



Managing Trauma & Stress

April 7, 2021

Part of the “Life in Congress” Project by:



Moderator

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Presenter

Rep. Brian Baird (D-WA)

- 6-term Member
- U.S. House of Representatives (1999-2011)
- Ph.D., Clinical Psychology



Upcoming CMF Events

- April 28: Personal Safety & Preparedness
- May 5: Preventing Burnout: Using the Science of Stress & Energy Management to Reset and Recover
 - featuring special guests, the [Becoming Superhuman Lab](#) at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business
- TBA (May-June): Return to Work vs Remote Work: Managing Hybrid Workplaces
- To register: <https://www.congressfoundation.org/calendar>

Goals of this Program

- Support and empower you, your team and your family
- Help understand your personal emotion, physical and cognitive reactions to the past year, recent events and ongoing challenges
- Offer ways to help you cope with what you've experienced and what comes next
- Provide tools and ideas to support your coworkers as they deal with the experience

What You Have Been Through

- A viral pandemic unprecedented in the recent memory of our country. It has already killed more than a half million Americans, debilitated millions more, cost more than ten million jobs, left people without homes or insurance and profoundly disrupted nearly every aspect of our work, daily lives, and the lives of your constituents.
- An outright attack on the nation's Capitol by dangerous mobs trying to disrupt the certification of the election and in the process vandalizing the building and threatening to kidnap or kill members of Congress and their staff and employees of the Capitol.
- Ongoing threats to the safety and well being of members of Congress and their staff both in DC and in the state or district offices.
- Racist, antisemitic, sexist and homophobic language and explicit threats against staff and members of color and diversity being made on a daily basis on phones, emails and social media

And somehow, you still have to
do your jobs

QUESTION:

Which of the following do you personally experience on a daily or near daily basis? (Check all that apply)

- Frustration at not being able to help as much as I'd like
- Anxiety for my own safety or that of our Member/colleagues
- Direct insulting or threatening messages or communication
- Being overwhelmed by the number of demands and issues
- Isolation from both the people we serve and my colleagues

Secondary Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

- Primary Traumatization
- Secondary Traumatization
- Compassion Fatigue – Empathic strain or exhaustion from caring with people dealing with trauma

All this is expected of you and more

- Be kind and supportive of people who really are in desperate need, including some who have lost loved ones to COVID or other illnesses
- Deal with all sorts of limits and frustrations as you try to help those in need
- Be professional and at the top of your game as you evaluate and make recommendations on legislative matters
- Handle angry, threatening and insulting people who are rude in person, on the phone, social media, email or regular mail
- Be aware of safety issues for your boss, yourself, your teammates, and your constituents
- Work with colleagues and elected members who may have supported the insurrection and or deny the need for COVID precautions

More

- For some – manage much or all of the above from home, possibly with family in the background, possibly all alone
- For others – work in a state or district office that may not feel very safe and security that may not be as robust as the Capitol/DC office
- For some – deal with current and legacy racism, homophobia, sexism, antisemitism and other prejudices
- For all – do all this in a time when a subset of our population HATES their own government and all involved in it
- And, oh, did we mention stay positive, professional and respectful

Emotional Reactions You and Your Peers May Be Experiencing

Anger, Fear, Anxiety, Frustration, Confusion, Outrage, Deep sadness, Loss, Loneliness, Isolation, Vulnerability, Helplessness, Abandonment, Injustice, Feeling overwhelmed, Not understood, Guilt, Shame, Resentment, Nightmares, Intrusive thoughts, Irritability, Depression, Reduced motivation, A loss of purpose or passion, and many other shared and personal reactions or changes.

Physical Reactions

- Sick to your stomach
- Heart racing or pounding
- Blood pressure increase
- Trembling, shaking, nervousness
- Feeling faint
- Exhaustion and weakness, both emotionally and physically
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping at night or possibly a desire just to sleep during the day
- Changes in appetite
- Grinding teeth at night
- Tension or pain in your neck or back
- Fidgeting or nervous habits
- A distant stare

Cognitions and Behaviors

- Repeated or intrusive thoughts or memories of the events
- Recurring fears or thoughts about possible future threats
- Hypervigilance
- Difficulty concentrating or working
- Trying to make sense of the senseless
- Feeling disorganized
- Trouble being or staying motivated
- Withdrawal
- Avoidance
- Thoughts of violence or self harm
- Existential crises about your life, your family, your country, your job, your party, your coworkers, your boss, humanity, the fate of the world

What It Takes to Keep Going And Stay Strong

- You CAN do this
- You have to take care of yourself
- You have to be clear about who you are and why you do this work
- You have to take care of each other
- You have to develop and apply new skills
- This is going to be hard work for a long time but it MATTERS so you have to pace yourself

QUESTION:

Which of the following do you personally engage in on a daily or near daily basis? (Check all that apply)

- Take breaks to stretch or move around
- Practice meditation or prayer
- Talk with friends/colleagues about experiences and coping
- Pause to recollect yourself after a difficult interaction
- Eat healthy foods to take care of yourself

Self Care

- Being gentle with yourself and patient, you have been through a lot
- You and others may be grieving in a way, you have lost something precious and life has changed
- Recognize and accept and learn from your emotions, there are lessons here
- Reduce or stop a fixation on reviewing the negative images and bad news
- Make it a point to find beauty and goodness in yourself, your team and in the world

Self Care

- Practice mindfulness, breathe, do movement meditation – do it regularly (Try Thich Nhat Hanh – The Miracle of Mindfulness, John Kabat-Zinn)
- Practice your spiritual traditions if they are helpful – pray if it helps
- Support yourself as you take care of yourself physically, get exercise, stretch
- Watch out for alcohol or substance use
- Do not go this alone, reach out to friends and family
- Limit your doom scrolling and social media intake
- GO TO BED at night and leave the emails for tomorrow

Team Care

- If you are a leader, you set the example and the tone – and that example includes self care and care for the team
- It MUST be safe in the office and your home to have and express feelings – This must be stated explicitly, modeled and practiced in reality
- People need permission to have space and time to experience and process
- Ethics – Confidentiality, Respect, Safety
- There needs to be protective boundaries – e.g., limits on when emails can be sent, mandatory and shared breaks, time to deal with especially challenging experiences or interactions
- Have a code word for needing emotional support, time, or space
- Keys to helping remotely (6Rs)
- Building and modeling a lasting culture of support

Support From and For Others

- Do not go this alone, do not leave others to solve this alone, find support in the office, groups online, on the phone, reach out
- Being a resource for others
- Seeking support and learning from your peers
- You do not have to solve the problems to be helpful

What does working
in Congress mean
to you?



Purpose and Meaning

- Purpose and meaning may be the most powerful resources for you, your family and your staff
- The world has changed and so have our normal ways of operating
- You are vital now more than ever and the work you do is even more important
- It matters that you're there even if not all problems can be solved
- We have to make it through the virus and that will take time
- We cannot allow the people who attacked the Capitol to prevail over us or over the country
- You are stronger than you know
- You are not alone

We Have Examples of Courage and Purpose

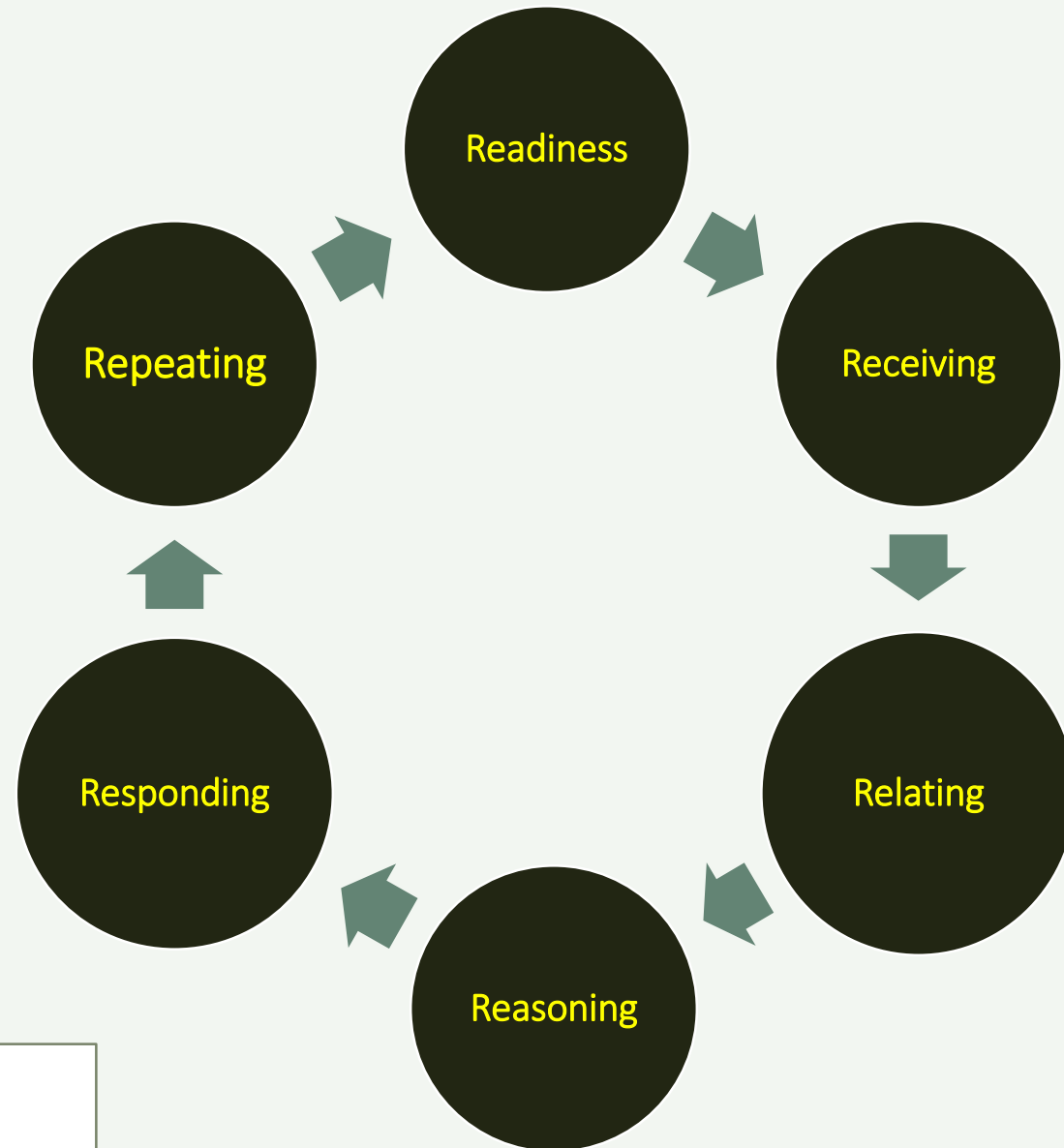
“Despite everything that has happened, regardless of the pain of their loss, despite all the other nonviolent peaceful warriors who suffered and sometimes fell, I have never once considered giving up or giving out. I could not let myself get lost in a sea of despair, because I had faith that the truth is bigger than all humanity. ...The truth marches on; it is not connected to the life of any one individual. When a person dies, the dream does not die. You can kill a man, but the truth that he stood for will never die.”

—John Lewis, [Across That Bridge: Life Lessons and a Vision for Change](#)

Professional Support

- Even the toughest soldiers, doctors, nurses, athletes, etc. have benefited from therapy
- If you sliced your foot on some broken glass, you would get stitches, if your spirit has been wounded, it's fine to get help fixing that as well
- This is an act of strength, courage, resolve and a determination to move on, it is not a weakness in any way
- Support your peers or friends or staff if they seek help and therapy

The 6 Rs of Communication



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4Pir2 Communications

The 6R Model of Communication

1. Readiness
2. Receiving
3. Relating
4. Reasoning
5. Responding
6. Repeating

The 6R Model of Communication

1. Readiness

- Quieting your mind
- Holding the habitual responses
- Meeting people where they are

The 6R Model of Communication

2. Receiving

- Not just listening
- Taking in everything the person is saying and feeling

The 6R Model of Communication

3. Relating

- This may be the most important thing you do to help
- Feeling what they feel and letting them know you do
- The power of listening, silence and reflecting

The 6R Model of Communication

4. Reasoning

- Think before you speak

The 6R Model of Communication

5. Responding

- Deciding what the best response is
- What does this person need most right now from you
- How you say things is as important as what you say

The 6R Model of Communication

6. Repeating

- The cycle of Rs is ongoing

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The Long Struggle For A Better World

“Ours is the struggle of a lifetime, or maybe even many lifetimes, and each one of us in every generation must do our part. And if we believe in the change we seek, then it is easy to commit to doing all we can, because the responsibility is ours alone to build a better society and a more peaceful world.”

—John Lewis, [Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America](#)

Your Vision For Yourself and Your Team

Take a few moments to think about some words to describe how you would like to see yourself as an individual and how you would like to see your team and the Capitol family/community come through this experience. You don't have to be there just yet or right away, but what would you like to see and feel as a person and as a team.



Q&A

Type in your questions and comments

More Information

Additional Resources & Evaluation

U.S. Senate Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Goal & Mission:

Increase resiliency throughout the Senate community by helping to support happy, healthy and productive employees in DC and in State offices

Free & Confidential Services:

- Available to all Senators, staff and family members
- Virtual appointments and with extended hours
- Updated info on Webster on trauma and presentations for staff

Contact: 202-224-3902, <http://webster.senate.gov/eap/>

U.S. House of Representatives Office of Employee Assistance

- Free & Confidential Consultation, Counseling and Information for the House community
- Management Consultation
- Executive Coaching
- Transition/Career Planning
- Training, Presentations and Retreat Facilitation
- Critical Incident Response: Organizational consultation and Management of crises impacting DC and District offices
- House Wellness Center

Contact:

Main phone number, for appointments and urgent 24/7 after-hours needs:
202-225-2400

General email box, for appointments and basic information:
employee.assistance@mail.house.gov

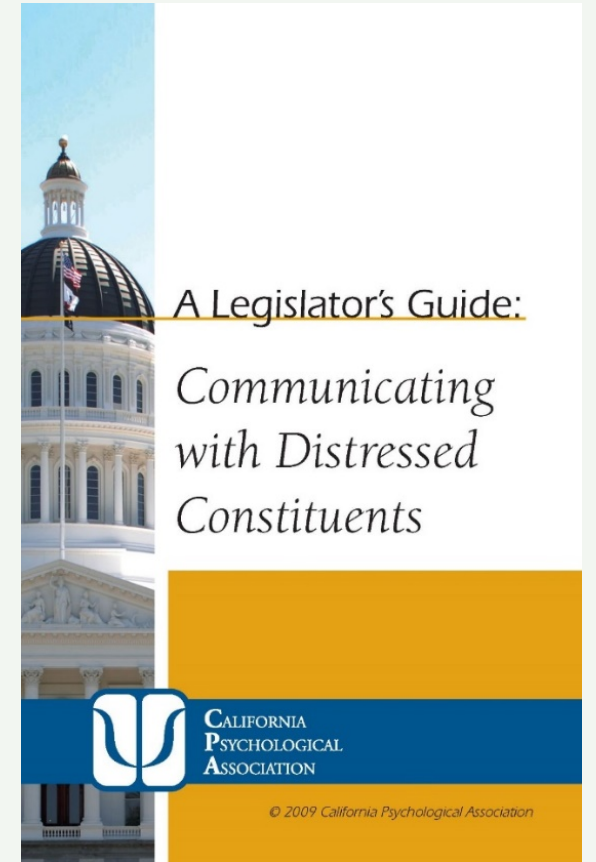
Website:
Housenet.house.gov/EmployeeAssistance

CMF's Congressional Crisis Preparation & Response Center

A compilation of resources on crisis management, remote work, burnout and stress, remote town halls, and employee assistance.

Access related webinars, handouts, publications, articles, and more, including:

- “Managing Stress in Staff and Constituents During a Crisis”
- “Strengthening Employee Well-Being and Personal Resilience”
- CPA Guide: *Communicating with Distressed Constituents*
- CMF Handout: *Casework Burnout & Stress*



CapitolStrong

A coalition of civil society organizations working to strengthen and invest in the institution of Congress and the people who serve there.

CapitolStrong.org links to many resources for staff including:

- Immediate and longer-term mental health support
- Resilience, safety and workplace resources
- Playbooks, checklists and toolkits

Contact:

[CapitolStrong.org](https://www.CapitolStrong.org)

@CapitolStrong

#CapitolStrong

SHRM COVID-19 Resources

Visit

<https://pages.shrm.org/covid-19-resources>

for

Coronavirus and COVID-19 Resources

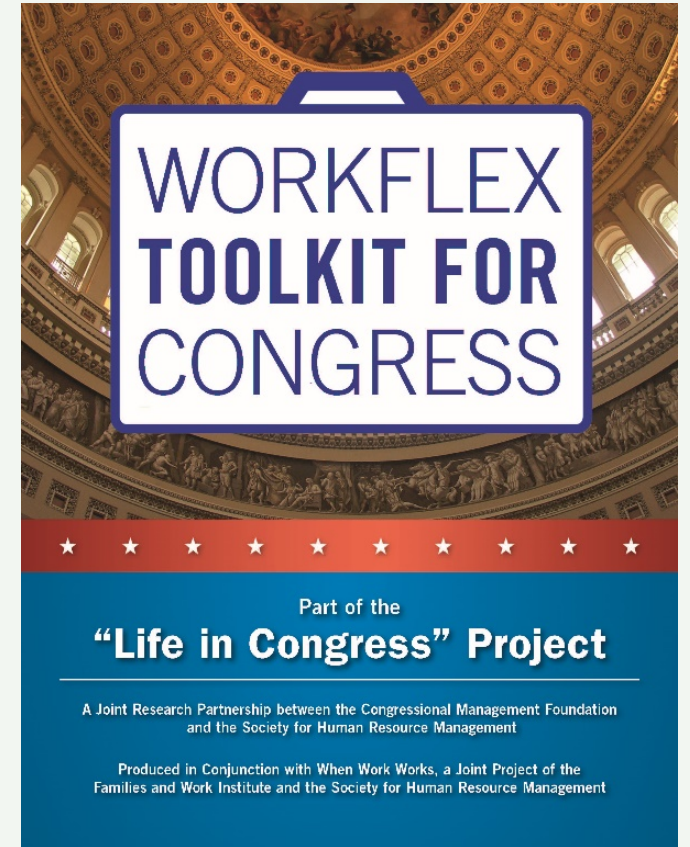
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Government Response and Resources

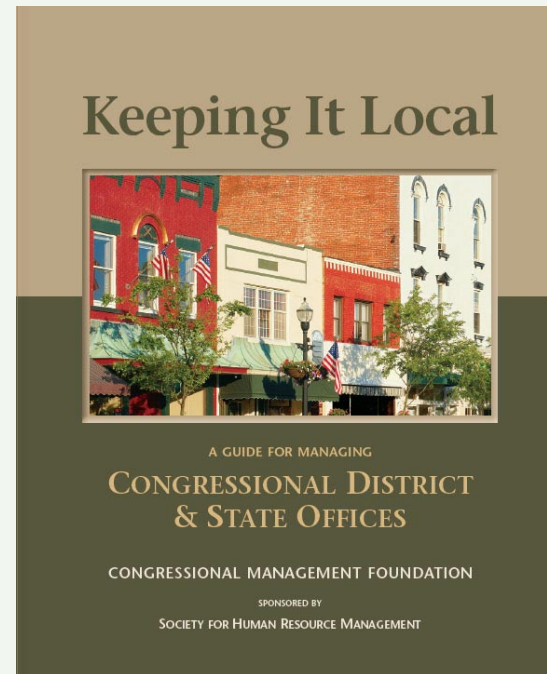
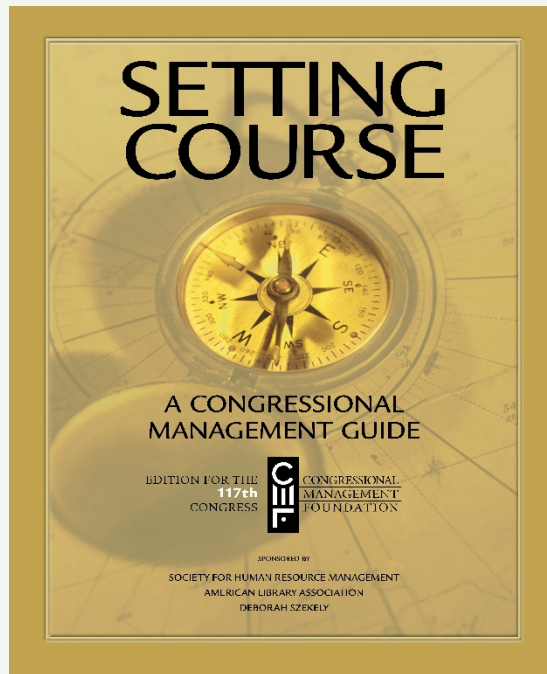
“Life in Congress” Reports

- *Aligning Work and Life in the U.S. House and Senate*
- *The Member Perspective*
- *Job Satisfaction and Engagement of House and Senate Staff*
- *Workflex Toolkit for Congress*
- *Congressional Benefits & Personnel Practices*

Visit CongressFoundation.org for downloadable PDFs



Complimentary Management Guidebooks



Visit CongressFoundation.org for downloadable PDFs or contact us for free hardcopies or if we can be of any assistance to your office



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