

## Psychological Support for Staff in Critical Care

**This leaflet explains how and why emotions and psychological health can be affected by the work of critical care and what support is available; including support from the Critical Care Unit's Clinical Psychologist**

Working in Critical Care can be hugely rewarding. To work with people at their most physically and often emotionally vulnerable is a very powerful and privileged role to have in someone's life. How often have you been referred to as an 'angel' or a 'blessing' by the person you have cared for and their family?

However, working in Critical Care can also be very challenging. We work with the sickest patients in the hospital and sometimes the work pace can feel relentless. As part of the work we can witness and try to manage many complex emotions in the families and the patients we care for. Our work also involves us witnessing significant suffering, sometimes death, and the intensity of human emotion that can accompany these processes. This can take a strong emotional toll on us.

Sometimes the people we are caring for can remind us of the most important people in our own lives – for example, our parents or our children. The illness or injuries that we see in our patients can sometimes feel very unfair or unjust, leaving us at times maybe feeling a bit 'jaded' with the world.

Working with such a level of ill health can also shape our relationships with our sense of health and illness for ourselves and those we love. Being around illness can leave us with an altered view on what is 'normal' and we may find ourselves vulnerable at times to 'fearing the worst' when those we love have more simple ailments like headaches or common colds.

### How might I know when I need support?

There can be several signs that might indicate that you may benefit from thinking about how you look after yourself differently at work. This can include:

Signs	Symptoms
<b>Physical</b>	Difficulty sleeping or excessive sleeping, headaches, fatigue
<b>Cognitive</b>	Difficulties with decision-making, planning, prioritising, problem-solving
<b>Emotional</b>	Anxiety, depression, tearfulness, frustration, loss of confidence
<b>Behavioural</b>	Not coming into work, 'keeping busy', less able to communicate effectively

## What YOU can do to help care for you:

1. Practical strategies that protect us: limit the impact of the stressor itself by thinking about work/life balance by maintaining boundaries, engage in physical exercise, think about sleep hygiene, nutrition, and pacing when you take your annual leave
2. Be aware and engage with your own thoughts and feelings, don't push them away
3. Use support, supervision and opportunities to process emotions and so help us make sense of our experience, help us notice our interpretations, allow us to feel supported, help us consider if there is any direct action we can take to alter the stressor (supportive colleagues/friends, and supervision/ mentorship)
4. Engage with positive relationships
5. Notice your achievements and focus on strengths
6. Judge only against yourself – Be yourself, everyone else is taken!
7. Living life in accordance with your values and make time for pleasurable activities / pleasant distractions
8. Consider the impact of own bereavements – past/current experiences

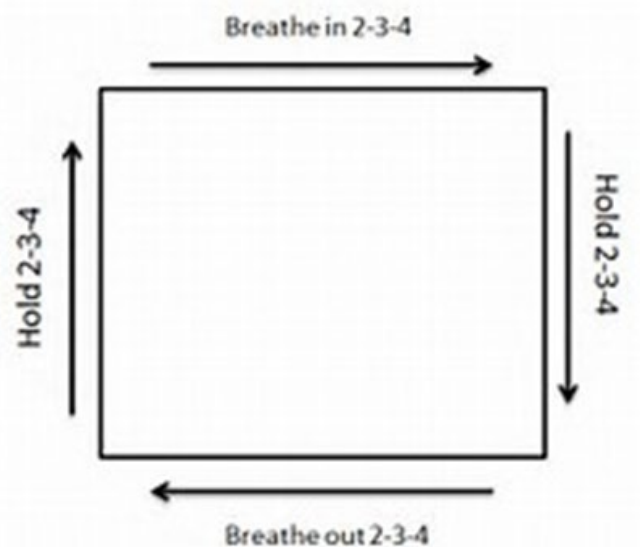
## Use a range of coping strategies

Try experimenting with the following:

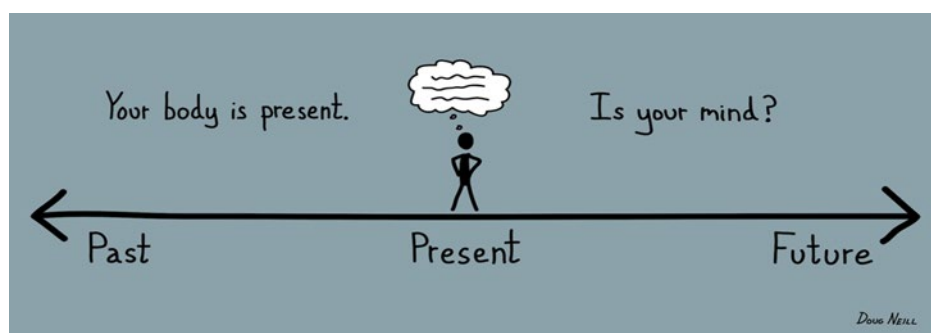
### Grounding Exercise:



### Breathing Exercise:



### Staying more in the Present:



## Clinical Health Psychology

Clinical Health Psychologists specialise in helping people cope with the psychological aspects of living with a serious and/ or chronic physical illness, distressing medical/ hospital experience. Clinical Health Psychologists spend a minimum of 7 years training before qualifying and are approved by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

### How psychology be used?

Psychology support for staff is not about therapy but about offering the opportunity to support you in your work role. If your difficulties are more about your life outside your work and you are finding them hard to manage, consider making a self-referral to the Trust Occupational Health Service.

However, if you are noticing that you are struggling in relation to your work and would value some support please consider whether having a conversation with me, even just informally, might be helpful.

### Some of the support Becky can offer:

- Manage distressing thoughts and feelings
- Make more sense of experiences you describe from working in critical care
- Consider the impact of the work on yourself and those around you
- Look at how to use your existing coping strengths
- Develop new approaches to coping and to see how they work out in practice
- Work on the best ways for you to communicate with the people around you
- Cope with the uncertainty that this work can bring in our daily practice
- If you find yourself in an emotionally challenging or tricky situation on the unit Becky can be there to support you
- Becky is available to sit in on difficult meetings with families where bad news is to be discussed

### When and how can I access the Clinical Health Psychology Service?

You can speak directly with Becky Coles-Gale or if you wish, share your request for support with Matron first. There is also a contact form on the K:/drive that you can complete and email to [spnt.criticalcarepsychology@nhs.net](mailto:spnt.criticalcarepsychology@nhs.net) if you prefer.

### Confidentiality

This service is for all staff working in critical care. In order to ensure we are providing a safe, responsible and responsive service, your requests for support may first be disclosed to the matron of the unit where you are based. Broad themes from the discussions may also be fed back to the matron in times of risk and to improve overall service delivery. If you have any questions or concerns about the transparency of the service please do not hesitate to ask.

### Sources of information

Clinical Health Psychology Office Hours:

Conquest Hospital – Wednesday to Friday – 1000am to 6.00pm

Eastbourne District Hospital – Monday to Tuesday – 10.00am to 6.00pm

Dr Becky Coles-Gale

Direct Psychology Telephone: 07391 415557

Email: [spnt.criticalcarepsychology@nhs.net](mailto:spnt.criticalcarepsychology@nhs.net)

## Important information

This staff information is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

## Other formats

**If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.**

**Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:  
Rebecca Coles-Gale - Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist

The Clinical Specialty/Unit that have agreed this patient information leaflet:  
Clinical Psychology, Critical Care

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Responsible clinician/author: Rebecca Coles-Gale - Highly Specialist Clinical Psychologist

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