

Walking alongside a team member who is struggling during, or as a result of this Pandemic

Each of your team will respond to the pandemic in different ways. All of us will need to process the time with our teams, but some may need a little more help. This guide is designed to help you know what to look out for and how to help.

As a team leader, what should I look out for?

As you listen to your team's stories or things they share about, what are you prayerfully noticing about the themes? Do they 'ring true'? Do they cause you concern? What feelings does the staff member seem to be expressing? Is there a mismatch between those expressed feelings and the body language they are showing? These things can often be indicators. In particular, you should look out for:

Behavioural symptoms

- Withdrawal - Silent, detached or not sharing during meetings
- Avoiding eye contact
- Repeatedly teary-eyed when sharing
- Overly-masking emotions
- Moving or speaking more slowly than usual
- Unable to relax
- Reduced attention span

Physical symptoms

- Persistent migraines or headaches
- Unexplained aches and pains or fatigue
- Insomnia or sleep difficulties
- Appetite changes
- Indications of self-harm

Psychological symptoms

- Continuous low mood or sadness
- Not getting any enjoyment out of life
- Being irritable and intolerant of others
- Having no motivation or interest in things
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Being anxious or worried

Don't assume that the appearance of these symptoms mean the staff member is struggling beyond their ability to manage, but use them as indicators to explore further.

How should I respond to this?

1. Pause and pray alone even before engaging with the staff member. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment, and fill your heart with His love and compassion.
2. Listen with your heart, paying attention to feelings or emotions. Empathise and try to understand, rather than analyse and try to find solutions to the problem or struggle.
3. Be present to the struggling team member. For the time being, set aside any ministry agenda.
4. Acknowledge the feelings, thoughts and ideas shared by the staff. Some of the most common struggles have been:
 - *feeling isolated and lonely*
 - *missing important milestones in the family*
 - *anxiety over existing medical conditions, or the fear of getting sick*
 - *mental health issues of loved ones*
 - *the challenge of looking after younger kids / working from home during lockdown*
 - *physical exhaustion*
 - *grief over the death of a loved one/friends during lockdown*
5. Create an environment where the staff member will feel safe to open up and share. Resist the urge to “fix”, “categorize” or “analyze” the situation or the struggling staff.
6. Be generous in how you respond to personal needs, for example giving permissions for space or a day off. Lower your expectations and ministry demands as we all learn to adjust to the changes
7. Be generous in the amount of time you give to listening to the staff member.
8. Show your love and compassion by reflecting back what the person is saying. Ask questions that seek to clarify and understand.
9. Pray for them and communicate your ongoing support for them.

What things should I say?

A good starting point would be to go back over the questions the staff member should (hopefully) have prepared, ahead of your conversation, in their [Personal Reflection](#). You may want to prompt their story with other exploring questions:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- I notice that....
- How did that impact you?
- What was difficult in that situation?
- How did you feel about that?
- What do you think you need?

(The “[I Feel / I Need](#)” sheet may help with this)

How can I help the staff member move forward?

It’s often hard to know what to say when you think someone may be struggling but isn’t expressing a need for help. One way to approach it might be the “*I notice - I wonder - I suggest*” model:

.. I notice your emotions seem overwhelming. I notice you're having a hard time managing daily life with such strong emotions. I notice you're finding it difficult to engage with the team. Are you experiencing this? What do you think?

...I wonder if you need more help than I can give you. I wonder if you'd find it helpful to talk to someone other than me

... Can I suggest you talk with someone who can help you process this a little more? I'd like to suggest you speak with someone experienced about this. Can I suggest a couple of ways forward for you to consider? What do you think of this?

What suggestions should I make?

There are a number of options available to the staff member who needs a little more help, but it's important for you as the team leader, to continue to walk with your team member, being a gentle and compassionate companion. There are 3 types of help you should consider:

A Listening Ear

For many people, they simply need space and time to tell their story in more depth with someone who is skilled in asking good questions and helping them process all that has happened. This may be you, It could be someone on your team or within your ministry. There may be someone at the local church or a ministry partner, but they will be someone that people are naturally drawn to. A lot of times, just giving this space to talk will put the team member back on the right path.

A Crisis Debrief

Crisis debriefing is a specific type of debrief designed to help someone process a stressful experience. God has designed us to withstand stressful experiences and He has also given us ways to heal. This process provides an opportunity for someone to tell their story in a structured manner and identify how they have been impacted. For further information on what it is and how you may be able to access it, [click here](#)

Professional help

It may be that a member of your team has been affected so significantly or has had such significant trauma, or the pandemic has raised significant issues from the past, that they need professional counselling. A Crisis Debrief may be helpful in identifying this. Different countries have differing policy in this area, so there may be qualified and experienced counsellors on your national staff team or in your area. Your LDHR leader may also have contacts or lists of suitable counsellors. Your staff member will need to feel in control of any process of determining professional help, but they may also need someone to walk alongside them, in order to get help.

Your role will continue to be walking alongside the staff member in this conversation. You should not decide for them which, if any course they should take, but neither should you leave it completely up to them, as they may need your encouragement and support to take the steps to find help. LDHR will be there to help, so do get in touch with your LDHR leader.

With many thanks to Leeboy DeValez for compiling this resource

Further Care resources can be found in the [Crisis Care 2020](#) document and at LDHR.org