



### **Push Back**

Beware of managing for public relations. This is no time to make decisions based on what looks good. Safety, science, and resources should be the only drivers.



### **Respite/Rotate**

Work with your team to get breaks—time outs, days on different/less intense assignments, etc.



### **Check-ins**

Staying connected is important, even from a distance. Quick check-ins with friends, family, and colleagues can offer support and reduce isolation.

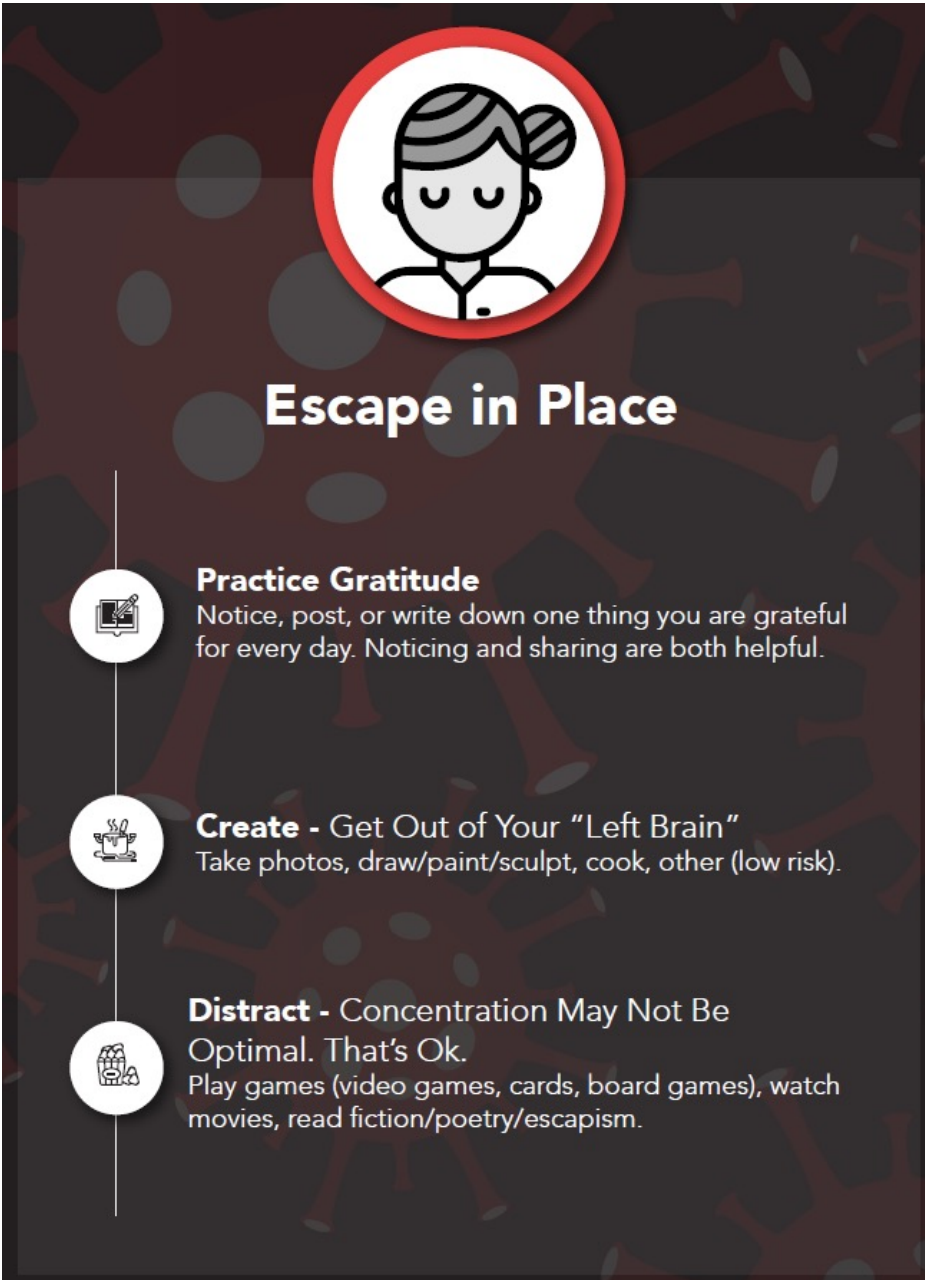


### **Make Change**

Identify opportunities to address challenges. Work with colleagues across the frontlines and senior leadership to bring change.




# ESCAPE IN PLACE

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The infographic features a dark background with a pattern of faint, stylized human figures. At the top, a circular icon with a red border shows a person with their eyes closed. Below this, the title 'Escape in Place' is written in white. A vertical line on the left side of the infographic connects three circular icons to their respective text blocks. The first icon shows a notepad and pen, the second shows a person at a desk with a lamp, and the third shows a person playing a board game.

## Escape in Place

- **Practice Gratitude**  
Notice, post, or write down one thing you are grateful for every day. Noticing and sharing are both helpful.
- **Create - Get Out of Your "Left Brain"**  
Take photos, draw/paint/sculpt, cook, other (low risk).
- **Distract - Concentration May Not Be Optimal. That's Ok.**  
Play games (video games, cards, board games), watch movies, read fiction/poetry/escapism.

GETTING HELP WHEN NEEDED

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- [Emotional Support Line for Pandemic Stress For Healthcare Workers, First Responders, and Education Professionals](#) from the TN Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Contact your local Employee Assistance Program
- UT Outpatient Psychiatry – 901.448.2400
- Lakeside Behavioral Health System – 901.377.4700
- Mental Health Resources (counseling) – 901.682.6136

