



Stress First Aid

for animal care
and welfare
workers

WORKBOOK





Acknowledgments



This workbook was designed to be used individually or in discussions to increase understanding of how to apply the Stress First Aid model to self-care, staff, and coworker support. It was originally developed by Patricia Watson of the National Center for PTSD, and Richard Westphal of the University of Virginia. Their work has been adapted by Jessica Dolce of The Compassion in Balance Program for animal care and welfare professionals.

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For more information on Stress First Aid, you may also review two additional resources: **The Stress First Aid for Animal Welfare Workers Manual and The SFA Implementation Guide**. Both are provided after the webinar.

These additional resources are adapted from the work of Patricia Watson, Ph.D., of the National Center for PTSD, and Richard Westphal of the University of Virginia. This work is a civilian adaptation of the Combat and Operational Stress First Aid (COSFA) Caregiver Training Manual, developed by the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Department of the Navy, in cooperation with the Combat and Operational Stress Control, Manpower & Reserve Affairs, Headquarters Marine Corps, the Navy Operational Stress Control, Chief of Naval Personnel, Total Force N1 and the National Center for PTSD, Department of Veterans Affairs. The principal authors of the COSFA Caregiver Training Manual included: William Nash, M.D., Captain, MC, USN (Retired), Richard J. Westphal, Ph.D., PMHCNSBC, Captain, NC, USN (Retired), Patricia Watson, Ph.D., of the National Center for PTSD and Brett Litz, Ph.D., of the Mental Health Core of the Massachusetts Veterans Epidemiological Research and Information Center at the VA Boston Healthcare System.

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Use of This Workbook

This workbook was designed to increase knowledge and understanding of how to apply the Stress First Aid (SFA) model to both self-care, staff, and coworker support. It is to be used in conjunction with or after training or after review of the ***SFA for Animal Welfare Workers Manual***. Self-reflection and group discussion questions are included, as well as examples of actions for each core function of SFA, skill application, and quotes from those who have used SFA. These can help you reflect on how SFA can best be used in your organization.

As a reminder, SFA actions are to be used as needed with those who are experiencing either significant distress or impairments in functioning caused by stress reactions. SFA should be incorporated into departmental operations in a natural, seamless way, and implemented when needed. In most cases, it is not necessary to provide all the SFA actions. SFA functions along with a sampling of associated actions are provided in the table below.

SFA FUNCTIONS	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess current level of distress and functioning • Assess immediate risks • Assess need for additional SFA interventions or higher levels of care • Reassess progress (Re-Check)
Coordinate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who else should be informed of situation • Refer for further evaluation or higher levels of care, if indicated • Facilitate access to other needed care
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure immediate physical safety of stressed person and others • Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort • Protect from additional stress (ensure respite)
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce physiological arousal (slow down heart rate and breathing, relax) • Reduce intensity of negative emotions such as fear or anger • Listen empathically to the individual talk about experiences • Provide information that calms
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage connection to primary support people • Help problem-solve to remove obstacles to social support • Foster positive social activities within crew
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help mentor back to full functioning • Facilitate rewarding work roles • Arrange for retraining
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor back to full confidence in self, leadership, mission and values • Help restore meaning or faith • Foster the trust of coworkers and family members in the individual



I. The Need for Stress First Aid

People in animal welfare jobs typically have common guiding ideals that draw them to those occupations, keep them in those occupations, and contribute to strong coworker bonds. These ideals can create both strengths and vulnerabilities that can either offset stress or become a barrier to self-care. Review the following common ideals, strengths, and vulnerabilities in the table below to see which you recognize in yourself.

Strength	Guiding Ideal	Vulnerability
Placing the welfare of others (animals and/or ppl) above one's own welfare	Selflessness	Not seeking help for health problems because personal health is not a priority
Commitment to helping animals heal and supporting their families	Loyalty	Guilt and complicated grief after perceived failure or loss
Toughness and ability to endure hardships without complaint	Stoicism	Not aware of or acknowledging significant symptoms and suffering
Following an internal moral compass to choose "right" over "wrong"	Moral Code	Feeling frustrated and betrayed when others fail to follow a moral code
Becoming the best and most effective professional possible	Excellence	Feeling ashamed and withdrawing from others when not living up to personal standards, or denying / minimizing imperfections

Which ideals do you most identify with?

Which vulnerabilities do you most identify with?

Post-Webinar Reflection and Discussion: How have these ideals helped you cope with stress? And how have they increased your stress?



II. Obstacles to Self-Care and Coworker Support

The values and ideals that draw people to animal welfare jobs, as well as the working conditions, can sometimes create or increase obstacles to self-care. Check the obstacles to self-care that you regularly experience.

Situational	Personal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Too many responsibilities on and off the job <input type="checkbox"/> Unexpected emergencies <input type="checkbox"/> Limited time in one's schedule <input type="checkbox"/> Always putting the job first <input type="checkbox"/> On-call or shift work <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of sleep <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of coworkers who could fill in if you need a break 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The feeling that if you say "no" you will be looked down upon <input type="checkbox"/> Concern about being perceived as weak <input type="checkbox"/> Self-criticism, not being able to modify high expectations under stressful circumstances <input type="checkbox"/> Never feeling that you can "unplug" <input type="checkbox"/> Wanting to be perceived as perfect <input type="checkbox"/> Always prioritizing others over self <input type="checkbox"/> Low morale
Attitudinal	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "It would be selfish to take a break from this work." <input type="checkbox"/> "I'm okay, I'm fine, I'm not even tired." <input type="checkbox"/> "The needs of the animals are more important than my own needs." <input type="checkbox"/> "I'm not doing enough." <input type="checkbox"/> "I can contribute the most by working all the time." <input type="checkbox"/> "I don't want anyone to know how affected I am." <input type="checkbox"/> "Only I can do x, y, and z." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Working too long by oneself without checking in with colleagues <input type="checkbox"/> Keeping stress to oneself <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring declines in functioning <input type="checkbox"/> Underestimating needs <input type="checkbox"/> Relying only on alcohol/substances to relax for extended periods of time <input type="checkbox"/> Becoming more disengaged/isolated <input type="checkbox"/> Overworking <input type="checkbox"/> Not doing enough self-care to balance out the demands of work <input type="checkbox"/> Not seeking help/expertise

Other: _____

Post-Webinar Reflection and Discussion: What are the most common obstacles to self-care in your life?



III. The Stress Continuum

Stress responses lie along a spectrum of severity, and the Stress First Aid model acknowledges this with the Stress Continuum model.

Ready (Green)	Reacting (Yellow)	Injured (Orange)	Ill (Red)
DEFINITION			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optimal functioning Adaptive growth Wellness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mild and transient distress or impairment Always goes away Low risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More severe and persistent distress or impairment Leaves a scar Higher risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clinical mental disorder Unhealed stress injury causing life impairment
CAUSES			TYPES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At one's best Well-trained and prepared In control Physically, mentally and spiritually fit Mission-focused Motivated Calm and steady Having fun Behaving ethically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any stressor Features Feeling irritable, anxious or down Loss of motivation Loss of focus Difficulty sleeping Muscle tension or other physical changes Not having fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wear and tear Loss Moral injury Traumatic stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PTSD Depression Anxiety Substance use
		FEATURES	
YOUR ROLE			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access wellbeing resources Self-care Other care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternate exertion with rest Monitor your own well-being Offer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize stress injuries early Remember and use the 7 C's of Stress First Aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link into care Recover Return

The Green Zone indicates being at optimal functioning. Yellow occurs when expected or typical stressors create transient or mild stress reactions. Entering the Orange or Red Zones usually occurs as a result of accumulation of prolonged stress, exposure to traumatic events, grief or loss, or a sense of conflict between one's moral/ethical beliefs and current experiences. The hallmarks of the Orange and Red Zones are more prolonged or significant distress or lowered functioning, a feeling of lessened control over one's emotional reactions, or no longer feeling like one's normal self.

Post-Webinar Discussion: Is Orange or Red Zone stress common in your work? What's likely to cause it?



Stress First Aid Model

IV. SFA: Check

The Check and Coordinate functions in SFA are ongoing, foundational actions for providing SFA. The Check function in SFA involves **increased awareness about stress reactions** in yourself, staff, and coworkers in an **ongoing way**, whether they arise from stressors at work or at home.



DISCUSSION: Which of these stress indicators have you most commonly seen or experienced in the last few months?

The SFA Model is a framework that includes seven actions, the Seven C's. The cycle begins with the onset of stressors that are accompanied by distress or loss of function, and continues to wellness. Check and Coordinate actions are repeated throughout the cycle, and the other five C's are used as needed.

Physical	Emotional
<input type="checkbox"/> Aches and pains <input type="checkbox"/> Weight loss/gain <input type="checkbox"/> Indigestion/digestive issues <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disruption/sleeplessness <input type="checkbox"/> Immune system problems <input type="checkbox"/> Medical symptoms of undetermined cause <input type="checkbox"/> Stress induced seizures <input type="checkbox"/> Increased use of sick leave	<input type="checkbox"/> Emotional extremes <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety/panic attacks <input type="checkbox"/> Crying easily or unexpectedly <input type="checkbox"/> Depression <input type="checkbox"/> Short temper <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration <input type="checkbox"/> Increased drinking <input type="checkbox"/> Giving up <input type="checkbox"/> Hypervigilance
Mental	Social
<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of interest in things that once mattered <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease in the quality of work/productivity <input type="checkbox"/> Decreased motivation <input type="checkbox"/> Decreased patience <input type="checkbox"/> Increased work errors <input type="checkbox"/> Increased lateness/absenteeism <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness <input type="checkbox"/> Distorted thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced self-awareness <input type="checkbox"/> Trouble keeping up with workload	<input type="checkbox"/> Marital/partnership stress <input type="checkbox"/> Increased isolation <input type="checkbox"/> Increased complaining <input type="checkbox"/> Less tolerance <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability / impatience / intolerance <input type="checkbox"/> Social engagement with others dropping off <input type="checkbox"/> Closed off body language <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced interpersonal boundaries <input type="checkbox"/> Less volunteerism <input type="checkbox"/> Uncharacteristic negative changes in social behavior

Other: _____

POTENTIAL CHECK ACTIONS

Self-Care Actions

- Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
- Make a conscious effort to track changes in yourself
- Become aware of your own personal indicators of Orange or Red Zone stress
- When Orange or Red Zone stress indicators occur, take steps to mitigate them sooner rather than later
- Inform key family, friends, or coworkers about your stress unique stress indicators and make a plan as to what to do when they occur

Checking on Employees

- Foster a culture that encourages employees to offer, receive, or ask for help, to make it easier for employees to check in on one another
- Be approachable and authentic, to encourage employees to share their experiences
- Set the tone by stating that it's natural to have stress in animal care jobs and that it's important to look out for each other and to be self-aware about specific red flags
- Monitor/check on staff needs regularly
- See actions listed below for coworkers as they also apply to checking on employees

Checking on Coworkers

- Pay attention to changes in behavior, emotional tone, and work performance
- Find the right way to check on someone (e.g., email / texting versus talking or calling)
- Offer basic resources like food, water, etc. to open a conversation
- Start a general conversation to get the person talking. Then look for verbal and non-verbal signs as to how they are doing
- Start with something positive then reference specific concerns you have
- Ask, "Is everything all right? I'm checking on you. I've noticed..."
- Reference the stress continuum model
- Look for opportunities where there is safety, privacy and time to open conversations
- Check in during known challenges, or on anniversaries of difficult events





USE THE OSCAR TOOL TO HELP YOU CHECK IN:

Use the **OSCAR** tool to help you check in with coworkers and employees:

O bserve	Actively observe behaviors; look for patterns.	Be on the lookout for changes in their behaviors or functioning (e.g., increased withdrawal / more mistakes).
S tate Observations	All attention to the behaviors; just the facts without interpretations or judgments.	"I've noticed over the past few days that you seem distracted and haven't been talking much (seem frustrated/irritated, etc.)."
C larify Role	State why you are concerned about the behavior. Validate why you are addressing the issue.	"As a coworker (friend, supervisor) I am concerned."
A sk Why	Seek clarification; try to understand the other person's perception of the behaviors.	"Am I right? Am I wrong? Help me understand what's going on. I would like to help if I can."
R espond	Clarify concern if indicated. Discuss desired behaviors. State options in behavioral terms.	"Thank you for trusting me enough to share that. Would you like to grab a cup of coffee and talk more? I respect that you have a lot going on. And I also respect your privacy. If not me, would you be willing to talk with (trusted resource)?"

Post-Webinar Reflection + Discussion:

Which of the examples on page 9 appeal to you for self-check and checking on coworkers? What are some other ways you could check in with yourself or your co-workers? What action will you take to check in with yourself or check on a coworker?

What will you do to overcome potential obstacles to this action?

(Examples: remind myself that self-care matters, put a plan to check in with a coworker in my calendar so I won't forget, etc.).

Stress First Aid Model

V.SFA: Coordinate

Stress First Aid is a good step towards better self-care, staff, and coworker support, but it may not be enough. Like Check, the Coordinate function in SFA is an important foundational function of SFA because it allows you to gather and consider **additional resources or assistance that might be needed if SFA actions are not a sufficient support.**

POTENTIAL COORDINATE ACTIONS

- Set up a variety of resources in advance (e.g. local clinicians, mentors, coworker teams, chaplains, life coaches, hotlines, support groups and self-help groups).
- Share your own or others' experiences with help-seeking, and/or normalize help-seeking.
- Suggest why you think it would be beneficial for them to talk with EAP or other support.



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What are at least two trusted resources you would refer a stressed coworker to?

- Mentor/supervisor/coworker: _____
- Support group: _____
- Trained peer: _____
- Chaplain: _____
- Alternative healer: _____
- Employee assistance program: _____
- Human resources: _____
- Mental health: _____
- Medical: _____
- Other: _____

Stress First Aid Model

VI. SFA: Cover

To provide **Cover** means to ensure safety **immediately or in a longer-term way**. Cover is needed when:

1. Someone is in **immediate danger** (e.g., is faced with a threatening person or situation; has frozen, panicked, or is not thinking clearly or making good decisions because of intense stress).
2. Someone has an **ongoing sense of not being safe** (e.g., feels overworked, not protected from potential harm at work, or unsafe because of trouble setting boundaries or fears about making any mistakes).
3. **Others are in danger because the stressed person behaves in a way that impacts their safety** (e.g., freezes or panics, puts others in harm's way).



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Post-Webinar Reflection and Discussion: Using ideas from the following pages, what are some ways that you can Cover yourself to increase your sense of safety?

What are some ways that you can Cover coworkers to increase their sense of safety?



POTENTIAL COVER SELF-CARE ACTIONS

Here are some Cover actions for making oneself feel safer:

- Amplify **safety plans and behaviors**:
 - Actively seek information that can help you feel safer
 - Get an accurate understanding of specific risks in order to better plan
 - Make a list of things that make you feel safer
 - When you feel acutely unsafe, distract yourself by naming objects you can see in the room or focusing your own breath or thought (e.g., counting)
 - Find those people, places, or actions that feel safe to you and call on those resources
 - Request help from supervisors (e.g., ask for team or project transfers)
- Set **healthy boundaries** for yourself:
 - Give yourself permission to take care of yourself
 - Reconfirm your values, priorities, and rights regularly
 - Remind yourself that no one is perfect; everyone has strengths and vulnerabilities
 - Turn off your phone at times
 - Take breaks regularly
 - Say no if something is going to interfere with your health
 - Tell yourself it's not your responsibility to:
 - rescue others from habitual drama
 - protect others from getting upset or angry
 - always say yes when it doesn't work for you
 - think, feel, or live for others
 - stay in contact with those who are draining, abusive, or disrespectful
 - make everything okay for everyone all the time
- Include **family or friends**:
 - Let them know about work-related situations that might occur
 - Educate them about potential red flags that you might demonstrate if you are overly stressed, so they know when to support you and so they don't take them personally
 - Tell them what kind of support you would like them to offer
 - Talk with them about ways you can help each other feel more safe
 - Practice more **helpful ways of thinking** to foster healthy changes in behaviors.

Here are a few examples of helpful thoughts:

- "Taking a break from this work will help me be more effective."
- "Even though I feel fine I need to take breaks regularly so I can continue to feel fine."
- "I can better care for others if I also attend to my needs."
- "I'm doing enough."
- "I can contribute the most by pacing myself."
- "Letting someone know how affected I am can help me."
- "I can trust that others can handle the work while I take a break."
- "I'm doing the best I can with the limited resources that are available."
- "Pacing myself by taking breaks will help me to help more animals in the long run."
- "Just like the animals do, I also need to rest and play."
- "It's ok for me to rest. I don't have to suffer to prove that I care about animals."



POTENTIAL COWORKER SUPPORT COVER ACTIONS

Here are a few Cover actions for coworker support:

Tailor Cover to the needs of the specific situation:

- Get to know your colleagues
- Maintain situational awareness to monitor for and assist in potentially threatening situations

Cover one another for personal issues as a form of solidarity:

- Become more aware of and supportive during times when there are significant issues at home for others, in order to provide a collective safety net
- Check in and reduce high-risk behavior

Here are a few Cover actions for leaders to support their employees:

Work to make situations safer:

- Learn which situations feel unsafe to employees and work to improve their safety
- Have coworkers work in partnership
- Discuss lessons learned after unsafe situations and engage in problem-solving
- Train personnel on situational awareness and decision-making
- Give briefings before workers are involved in potentially unsafe situations
- Reduce exposure to potentially traumatic information as much as possible
- Reduce anxiety by taking a team approach to difficult cases
- If something goes wrong, take a lessons-learned rather than punitive approach and normalize stress and emotions related to negative outcome

Improve boundaries:

- Mentor individuals who feel overwhelmed or overworked because of their trouble setting work boundaries
- Give time off for those needing a break, allow people to go home when needed
- Create consistent operating hours and predictable shifts, so employees can plan time outside of work
- Provide adequate staffing and/or sufficient cross-training so workers feel safe taking time off (and know the animals will be cared for)
- Be a good role model for setting boundaries
- Give permission and guidance about how to set boundaries and limits (example: no checking email on vacation, emails written at 11pm should be delay-sent during business hours)
- Create clear policies on using paid and unpaid time off
- Help workers to delegate or get coverage when they take time off, so they are not worried about their workload while on vacation
- Help workers make decisions at times when they may not make the best decisions for themselves
- Help people problem-solve solutions to situations in which they don't feel safe



Stress First Aid Model

VII. SFA: Calm

The goal of Calm in SFA is to reduce the intensity of physiological, emotional and behavioral stress. There is overlap between the actions of Cover and Calm, but the difference is that the primary goal of Cover is safety, while Calm actions may have no direct connection with safety.

Calm is needed when intense stress has interfered with an individual's ability to reduce their physiological arousal level. This can affect sleep, cognitive functioning, or healthy emotional expression (e.g., when someone is so overwhelmed with obligations or distractions that they "shut down," rendering them incapable of doing their job, when an accumulation of stress causes a person to feel regularly agitated or anxious, or when the loss of a patient causes insomnia and nightmares).



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Post-Webinar Reflection + Discussion:

Using ideas from the following pages, what are some ways that you find calm for yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered calming actions?



POTENTIAL SELF-CARE CALM ACTIONS

Here are a few potential Calm actions for improving self-care:

- Spend time with family and close friends and let them know what is calming for you ahead of time, so they can better support you when needed
- Take a break from stressful situations for a short time (even 60 seconds), remember that micro-breaks add up
- Get organized and problem-solve to tackle problems directly
- Try to see things from a higher vantage point to gain a broader perspective, take the long view
- Focus on:
 - Whatever helps you to keep focused on the present moment instead of racing thoughts about past or future
 - Being realistic — for instance, focusing on appraising situations, others, and yourself in terms of specific realistic descriptions such as “sometimes/lately” versus more polarized descriptions such as, “never/always”
 - What you can control
 - How you will cope with what you cannot control
 - Taking action to reduce stress reactions
 - Acceptance of the current circumstances
 - What you’re grateful for
 - Changing beliefs that don’t serve you
 - When/how pain temporarily eases
- Prioritize simple strategies to calm down, such as:
 - Breathing practices
 - Exercise
 - Yoga
 - Social Support
 - Laughter
 - Shake out your body (like the animals do to reset)
 - Having a good cry
 - Spend time in nature
 - Sing, dance, listen to music
 - Reflection/meditation/prayer
 - Actively identifying problems and creative solutions, then taking steps towards solving problems
 - Rewarding or pleasurable activities. While engaging in rewarding or pleasurable activities regularly may not result in feeling immediately better over time, it has been shown to be helpful in buffering stressful experiences. One analogy is that, like good nutrition, these activities can replenish or energize.
 - Any other self-regulation or self-soothing techniques that help calm your stress response



POTENTIAL COWORKER + EMPLOYEE SUPPORT CALM ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions to calm others:

- Educate:
 - Acknowledge possible stressors and the potential need for support in a matter of fact way ahead of difficult events
 - Make others aware of the importance of tailored self-calming/self-regulation strategies
 - Provide information about triggers, reactions, and coping
- For immediate calm:
 - Reassure by authority and presence
 - Show understanding
 - Ask them to help you with a task as a way to empower and distract the person
 - If possible, get the stressed person to look at you for a minute, then be very specific and detailed about what you want them to do
 - Use the person's name and communicate exactly what is needed in a calm, methodical voice
 - Offer to help with the task or customer that is the source of stress, so they can take a break
- For long-term calm:
 - Validate concerns
 - Encourage the person to take brief breaks
 - Ensure that taking brief breaks is possible through adequate coverage
 - Praise and give positive feedback regularly
 - Allow the person to vent without judgment
 - Find ways to make meaning and memorialize together after losses
 - Help the person to prioritize and tackle problems directly
 - Encourage pausing and taking breaks (with a commitment to return) when discussions become heated
 - Start meetings with a minute of deep breathing or self-regulation to promote calm in the group
 - Foster a positive work environment by reducing gossip and negativity, not calling attention to a person's stress reactions, and acting upon employees' concerns

Stress First Aid Model

VIII. SFA: Connect

The Connect function of SFA involves **restoring or increasing social support**, such as asking for or providing support when you see Orange Zone stress in yourself or others. Connect is important because **organizational and social support have been shown to be more effective than self-care for work stress**.

Connect can be needed at either an individual or departmental level:

- When affected by stress, an individual can feel a sense of being alienated from themselves, like they are a different person. For instance, someone might withdraw from their coworkers after a difficult case because of shame, exhaustion or loss.
- At the department level, disruption of connectedness can be caused by blame, lack of confidence in coworkers or leadership, shame and stigma, overwhelming exhaustion, or loss.



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Post-Webinar Reflection and Discussion: Using ideas from the following pages, what are some ways that you have been able to connect with others that have been helpful?

What are some ways that you have offered, facilitated, or been offered social support?



POTENTIAL SELF-CARE CONNECT ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for improving the ability to connect with others:

- Know the value of good mentors and friends
- Create a supportive micro-culture at work by surrounding yourself with people who are genuine, authentic, and caring
- Make friends with people you can be yourself with and talk with about what bothers you
- Brainstorm with family and friends to find the best way to support you during difficult times
- Educate family and friends about the potential experiences that can occur in this job
- Communicate with family and friends when you are feeling upset, so they will not worry or take it personally
- Discipline yourself to have conversations with people who are familiar enough with you to know when something is bothering you
- Re-prioritize your schedule to spend more time with those who mean the most to you
- **If conflict is occurring**, use conflict resolution principles such as these:
 - Don't get involved unless you have to. Do a mental cost-benefit analysis to determine if the disadvantages of getting involved in a conflict outweigh the advantages. If they do, find ways to detach yourself, use humor, focus on other priorities, or remind yourself that it's not worth your time or energy to get involved.
 - If a conflict is unavoidable, begin with a positive approach. Try to establish rapport and mutual trust. Try to think of ways in which you are similar and focus on what you can potentially agree on.
 - Have a concrete strategy. Know what your needs and concerns are and anticipate how the other person will respond. How strong are your position and situation? How important is the issue? How important will it be to stick to your position?
 - Consider the other person's situation. Gather information about the other's interests and goals. What are the real needs? What is their strategy?
- Address problems, not personalities. Avoid the tendency to attack the other person personally. If you feel threatened, try to avoid defending yourself; it can make resolving the problem more difficult.
- Maintain a goal-oriented frame of mind. If the other person attacks you personally, try not to respond with an emotional reaction. Let the other person blow off steam without taking it personally. Try to understand the problem behind the anger.
- Emphasize win-win solutions. Even in what appear to be win-lose situations, there are often win-win solutions. Look for a solution that includes each person's needs. Create additional alternatives such as "low cost" concessions that might have value to the other person. Look for alternatives that allow the other person to feel their needs have been met.
- Negotiate on principles and results, not emotions or pressure. Try to find clear criteria that both sides can use to evaluate alternatives.
- To prevent conflicts, be proactively clear about your expectations and limits. For instance, if you have limited time to spend with someone, be specific about what works for you and set clear boundaries up front so the person knows what your time limits are and can plan accordingly. By doing this, you are less likely to become resentful because you're not letting the other person negatively impact you if they talk too much. And being clear about expectations and needs can help them have more explicit guidelines within which to adjust.

POTENTIAL COWORKER + EMPLOYEE SUPPORT CONNECT ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for helping others Connect:

- Leaders can build a foundation amongst their employees that fosters social support:
 - Hold employees accountable for treating each other with respect
 - Address conflict, microaggressions, bullying, etc. in a timely, fair, and consistent manner
 - Encourage employees to make connections at trainings or conferences
 - Foster a team approach to problem-solve answers to challenging cases
 - Show validation and appreciation for employees
 - Foster opportunities for employees to socialize, such as breaks for meals or walking dogs together
 - Foster appreciation and support among coworkers
- Coworkers or leaders can make it a priority to connect after difficult situations:
 - If someone has retreated because of an incident, find ways to show them you're thinking about them and are available to talk if needed.
 - Include the person in projects and create collaborative opportunities with coworkers, to get them back into doing something meaningful.
 - With introverts, give them time to recharge in their preferred way before facilitating reconnection with coworkers
 - If someone is stressed and resists getting support, don't be afraid to be more authoritative in getting them the help they need. In the middle of intensive stress, get the person or team engaged in activities that facilitate either physical movement or talking while you do other things.
 - For instance, have people briefly report out on successes, loose ends, or their plan for the next 24 hours while walking or attending to actions that require physical movement.
 - If someone is particularly stressed and isn't functioning well, foster understanding and support in coworkers.
 - If someone is having significant stress in their personal life, offer practical support if possible.





Here are some Connect actions for removing obstacles to potential social support for others:

Action	Specific Intent	How to Do It	Examples of Phrases to Use
Assess social resources	Identify the best possible sources of social support for an individual	Identify who in the team is most trusted by the individual or has a positive attachment (this could be you). Identify members of the chain of command whom the individual most trusts.	"You let me know that this is a difficult time for you, and you're not sure where to turn. In addition to me, let's think about who else can help at work and away from work."
Assess obstacles to social support	Understand why an individual is not using all available social resources	Ask about how they perceive their own level of social involvement and connectedness. Find out what has changed in the individual that has led to isolation or alienation. Observe the individual interacting with others, looking for patterns of poor communication, respect, or trust.	"You told me about spending less time with family and friends. Help me understand how that works for you." "You said you are frustrated with people walking away from you when you are speaking. I notice that sometimes you sound very angry before they walk away."
Act to remove obstacles to social support	Overcome obstacles in the individual or in others to support better social connectedness	Lead group discussions of events in order to promote common perceptions and understanding. Look for and discuss situations that might interfere with two-way trust and respect. Confront and try to neutralize blame, guilt and shame.	To a team: "Orange Zone huddle. This is a tough situation and we need to get on the same page. This started because of (name event). What is your concern?" To a peer: "There was an error and we will work together to learn from this. What are you thinking right now about...?"

Stress First Aid Model

IX. SFA: Competence

The SFA function of Competence improves endurance through difficult challenges by **enhancing and restoring previous occupational, personal and social capabilities, or learning new skills**. The need for Competence occurs in three different ways:

1. When an employee does not have the experience or skill level to address the demands of the position, which creates stress reactions.
2. When there is temporary or persistent loss of previous skills or abilities (e.g., mental focus, patience, emotional self-control) due to Orange Zone stress.
3. When there is inability to cope with newly emerging life challenges due to symptoms of Orange Zone distress (e.g., nightmares, intrusive thoughts).



The SFA Model is a framework that includes seven actions, the Seven C's. The cycle begins with the onset of stressors that are accompanied by distress or loss of function, and continues to wellness. Check and Coordinate actions are repeated throughout the cycle, and the other five C's are used as needed.

Post-Webinar Reflection and Discussion: Using the ideas on the following pages, what are some ways that you have been able to increase a sense of competence in yourself?

What are some ways that you have offered or been offered support to increase sense of competence?



POTENTIAL COMPETENCE SELF-CARE ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for building Competence:

- When you are having a difficult time, use positive self-talk and don't be afraid to ask for help and guidance from mentors.
- When tough things happen, establish new relationships with those who have been through similar situations.
- If you're under too much stress, do something that is easy for you to give you a sense of accomplishment.
- Find people who can help you with engaging in healthy habits
- Buddy up and commit to holding each other accountable for self-care.
- Regularly reflect on the balance between the satisfaction of fulfilling work duties and the personal sacrifices you are making. Be prepared to adjust behaviors and expectations if that balance changes over time.

Here are a few potential actions for building Competence in oneself during prolonged stress:

- Make a commitment to endure, using whatever coping skills work best, as well as these potential actions:
 - Divert attention temporarily, using humor or acceptance
 - Keep worrying circumscribed to actual potential risks and be disciplined about not letting fears derail important life tasks.
 - Shift expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a "good day"
 - Clarify top priorities and focus on taking steps towards what is most important.
 - Create routines of living and make every effort to keep to those routines. Routines create safety and reduce decision fatigue





POTENTIAL COMPETENCE COWORKER SUPPORT ACTIONS

Restoring or enhancing Competence in the face of Orange Zone stress can require the following sequence of actions:

Action	Specific Intent	Examples of Phrases to Use
Stop	Make sure there is time given to rest and to recover if needed. Identify challenges to functional capabilities. Do not keep doing what is not working.	"We need to pause. I can cover this. Take a 10-minute break." "The shelter software is down. Take a break and step away from the keyboard. What do you need to get done?"
Back up	Retrain and refresh old occupational, well-being, or social skills. Give training in new occupational, well-being, or social skills. Help mentor, problem-solve or explore new options.	"You have been doing this a long time and it feels like everything changed in the last few months. What new skills or ways of thinking do we need now and going forward?"
Move forward	Provide practice in refreshed skills. Provide practice to perfect new skills. Assist in integrating back into duties and in finding new directions and goals.	"I'm glad that you completed the communications training and are back to work. Remember that not everyone knows that you are trying to change..." "I will check in with you to see what is and is not working; you can check in with me too."





POTENTIAL COMPETENCE LEADER SUPPORT ACTIONS

Because leaders are in a particularly important position to help with Competence, many of the following examples of ways to build Competence in others are best implemented by those in leadership positions:

- Be authentic, normalize stress reactions, and give simple examples of ways to cope.
- During highly stressful times or after mistakes, give extra attention, training, or mentoring.
- Connect the person who has Orange or Red Zone stress reactions to relevant resources to learn coping and well-being skills.
- Provide targeted training after mistakes and with skills that are used infrequently.
- Provide training in stress management and other well-being skills.
- If someone is stressed because they are overthinking, give them simple systematic ways to occupy their thoughts, like counting random numbers, or counting steps.
- Let people know that you would expect them to struggle in certain stressful situations.
- Mentor others by offering advice on how you got through similar situations.
- If there are many new staff members, create a mentor group so they have the opportunity to ask questions and get to know others who are having similar experiences.
- If an employee is struggling to learn a task or process, find someone who matches their personality — somebody they can relate to and communicate with — and assign that person to help them.
- For less experienced workers who are anxious when learning something new, start with less stressful tasks, and provide stepped escalation of potentially stressful jobs in a thoughtful manner.
- Give the stressed individual responsibility little by little so that they do not feel overwhelmed.
- Remind the person of coping strategies and skills that have worked for them before.
- Encourage active coping.
- Help problem-solve and set achievable goals.
- After mistakes, help the person become more competent, to help with shaken confidence. Remind them that everyone is human and that all reactions are acceptable in the right context. Help them to figure out what they might do differently in the future.
- If the team's sense of duty and commitment lead to overworking, make sure that they're getting rest, and advocate for them.
- For those who need a break, reassign or temporarily suspend key job duties.
- Before you have a conversation with somebody who you think needs time off, make sure taking time off is feasible for that individual.
- For those who have taken time off, integrate them back into duties by assigning responsibility in a stepped, gradual way and help the person "recalibrate" their expectations and goals to meet current circumstances.

Stress First Aid Model

X. SFA: Confidence

Confidence focuses on **building realistic self-esteem and restoring hope**, both of which are often diminished in the aftermath of intense or prolonged stress.

Confidence can be needed when Orange Zone stress can cause a person to feel guilty or bitter, have difficulty forgiving themselves or others, or have trouble finding meaning or hope after what has happened. For example:

- The death of an animal due to a mistake or difficult choice results in guilt.
- A wear-and-tear stress reaction results in losing respect for other teams or leaders.
- Significant life threat or euthanasia results in depression and/or loss of spiritual faith.
- Challenges have created disconnection between teams or departments.



The SFA Model is a framework that includes seven actions, the Seven C's. The cycle begins with the onset of stressors that are accompanied by distress or loss of function, and continues to wellness. Check and Coordinate actions are repeated throughout the cycle, and the other five C's are used as needed.

Post-Webinar Reflection and Discussion: Using the ideas on the following pages, what are some ways that you have been able to increase a sense of confidence, meaning, or hope in yourself?

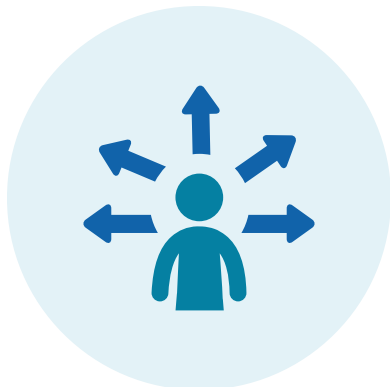
What are some ways that you have offered or been offered support to increase confidence, meaning, or hope?



POTENTIAL SELF-CARE CONFIDENCE ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for building self-confidence:

- If you unfairly blame yourself for a challenging situation, use positive self-talk to reframe the way you look at the event ("Yes, things didn't work out in the end **and** I know I tried my best with the limited resources I had at the time.")
- Use zone-of-control thinking to remind yourself of what you did and did not have control over
- Remind yourself of other successful cases to boost confidence when faced with those that are less successful
- Even in the most severe cases, focus on ways that you were able to make a positive impact or what you learned from the experience
- Adopt a long-term perspective
- Don't take perceived failures personally. It's not just you, everyone experiences this!
- Use small triumphs to build confidence
- After particularly traumatic situations or losses, don't push yourself to "process" the situation in any particular time frame. If something triggers you, give yourself time and space to think it through, integrate it, talk to someone, and have emotions about it
- Find ways to make sense of the situation, so that you don't get stuck in suffering. The work is hard and painful, but the way we think about a situation can add a layer of unnecessary suffering
- Use the wisdom gained from difficult experiences to reconfirm your values, make changes in your life, appreciate what you value or help others





POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP ACTIONS FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN OTHERS

Leaders play an important role in building trust and self-worth by developing clear lines of communication, reducing stigma, offering encouragement and praise, fostering and supporting efforts that will alleviate and mitigate stress, and helping to re-establish confidence in coworkers who are experiencing stress reactions.

Here are a few potential leader actions for laying a foundation that builds confidence in others:

- Set realistic expectations about the need to follow procedures but be open to taking a lessons-learned approach about deviations from protocol.
- Discuss your preferred values for working with each other and stress that you will stick together in adverse circumstances.
- Define those agreed-upon values in terms of clear, observable behaviors that everyone can hold themselves and each other accountable for upholding.
- Focus on learning opportunities.
- Confront stigma about stress reactions.
- Be a role model to show coworkers healthy ways of dealing with difficult situations.
- Remind people of the ideals and values that drew each of you to the work you are doing.
- Give regular specific positive feedback, and remind them about their positive impact, values, skills and competence. Focus on effort (in their control), rather than outcome
- Give them tasks that they can be successful at.
- Foster and support taking steps to alleviate and mitigate the harmful effects of stress.

Leaders can also help someone with significant stress reactions with the following actions:

- Allow the person to be reassigned or take a break from work
- Be patient and open to the possibility that the person can fully return to work duties
- Gradually increase duties and responsibilities when the person returns to work
- Look for positive changes in the person's behavior
- If necessary, help to re-establish the trust of coworkers in the person by providing accurate information, reducing rumors and gossip, being a non-judgmental, accepting role model, and discussing coworkers' fears and concerns
- Mentor the person to consider other options if they continue to struggle, including leaving their current position



There are 3 potential actions that can contribute to building Confidence in others:

Action	Specific Intent	How to Do It	Examples of Phrases to Use
Determine needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess self-image, understanding of meaning of life events, level of trust in self and others, and hope for the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen empathically. Develop a trusting relationship. Ask questions and offer tentative observations and understandings. 	<p>“You said, ‘It doesn't matter anymore.’ Why is that?”</p> <p>“Team, we have had a rough week. What does it mean to be an animal welfare professional given our experience?”</p>
Connect with resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restore depleted physical, psychological, and social resources. Foster spiritual connections. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate with all possible sources of needed resources, both inside and outside the organization. Address problems: financial, family, occupational, health, etc. Identify obstacles and find solutions to overcome them. 	<p>“The past few months have been a drain for all of us. Physically, mentally, financially we have been hit. Some of us are pretty exhausted. Here are some of the resources that we have...”</p>
Encourage growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce excessive guilt or shame. Promote forgiveness of self and others. Establish new meaning and purpose. Set new directions and goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help the person focus on the present rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Let them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions. Listen for and confront distorted or overly negative and/or rigid conceptions or perceptions of self or others. Encourage the person to understand how others see them, or to try more adaptive ways of seeing themselves or the situation. Encourage learning and education. Encourage setting realistic goals and setting a plan to achieve those goals in readily attainable steps. 	<p>“There was a bad outcome and you are feeling bad; I get it. You are not 100% responsible for this. Let's take an honest look at what was and was not in your control... Now let's think about what we will do differently in the future.”</p> <p>“Team, we have been talking about our challenges and the things that did not go well. Let's take a moment to talk about some of the things that did go well... Which of these do we need to make sure that we keep doing?”</p>

POTENTIAL COWORKER SUPPORT CONFIDENCE ACTIONS

Here are a few potential actions for building confidence in others:

- Be authentic, empathic, and nonjudgmental. For instance, make simple, nonjudgmental statements such as:
 - “I can understand why you’re feeling this way, given how strong your commitment is to animals”
 - “I know this can be rough”
 - “What can I do to help?” or “What would be helpful?”
- Help them focus on the present
- Encourage them to remember their personal strengths, positive relationships, spiritual change, appreciation for life, or other things they value
- Help them make meaning of difficult events or losses by encouraging them to find ways to memorialize or honor those events or losses
- When a person is struggling with lack of confidence, guilt, or self-doubt, help them counter their guilt by normalizing their reactions and letting them know they are not alone in experiencing stress reactions
- Be willing to talk with them as many times as they need, give them relevant reading materials, and connect them to treatment or to people who have dealt with similar situations





XI. Stress First Aid Scenarios

Use the following scenarios to think through or discuss how SFA actions can be used with those who are experiencing either significant distress or impairments in functioning caused by stress reactions.

Remember, SFA should be used in a natural, seamless way, and implemented when needed.

In most cases, it is not necessary to provide all the SFA actions.

As a reminder, SFA core functions and a sampling of associated actions are provided in the table below.

SFA FUNCTIONS	POSSIBLE ACTIONS
Check	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess current level of distress and functioning • Assess immediate risks • Assess need for additional SFA interventions or higher levels of care • Reassess progress (Re-Check)
Coordinate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide who else should be informed of situation • Refer for further evaluation or higher levels of care, if indicated • Facilitate access to other needed care
Cover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure immediate physical safety of stressed person and others • Foster a sense of psychological safety and comfort • Protect from additional stress (ensure respite)
Calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce physiological arousal (slow down heart rate and breathing, relax) • Reduce intensity of negative emotions such as fear or anger • Listen empathically to the individual talk about experiences • Provide information that calms
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage connection to primary support people • Help problem-solve to remove obstacles to social support • Foster positive social activities within crew
Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help mentor back to full functioning • Facilitate rewarding work roles • Arrange for retraining
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor back to full confidence in self, leadership, mission and values • Help restore meaning or faith • Foster the trust of coworkers and family members in the individual



SCENARIO 1

A respected member of your staff has had a hard couple of years. He had a back injury, financial problems, and lost a close friend to a car accident. Recently, he broke up with his girlfriend. After work, he has been drinking a lot. At work he seems distracted and hopeless that things will improve. This morning, he was late to work. When you begin to talk with him about your observations he says, “What difference does it make? Nothing really matters anyway. It doesn’t matter if I’m here or not.”

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?

SCENARIO 2

An intake counselor, who you know recently lost her dog very suddenly to cancer, is having trouble talking with families who need support with their pets. She suddenly slams down the phone and runs to the bathroom.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



SCENARIO 3

Your shelter has been dealing with an outbreak of panleukopenia that has led to many feline deaths. A couple of the animal care techs are very upset about the deaths of multiple kittens. At lunch you notice that the conversation is focused on lack of trust in leadership and whether the organization even cares about the animals.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?

SCENARIO 4

Your medical team responds to a dog who is seriously injured from suspected physical abuse. Your team includes a vet tech who has been on the job for less than a year. When the dog's vitals take an unexpected turn for the worse and the vet tech is asked to assist, she freezes. You call her name, but she doesn't respond. You then tap on her shoulder and she responds immediately, re-engaging in the task at hand. A few shifts later, she tells you "I just don't know if I can keep doing this." As you talk further, she tells you, "I froze in that instance. What if I freeze again and an animal dies because I don't react fast enough?"

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



SCENARIO 5

A month ago, your coworker was seriously injured by a dog during a behavior evaluation. He has just returned to work. Throughout the day, you notice that your coworker is unusually quiet. Later, as you both walk into the room where the incident with the dog occurred, you notice that he is breathing very rapidly and shaking.

Answer the following questions:

- What kind of stress injuries may be present? (Wear and tear, loss, moral injury, traumatic stress)
- How would you approach this person?
- What other information would you want to know?
- Which SFA action(s) do you think would be helpful? (Cover, Calm, Connect, Competence, Confidence)
- Does this scenario relate to any similar work scenarios?



XII. Summary and Next Steps

Stress First Aid fosters self-care, staff, and coworker support, but it invites you to use the framework in an individualistic way, taking into account your preferences and your capacity to engage in self-care and supportive actions.

Rather than prescriptively requiring that you offer support in a particular way, it instead highlights the importance of supporting each other, which is protective because of the unspoken understandings that result from working together.

It is frequently only in moment-to-moment encounters that the right support can happen, if a person is aware of its importance and empowered to decide how best to give that support. This model empowers you to be creative in the way you engage in support of your employees and coworkers. It asks that you avoid taking for granted all the small ways that you show kindness, empathy, and support, and reminds you of the cumulative potential impact of these behaviors in the lives of each other.

SFA gives a framework to identify what research has suggested are potent protective actions which are helpful in many different ongoing adverse circumstances. It also highlights the importance of organizations engaging in discussions and problem-solving around work stress and empowers employees and leaders to work towards reducing both acute and cumulative stress.

Post-Webinar Next Steps:

1. If you haven't already, plan to have **group discussions** using the questions on the following page.
2. In addition you may wish to use the 3 Scenarios starting on page 39 and/or the **Skill Applications** at the end of the workbook as **team exercises** to practice using the 7 C Actions.
3. If the group and leadership feel that SFA is a helpful approach:
 - a. How can you start incorporating SFA principles into your workplace both formally and **informally**?
 - b. Who will take the lead on a **formal** approach? It may be helpful to create an SFA committee to lead this effort.
4. What are the **next steps**?
5. What **obstacles** do you anticipate?
6. What **resources** might you need to best move forward with SFA? Note that after the webinar, you will receive further resources, including an **implementation guide**. What else might you need?



POST-WEBINAR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following are the questions from earlier pages in the workbook and a few new ones.

If your group is larger than 15 people, consider breaking into small groups of 3-5 people to discuss, then come back to the larger group to share.

1. How have your strong ideals helped you cope with stress? And how have they increased your stress? What are our group ideals and how do they impact our self-care efforts?
2. What are the most common obstacles to self-care in your life? Which obstacles are rooted in the situations or attitudes shared here at work?
3. Which of the examples appeal to you for self-check and checking on coworkers? In other words, how would you like people to Check on you, if they are concerned? What are some other ways you could Check in with yourself or your co-workers or staff?
4. What will you do to overcome potential obstacles to this action? (Examples: remind myself that self-care matters, put a plan to check in with staff in my calendar so I won't forget, etc.).
5. For the Coordinate action, what are some reasons you might self-refer or refer an employee or coworker for additional care?
6. What are some of the barriers or challenges to Coordinating with resources? What can be done about those challenges?
7. What action can you take to become more knowledgeable about possible resources for yourself, staff, or your coworkers? (Examples: Talk with at least one EAP or HR person this month to find out what they have to offer. Ask a coworker if they know of any good resources for stress).
8. Using ideas from the workbook, what are some ways that you can Cover yourself to increase your sense of safety?
9. What are some ways that you can Cover coworkers or staff to increase their sense of safety?
10. Using ideas from the workbook, what are some ways that you find Calm for yourself?
11. What are some ways that you have offered or been offered Calming actions? What do you find most helpful?
12. Using ideas from the workbook, what are some ways that you have been able to Connect with others that have been helpful?
13. What are some ways that you have offered, facilitated, or been offered social support for coworkers or staff?
14. Using ideas from the workbook, what are some ways that you have been able to increase a sense of Competence in yourself?
15. What are some ways that you have offered or been offered support to increase sense of Competence?
16. Using the ideas from the workbook, what are some ways that you have been able to increase a sense of Confidence, meaning, or hope in yourself?
17. What are some ways that you have offered or been offered support to increase Confidence, meaning, or hope?

Skill Applications

The following sections contain three scenarios that can help you reflect on the application of Stress First Aid actions. You can use these as team exercises to keep learning SFA together.

There are no absolutely “right” or “wrong” answers to the questions posed in each scenario; your answers will reflect how you interpret them.

Try to use the SFA core actions to shape your responses.





Skill Application I: Cruelty Case

The state animal welfare department has taken custody of 3 dozen dogs, including puppies and pregnant females. Many of them are fearful, injured, and/or neglected. You are asked to respond and help with intake as a member of the animal care team. Your organization has been experiencing high turnover and many departments are understaffed. Today, many staff are now working on overtime.

CHECK

As you start your shift, *what should you be looking for in the staff as signs of stress?*

COORDINATE

You have now been there for 30 minutes and have talked with a few coworkers. Many of them are exhausted, missed all of their break-times and never got to any meals today.

What should you report back to your supervisor or director about the needs of this team?

COVER

John is an animal care tech who worked his regular 8 hour shift and then an extra 6 hours due to the seizure that brought almost 40 dogs to the shelter at the end of his shift. The pace has been hectic.

John has been moving the dogs into temporary housing and has been rushing to get things done. The dogs, frightened and in pain, have been lunging, growling, and snapping at him. You meet up with John and try to lend support.

How can you check to see if John is safe? If he is not safe, what Cover actions would you consider providing?

CALM

You have arranged for John to come to the break room. He is clearly “revved up”; he is talking rapidly, pacing, and is unable to sit down for very long. Every now and then he says, “I am exhausted, but I can’t seem to relax enough to even sit!”

What Calm actions could you use to help John?

CONNECT

John tells you that although he has been working with animals for 10 years, he is relatively new to working in animal shelters. Before this, he worked in a private vet clinic. He tells you it was quiet compared to the shelter, and that today is “over the top” for him. He wonders if his experience and reaction of feeling overwhelmed is normal or if he is not coping well.

How could you use Connect actions to help John?

COMPETENCE

After his long shift, John goes home. The next day, he returns to work and stops by “just to talk.” He mentions that he feels, in retrospect, like, he didn’t handle the stress very well yesterday, and wonders if he wasn’t very skilled at handling the dogs.

How can you use your knowledge of Competence to help John?

Who else in John’s department could best use Competence actions to help John?



CONFIDENCE

Later in the week, your shelter's director calls you in and asks what you noticed in the staff and what you think she should do to help them, now.

You mention the exhaustion, but also that some staff felt like their staffing levels and skills were not sufficient to deal with the volume. They also felt like they should have done a better job and feel like they failed the dogs in some way.

How can you work with the director to improve Confidence in her staff?

Skill Application 2: Workplace Violence

- A man with a firearm entered the shelter and confronted the front desk staff. He demanded that they give him his dogs, who are in your custody during a court case. The police are called. The man storms out of the shelter, but before he leaves, he fires multiple shots into the dumpsters in the shelter parking lot.
- The staff have been given information that the man is the owner of two dogs in the building, that shots were fired, the police are looking for him, and that no one was hurt.

CHECK

As their manager, you call a meeting with the front desk staff. When considering using the Check action, *what behaviors or concerns are you looking for?*

COORDINATE

The staff shares that they are very anxious about what happened and afraid that the man might return. They have not received any further updates and have limited knowledge about what the shelter leadership and/or police are doing about this incident.

Are there needs for additional resources at this point? How would you obtain them?

COVER

Some staff members are closely watching the front door, inquiring nervously about unfamiliar sounds and retreating into back office at the appearance of unfamiliar men. Someone reports that they heard that the perpetrator has a friend who came by the shelter, pretending to be an adopter, and wanted to see the dogs.

How do you assess the safety status of the staff? If there are safety needs, what are they and how can you use Cover to help?

CALM

You have provided your team with information about the status of the situation and arranged a walk-through by a police information officer and a shelter administrator. You have also arranged for space and refreshments in a conference room, and you're coordinating so the staff can rotate through. You notice that one of the front desk staff is talking rapidly, and she spills her tea.

How can you use Calm actions to help her?

CONNECT

A week after the event, you have arranged a follow-up session for drop-ins and tea in the conference room. One of your employees is a new hire who started working at the shelter in recent weeks. She mentions she's from out-of-state. She has not made many local friends yet.

How can you help her Connect with social support?

COMPETENCE

In the follow-up session, some staff members report that they feel they are not giving full attention to customers as they did before the event. They are keeping up with tasks, yet they feel on edge and less attentive to the customers and animals. Thinking back on the event day, they wonder if they could have handled things differently.

What can you do to improve your staff's sense of Competence?



CONFIDENCE

In a follow-up session arranged four weeks after the event, some staff report thinking that they had not handled the situation with sufficient deescalation skills.

Some confide that they believe some people in leadership roles are not taking this incident seriously and treat them as if they are overreacting.

How can you work with management to help your team regain Confidence in themselves?



Skill Application 3: Flood

After an extended period of above average rainfall, local areas have experienced a downpour that has dumped 10 inches of rain in 12 hours, with resultant flash flooding throughout the region. A surge of animals has been found in communities devastated by flooding.

Regional power, telephone lines, and cell towers are out of service. Many staff members who were at work at the onset of the storm are unable to get home. Staff are unable to communicate with their families and don't know if loved ones or property are safe. Many who are scheduled to work are unable to make in.

CHECK

You are assigned as a team member to an emergency shelter for animals found in the floods. You've been told there are new pets entering hourly due to this emergency, including several animals who are being co-housed due to limited space. Several staff have now been there for 24 hours, with only a short rest break. As you walk onto the makeshift intake area, a tired looking coworker looks at you, and asks, "So, why are you here?"

With Stress First Aid in mind, *what should you say to explain your role to this coworker and what might you do to assess the needs for staff support?*

COORDINATE

What kind of resources might be helpful for the current workers? How might you obtain those resources?

What should you report back to your supervisor and the larger team covering this emergency?

COVER

As you walk farther onto the shelter, you see several staff at the worktable talking energetically. You hear one say, "Not only have I not gotten home in 24 hours, but I haven't even been able to go to the store to get anything to eat ...all of my breaks have been right here in this building in the middle of nowhere."

The other staff members all nod their heads and say, "Me too."

What Cover actions should you provide to make the situation safer?

CALM

You have talked to the emergency response coordinator and the site manager about the rest needs of the staff, and a break room has been set up for staff to retreat to. They can even take a nap if they want, using makeshift cots. You are re-assigned to this rest area for a few hours. Mary, one of the staff members from another department, comes to the rest area while you are there. You start to talk to her and find out she really wants to rest, but she is afraid she is "too tired and too anxious to really rest.

How can you help Calm Mary?

CONNECT

Mary is able to get some rest on a cot. She even closes her eyes and appears to sleep for 20 minutes. She opens her eyes and comes over to where you are sitting by a refreshment area where there is some bottled water, juice, cheese and fruit available. As she snacks, she tells you her husband is home alone with her three young children. She is worried about whether they are safe and have electricity and water.



She believes they might be worried about her, since she hasn't even had time to call them. She tells you that although her husband is good with the kids, having them all at home together without power is a stress.

How can you help Mary Connect?

COMPETENCE

The site manager asks to talk to you in her makeshift office. When you get there, she closes the door and says "I know my staff are exhausted, but we still have to take care of all of these animals. I have come up with some staffing ideas, but am tired myself, so I wonder if I can even trust my ideas at this point!"

She asks you if you are willing to discuss the staffing ideas with her.

What can you do to improve the site manager's sense of Competence? How can you help her improve her staff's Competence?

CONFIDENCE

One of the staff's favorite flood victims, a little black cat who was found trapped in the debris, dies unexpectedly a few days after seeming to recover with the help of staff. Two of the staff members in particular feel responsible for the death and are noticeably shaken by the experience. The site manager reports to you that they made a few mistakes due to their exhaustion, but nothing that would have contributed directly to the cat's death.

How can you work with leadership to help these staff members regain Confidence in themselves?

Stress First Aid

*for animal welfare
workers*

W O R K B O O K

For more information, visit The National Center for PTSD

To learn more about The Compassion in Balance Program, please [click here](#) to visit the CiB website.

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