MORAL DISTRESS

As we continue to provide essential healthcare services in this crisis, we are likely to be faced with choices and experiences that transgress our own moral beliefs, values, and ethics. We can name these feelings, reduce how overwhelming they feel, and identify what is in our control.

How Does it Feel?

This distress is experienced through our thoughts, bodily sensations, and actions.

**Body Signs:**
- Stomach pain/discomfort
- Back or shoulder tension
- Headaches
- Chest tightness
- Trouble sleeping

**Actions:**
- Avoiding work
- Avoiding coworkers
- Lashing out
- Acting in ways that don't feel good to you

We may find ways to soothe this distress (like drinking heavily or taking risks) that help in the short-term but may have negative long-term consequences.

How can I Cope?

1. **Acknowledge.** Take a moment to note you are experiencing moral distress.
2. **Regulate.** Distress is held in the body so we need to calm our system! Physically regulate your body through breath and symbolic, repeated motions.
   - Hold your hands together and interlace your fingers
   - Think of one small thing you feel good about that you did today. Visualize it filling your heart
   - Separate your hands and open your palms
   - Think of something you are judging yourself for. Imagine it dissolving into air
   - Repeat this action. Hold and separate your hands 10x
3. **Connect.** Ask others around you if they are experiencing similar dilemmas. Recognize people make different choices based on different circumstances and risk. Be kind and support each other.
4. **Be kind to yourself.** Trust that you’re making the best decisions that you can with choices that you have. Our circumstances are evolving daily. We are in this together and trying our best to act in line with our values.

Moral distress comes up when we are faced with choices that put our values at odds. Some of the morally distressing questions we might be having include:

- Should I choose to follow orders or listen to my instincts?
- Should I choose to take more responsibilities or take care of myself?
- Should I choose to stay at home or go to work?
- Who do I choose to social distance from?
- How can I choose whose needs and lives to prioritize?
- Am I participating in furthering oppression and inequality?
- Should I focus on what is better for me, what is better for my loved ones, what is better for my patients, and/or what is better for my community?

In a crisis? Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255