



## SUPPORT FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS



# Meaning Making in Times of COVID

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We're all looking for it - and under the current circumstances, it seems elusive to many. The world we live in is unfamiliar, the rules seem to change on a weekly, if not daily basis. Too many people we see are in pain and we feel it directly or residually. This is particularly true for the workers on the frontlines of this "Brave New World," who may desire some return to 'normalcy' (whatever that means), and fear the next steps to come.

Meaning making is the desire to find value, or inherent truth in a challenge or arena in one's life. According to Victor Frankl, it was how he survived living in Auschwitz for 4 years. But according to Frankl, in his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, it wasn't grand scale meaning that kept him waking up each day - it was finding the small moments of laughter, connection, and value that enabled him to face day after day.

And we've seen it throughout this pandemic as well. From funny memes about how many times a cat can take on the persona of zoom bomber, to that woman who turned herself into a potato in a Microsoft Teams meeting, we're finding ways to connect amongst the chaos. But there is no place that this holds true more than in the meaning our healthcare workers are finding for their patients, for themselves, and for their communities during this time.

From Jimmy Fallon's "Safety Dance" with frontline workers to endless story after story about last rites rituals and last-moments Facetime sessions with loved ones, nurses, doctors, respiratory therapists, and other frontline workers are doing everything they can to change the narrative from dire and hopeless to full of love and, well, meaning. Providing these opportunities for connection during the most vulnerable moments of one's life is something that cannot be measured, and it is that part of the narrative that I am hopeful will carry throughout time.

But as our frontline workers carry that tremendous load of responsibility, how can we support them in the search for meaning throughout the murky waters? The reality is that it is a challenge, and there are no clear cut steps. However, there are areas where it may be possible to focus on the way that meaning happens, rather than the way that it's nowhere to be found.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is a tool that provides opportunity for curious reflection, without judgment, of feelings, behaviors, and thoughts. Utilizing this during your time on-and-off the floor will allow for moments of humor, sadness, kindness, and value to trickle in.

### **Self-Compassion**

We are all experiencing a collective trauma - and one that we cannot expect to recover from overnight. Just as bones and muscles need care and tending to in order to recover, so do our brains and hearts as we realize the gravity of our experiences. Facing yourself with compassion and kindness will allow the small victories or "silver linings" to shine rather than the moments we may wish to forget.

### **Help Seeking**

Every single person has limits, and it should not be taboo to ask for help before we reach our own. While stigmas and structural barriers exist in many communities when it comes to treating our own mental health, there are many opportunities available to speak with a professional when it is necessary. This is not true only in the peak of this epidemic - but will remain true for however long the recovery period is afterwards, as well.

### **Connection**

When possible, focus on physical distancing, and not social distancing. Utilize time off to do something that you really *LOVE*, whether it's time with your family/loved ones (over zoom or skype), cooking and eating your favorite foods, or spending time in nature - whatever makes your heart sing should be a priority to give you an opportunity to turn off your brain and be in the moment.

Sometimes, the answer is to simply stop looking for an answer, and start looking for a reason to put one foot in front of the other. Usually, meaning will provide those steps. And with our search for a shared meaning, we will get to the end of this pandemic, no matter what the world looks like on the other side.

For support during this time, please call our Care Navigation Line at 1-866-JFCS-NOW or go to [www.jfcsphilly.org/supportforhealthcareprofessionals](http://www.jfcsphilly.org/supportforhealthcareprofessionals)

*The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline phone number is 1-800-273-8255*