



#### Preamble: Must Read

It is critical that the Resilience Support Toolkit be considered as one small piece in the overall resilience support plan for staff, physicians and learners facing extraordinary stress at this time. Lessons learned over the course of the pandemic indicate the critical importance of attending to *structural* elements that contribute to healthcare worker (HCW) resilience at the same time that we are supporting individual and team resilience strategies. These key structural elements require that we have processes and procedures in place for HCW that ensure:

- the physical as well as psychological **safety** of HCWs
- ongoing **support** regarding the fluctuating conditions that impact HCW, combined with responsiveness to needs being raised by workers
- a steady, predictable **schedule** that allows for respite and recovery

It is only when we continually attend to these 3 components of safety, support and scheduling, in a structural way that HCW will feel settled enough attend to themselves and their team colleagues with the resilience tools and Pause, Reset, Nourish (PRN) framework. It is key that the PRN framework be incorporated into the flow of the work through huddles, reminders and opportunities throughout the day to foster resilience.

Any questions about the Resilience Support Toolkit can be directed by email to: [resilience@hhsc.ca](mailto:resilience@hhsc.ca), attn.: Diana Tikasz, Resilience Integration Specialist, Hamilton Health Sciences

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The PRN framework is designed to help us to **Pause** in order to notice our current state which helps us stay present and connected to the higher thinking brain. **Reset** reminds us to utilize a strategy to regulate the nervous system into a more steady, grounded state. **Nourish** helps us acknowledge that we have done something good for ourselves, and others, and to really absorb the benefit of engaging in this micro practice. Doing this numerous times a day helps us to develop a new way of working or a habit that fosters resilience. The science of neuroplasticity states that when we engage in an activity, “small and often”, we develop new neuro networks in the brain. This helps to rewire the brain away from the negativity bias and an over activation of the stress response thus fostering a nervous system that reflects a greater sense of calm and connection.

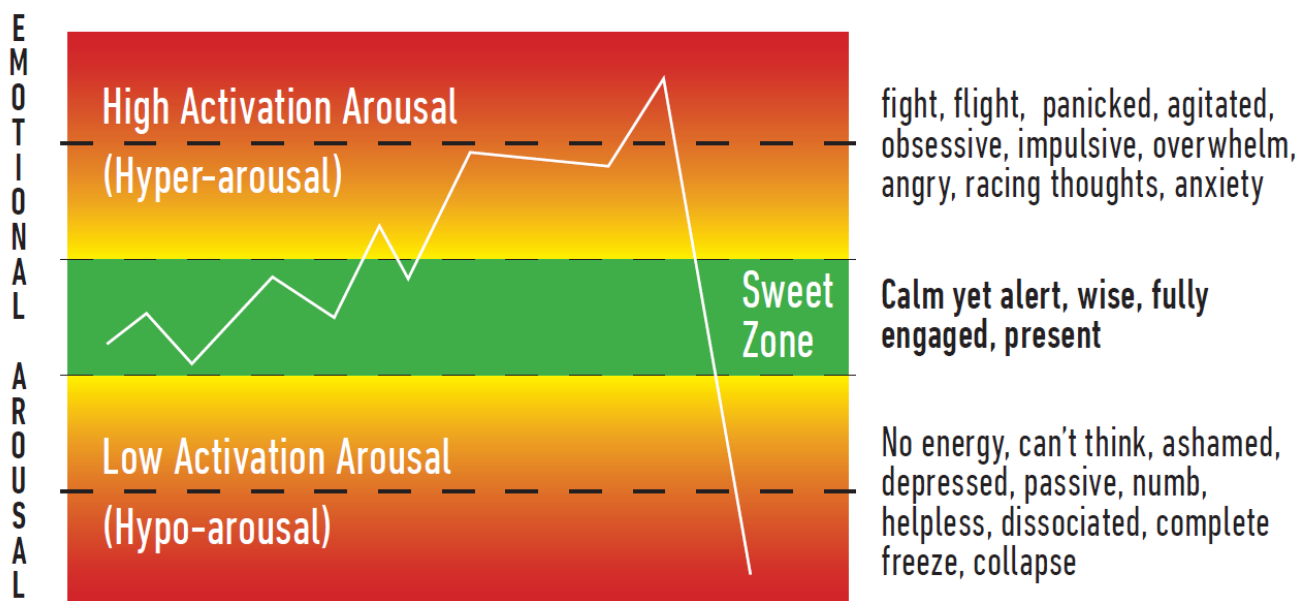
## PRN Framework: Step 1 Pause

Take a full, deep breath allowing your attention to focus inward. Noticing what is here for you now in thoughts, emotions and body sensations. Are you noticing signs of anxiety, anger, restlessness, etc. or signs of apathy, detachment, numbing, etc.? Is your internal experience reflective of the green, yellow, orange, or red zone (see below)?

## Know your Window of Tolerance: A Tool to Help you to Regularly Monitor Your Stress Level

In order to build our resilience “muscles” through challenging times it is important to pause and check in with ourselves several times through the day to notice how we feel so that we can determine how best to support our resilience in any given moment.

Adapted from Siegel, Ogden and Minton



The window of tolerance is an emotional band, it illustrates the degree of emotional experience we can tolerate without becoming completely dis-regulated.

It is a useful tool to use to check in with ourselves to continuously monitor our emotional state in order that we can make moment to moment adjustments.

Checking in with our body can assist us in this as our body is a good barometer for our stress level.

For more information checkout these resources:

[Stress Self-Assessment Tool](#)

[Mental Health Continuum Tool: How to know when to ask for help](#)

## PRN Framework: Step 2 Reset

### Grounding Strategies

The following PRN strategies are all designed to help us shift out of a stress response that is either pushing us into overdrive, or causing us to start to shut down. These strategies both calm our stress response and help us to connect with a sense of steadiness; they get us grounded. When we are grounded, we are anchored in our bodies, and we are present and focused. We are less impacted by the stress around us because we are rooted in our individual and collective sense of purpose. All of these grounding strategies can be done in moments.

The following grounding practices are taken from the Grounding Worksheet found in the Resilience Support Toolkit which is adapted from *Seeking Safety* by Lisa M. Najavits (2002) found [www.winoa.edu/resilience](http://www.winoa.edu/resilience)

### Ways of Grounding:

There are three types of grounding. You may find that one of these types works better for you, or that each is helpful in different situations. Sometimes we may need to use several in order to feel a little more steady.

1. Mental (focusing your mind)
2. Physical (focusing your senses)
3. Soothing (talking to yourself in a very kind way)

### **Mental Grounding:** Use when feeling scattered or unfocused

1. **Describe your environment in detail**, using all of your senses – for example, “The walls are white, there are five blue chairs, there is a wooden bookshelf against the wall...” Describe objects, sounds, textures, colors, smells, shapes, numbers, and temperature. You can do this anywhere.
2. **Play a “categories” game with yourself/team.** Try to think of types of dogs, jazz musicians, animals or famous people that begin with each letter of the alphabet, cars, TV shows, sports, songs, cities.

3. **Describe an everyday activity in great detail.** For example, describe a meal that you cook (e.g., “First, I peel the potatoes and cut them into quarters; then I boil the water; then I make an herb marinade of oregano, basil, garlic, and olive oil...”).
4. **Imagine.** Use a pleasant or comforting mental image. Use all of your senses to make it as real and vivid as possible.
5. **Read something, saying each word to yourself.** Or read each letter backwards so that you focus on the letters and not the meaning of words.
6. **Use humor.** Think of something funny to jolt yourself out of your mood.
7. **Count to 10 or say the alphabet,** very s . . . l . . . o . . . w . . . l . . . y.

**Physical Grounding:** Use when feeling disconnected

1. Run cool or warm water over your hands.
2. **Grab tightly onto your chair as hard as you can;** notice the sensations and the experience.
3. **Touch various objects around you:** a pen, your clothing, the table, the walls. Notice textures, colors, weight, temperature. Compare the objects you touch.
4. **Carry a grounding object in your pocket** – a small object (a small rock, ring, piece of cloth) that you can touch whenever you feel disconnected or unpleasant emotions rising.
5. **Notice your body:** the weight of your body in the chair; wiggling your toes in your socks; the feel of your back against the chair.
6. **Stretch.** Extend your fingers, arms, legs as far as you can; slowly and gently roll your head around.
7. **Clench and release your fists.**
8. **Jump up and down.**
9. **Eat something in a savoring way;** fully experience the food; describe the sights, aromas, textures, flavors, and the experience in detail to yourself.
10. **Focus on your breathing,** noticing each inhale and exhale. Repeat a pleasant word to yourself on each exhale.

**Soothing Grounding:** Use when feeling difficult emotions or stuck in negative thoughts

1. **Say kind statements,** as if you were talking to a friend or small child – for example, “You are a good person going through a hard time. You’ll get through this.”
2. **Think of favorites.** Think of your favorite color, animal, season, food, time of day, TV show.
3. **Picture people you care about** and look at photographs of them.
4. **Remember the words to an inspiring song, quotation, or poem** that makes you feel better (e.g., serenity prayer).
5. **Say a coping statement:** “I can handle this,” “This feeling will pass.”
6. **Plan a healthy treat for yourself,** such as a piece of candy, a nice dinner, or a warm bath.
7. **Think of things you are looking forward to in the next week** – perhaps time with a friend or pet, or going on a hike.

For additional PRN strategies to help you and your team mates reset please see the Toolkit and click on the Body, Mind, and Connection tabs. The **HCW Workbook** can be printed and contains additional strategies, tools and resources. It can be found here: <https://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HCW-workbook-apr-20.pdf>

The World Health Organization has written an excellent guide called “**Doing What Matters in Times of Stress**” which can be found here:

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003927>

## PRN Framework: Step 3 Nourish

After a small resetting practice, notice once again what is here for you now with curiosity and without judgement. Take time (about 20 seconds) to acknowledge the important work that you are doing and that you took a moment to reset and replenish yourself. Taking this time is good for you. Taking this time is good for others.

## Additional PRN Resources

PRN Poster, PRN Name Tag Insert and PRN Small Graphic: These can be printed and posted throughout the unit as reminders to PAUSE, RESET, NOURISH. The small graphic could be attached onto all sanitization dispensers as an example.

[\*PRN Graphic Poster\*](#)

[\*PRN Graphic Badge\*](#)

[\*Transition Checklist Posters\*](#)

These checklists can be posted on the unit, in the department, in your car or somewhere at home as a way to transition from home to work and work to home, even when physically working at home.

[\*Start of the Day Checklist\*](#)

[\*End of the Day Checklist\*](#)

## Quick Tips for Leaders to Support HCW During Covid-19

Research indicates that prolonged crisis and stress can lead to acute stress reactions as well as PTSD in the aftermath. However, human beings are far more likely to respond with Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) following adversity. We can foster resilience and PTG by continuously adapting to the changing stressful conditions through grounding in our own unique and innate resourcefulness and encouraging others to do the same. During these turbulent times, leaders can:

[\*Increasing a Sense of Safety:\*](#)

Of course this is difficult during turbulent times however some level of safety needs to be created to calm the nervous system.

- Maintain a predictable routine in the environment through daily huddles/meetings and a consistent response from you as leader. Incorporate the Pause, Reset, Nourish resilience

framework throughout the workday by embedding reminders at routine times of the day such as huddles, emails, one on one support, etc.

### Lead with Compassion

Compassion does have a softer, nurturing side but it also has a fierce side that is protective of self and others, and can motivate us into action.

- An open approach which encourages HCW to discuss their concerns while setting limits on spreading negativity. Transparent, genuine, and calm communication is key. The Pause, Reset, Nourish practices are designed to help calm our stress response and ignite our caregiving response which releases oxytocin the hormone of compassion

### Cultivate Team Support

Research repeatedly indicates that team support is the number one factor in fostering resilience.

Encourage team members to:

- Share a joke
- Comfort each other when feeling challenged
- Remind and encourage each other to take rest breaks
- Pause, Reset, and Nourish using their own coping expertise and the HHS Resilience Toolkit

### Taking Care of Themselves in the Midst of Caring for Others

Actively encouraging HCW to continuously reset their nervous system throughout the day has been shown to be grounding, adaptive and supportive. Caring for others requires that we care for ourselves. It is a selfless act especially in the time of pandemic when we may be fueled by adrenaline. We will crash without a focus on resetting and replenishing ourselves.

- People are very resourceful and already know what they need to do to stay well. Pause, Reset, Nourish is a framework that will help remind HCW to use their own internal wisdom and perhaps find some additional helpful strategies in the Resilience Support Toolkit
- Recognize when HCW are struggling beyond the current crisis challenges and refer them to additional supports such as an EAP program or their family doctor

### Leaders are People Too

You are also experiencing an elevated stress response during this time of uncertainty which can make it challenging to be that calm, courageous presence that people are looking to you to model. This means that you need to be the change that you want to see and that you need to walk the talk

- It is important to be genuine in letting others know that this is challenging for you too however you are committed to the team and being in this together as this is what will get us through

- Model pacing and resourcefulness by actively engaging in the Pause, Reset, Nourish framework yourself
- Seek the supports of your leadership colleagues and take some time to connect

## Understanding the Neuroscience that Informs PRN

The Resilience Toolkit is informed by the science of stress and resilience. It recognizes that as human beings we share an evolutionary history that has equipped us with a common neuro physiological response when faced with a threat. Knowing some crucial neuro scientific facts can help us to calm the threat response so that during times of stress we can stay emotionally regulated and function to the best of our ability. The following key points are important to consider:

1. All human beings are equipped with a stress/threat response that was not built to be activated over long periods of time. It is designed to give us short bursts of energy to get us to safety after which the nervous system re-regulates to its usual physiological state. A highly activated stress response over extended periods of time begins to have negative physical and emotional impacts on people. Furthermore, the more the stress response is activated the more sensitive it becomes meaning it is trigger more easily. It is important to note that we can purposefully regulate our nervous system in the midst of stress by engaging in strategies that are grounding and calming.
2. Human beings have evolved with the capacity to think and imagine. This is helpful because it allows us to problem solve and be creative. However it can be harmful in that we can get caught in “what if”, “catastrophizing ” or “blaming, shaming and complaining” types of thinking. When this occurs it also activates our stress response. The brain does not recognize whether a threat is real or imagined and so it will activate the stress response just in case. Exposure to lots of negative inputs like an over-abundance of inaccurate news is also a contributor. We do not have control over the threats that are present out in the world, however we can recognize when we get excessively caught in negative thinking. With this awareness comes choice, a choice to limit our negative inputs and switch focus. We will need to do this again and again because of the negativity bias.
3. The negativity bias states that we are wired to notice, and even get stuck on, the negative far more easily than the positive. Quite literally all our optimistic ancestors were eaten by the saber tooth tigers of the past and we were left with the gene pool of the pessimists. If our ancestors did not focus on the negative, and react quickly, they would not have survived. This means that today, tens of thousands of years later, we are still wired this way. Evolution is a slow process. In fact, we will register a negative instantaneously and we actually have to focus on a positive for 20 seconds for it to register anywhere near as significantly as a negative does immediately. Of course, our environment is very different today from that of our ancestors and we no longer face the same dangers. We therefore need to really work on focusing or absorbing the positive through noticing what’s right, recognizing the good, paying attention to acts of kindness in order to rewire the brain.



4. The higher evolved thinking parts of the brain also have a role in regulating the stress response. If the threat is imminent, or if our stress hormones have elevated significantly, what can happen is that we disconnect from this thinking part of the brain and move purely into a less conscious, reactive mode. This is sometimes referred to as an amygdala hijack. The amygdala is the part of the brain that senses danger and activates the stress response in the body. You may wonder why your thinking part of the brain alludes you during times of crisis when you actually really need it. Well it makes sense if we look at it from an evolutionary perspective because when we were faced with the saber tooth tiger we did not want to stand there planning out what to do, we wanted to react quickly to get to safety. In today's environment we no longer have the same kind of immediate dangers and therefore it can be problematic when we get hijacked into reactive mode because that is often when we say and do things that we may regret later. Recognizing when we are becoming more stressed as soon as possible can help us to actively choose to engage the thinking brain and use strategies that regulate the nervous system.
  
5. As human beings we are interdependent and interconnected. In fact our emotions and neuro physiology resonates with each other. It means we can quite literally catch each other's emotions. Heart rates and breaths rates will also become similar to those that are around us. This had an evolutionary purpose because if someone at the front of the group noticed a threat the whole group needed to become aware quickly and react in order to get to safety. Hence, we can either amp each other up or calm each other down. Purposefully regulating our own emotions and nervous system, using the PRN framework, not only calms us but others around us as well.

## Resilience Support Toolkit: Instruction for Use

Link to the Resilience Support Toolkit:

[Web Based Resilience Support Toolkit](#)

### Introduction:

The resilience support work at Hamilton Health Sciences, including the Toolkit, is based on the premise that those who work in health care are resilient and resourceful however during times of uncertainty any one's coping resources are challenged. We also know that what gets us through times of uncertainty is how we support each other thus a toolkit developed to support our HCW, teams, leaders and physicians. This work is grounded in the science of stress and resilience and is meant to support all those working in health care to engage in micro-practises that promote their optimal wellbeing.

The Toolkit strives to foster post-traumatic growth and influence the integration of resilience practices into the workflow of health care. The Toolkit is based on a framework called PRN or Pause, Reset, and Nourish. PRN means "as needed." The PRN framework reminds us to engage in small practices, numerous times a day, in the flow of our work, to steady ourselves, replenish and stay connected with our team. These practices will complement the strategies that one already uses to manage stress and take care of self and others. They can be used on one's own, or with others, including teams at work perhaps during meetings or huddles.

The intention of the Toolkit was also to provide concrete tools and resources therefore additional mind, body, and connections strategies can be found in the Toolkit. All practices are based on solid neuroscience and the idea of “neuroplasticity”, that our brains are constantly changing based on how we think and what we choose to focus on. These tools help to calm our nervous system, enhance our focus and facilitate our collective resilience.

The Resilience Support Toolkit promotes a different approach to fostering resilience of those working in health care. It recognizes that all who work in health care, from those at the bedside to those providing operational supports, do challenging work that is high stress and trauma exposed. Traditionally the approach to managing these types of stressors has been to engage in self-care, which tends to give the impression that those working in health care need to take care of themselves on their own time separate from the workplace. This toolkit promotes an alternative approach which is to engage in micro-practices “as needed” through the flow of our work. It emphasizes the importance of caring for ourselves as necessary to care for others and PRN can develop into a necessary habit for how we do our work. It is hoped that the PRN strategy and Toolkit will remain long after the pandemic is past as a way to navigate the inherent challenges faced in doing helping work that can lead burnout, moral distress, empathic strain and secondary trauma.

- Please feel free to adopt or adapt WITH ATTRIBUTION TO HAMILTON HEALTH SCIENCES any of the resources to fit your individual or organizational needs; just acknowledge the source to express your gratitude for the good work done by our health care resilience support community, and to track the spread of these resources and tools.
- Recognizing that we will be learning as we grow, this on-line Toolkit allows us to update and add resources and tools to stay current and comprehensive. We suggest you check back often for new items available to you.
- Any questions about the Resilience Support Toolkit can be directed by email to: [resilience@hhsc.ca](mailto:resilience@hhsc.ca).

### Values that inform the Resilience Support Toolkit:

\* Individual Autonomy - that people know themselves best and what they need.

\* Safety and Wellbeing - creating a collective and personal sense of psychological safety. To promote the optimal wellbeing of the individual and the team.

\* Community - the importance of collective support. We share a common humanity; we must take care of each other with integrity and thoughtfulness.

\* Compassion - the recognition that being compassionate to others and yourself, is energizing and inclusive, and has the ability to inspire our entire community.

### Acknowledgements:

The Resilience Support Toolkit was developed in collaboration with key stakeholders from many sectors within HHS including those who have an interest or specialize in the area of mental health, secondary trauma, care ecologies, resilience and wellness. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of and express our gratitude to: Ethics and Care Ecologies Program; Health, Safety, & Wellness; Inter-Professional Practise; Social Work; Child & Youth Mental Health; Psychology; Organizational Development; and the many HCW, leaders and physicians who have submitted ideas and offered enthusiastic support of the project.

### Thank you!

*In closing we want to express our deep appreciation for all those working in health care from the bedside to the boardroom, and to all those who support healthcare operations, not only during this time of pandemic but each and every day, thank you.*