

*This document compiles resilience tips that were shared on a weekly basis to the MRC listserv during the winter and spring of 2021.*

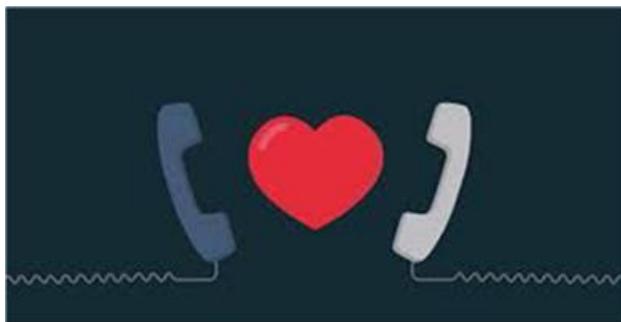
*These tips are evergreen, evidence-based ideas that can help both MRC unit leaders and volunteers build their resilience.*

## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 1)



Even experienced disaster responders and emergency medical volunteers sometimes need a person to turn to for help with stress. Finding support is easier when you know where to go *before* a crisis. This week's tip is easy: Save the **Disaster Distress Helpline** to your phone contacts (and encourage volunteers to do so too) so that it is at the ready when you want to talk to someone about stress or coping! Also know that there may be local helplines, warmlines, or peer support lines that cater to unique situations.

If you or a volunteer find yourselves experiencing emotional distress, prolonged sadness, mood changes, anxiety, social withdrawal, or depression, the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) has trained crisis counselors available 24/7 who provide free services to support you. **Call or text 1-800-985-5990** to connect with a counselor. Spanish speakers can call the hotline and press "2" for bilingual support. Callers to the hotline can also connect with counselors in over 100 other languages via 3rd-party interpretation services. Remember, the Disaster Distress Helpline is here for all of us — not just disaster survivors.



## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 2)



Did you know it is proven that mindfulness builds our resilience, helps us cope with stressful situations, increases self-compassion, and reduces symptoms of burnout? And you don't even need to set aside a lot of time to do it! Practicing mindfulness is a strategy that can help you and your volunteers find some calm during a busy day and can be as quick as **5-4-3-2-1**.

Look around, and note **5 things you can see**, like the sun shining through a window. Take a second to notice **4 things you can feel**, such as the clothes on your skin or the chair you are sitting on. Listen closely for **3 things you can hear**, like birds chirping or the hum of your refrigerator. Bring your awareness to **2 things you can smell**, such as the scent of a cup of coffee or the shampoo you used this morning, and acknowledge **1 thing you can taste** — maybe have a little snack prepared ahead of time and ready to go.

Encourage yourself and your volunteers to **schedule time** (as little as 5-10 minutes) to practice mindfulness, which is the act of focusing on one's present thoughts and feelings. Consider how you can practice mindfulness this week. Apps like [The Mindfulness App](#), [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), [Ten Percent Happier](#), and podcasts such as [Happy Mind Guided Meditations](#), [Meditation Minis](#) and [The Daily Meditation Podcast](#) are helpful tools to help you get started!

## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 3)



Are you familiar with the buddy system? A popular approach in the military to ensure support for troops, the buddy system is a resilience-building strategy in which two individuals, or “buddies,” share responsibility to support each other’s safety and emotional well-being during stressful times. On or off the battlefield, this system is effective at decreasing stress and anxiety and increasing resilience and positive coping. As unit leaders, you can support your team by implementing a buddy system for yourself and encouraging your volunteers to do the same.

There’s no buddy system without a buddy! This person can be a fellow volunteer, a friend, or a family member who is open to sharing mutual accountability for each other’s wellness. Your buddy can be available for any type of support you need, whether it’s social, emotional and spiritual, or professional and tangible support. Each buddy relationship is unique, so talk with your buddy about what supporting each other will entail. Many buddies reflect on:

- Recent “Highs” and “Lows”
- Breakthroughs and “a-ha” moments
- Questions like: how are you doing? What is one thing that was stressful or hard today? How did you manage it, and how are you coping? How have you been eating/sleeping/exercising? What are you doing to decompress?

You can check in with your buddy as often as you like, but most buddies try for at least one call, text, videoconference, or in-person meeting (with proper safety and public health precautions) each week. Meeting with your buddy doesn’t have to be too time consuming; just a few minutes once or twice a week to check in can make all the difference.

**This week’s tip? Find yourself a buddy, and meet with them once this week for at least 10 minutes and see how it goes!**

Remember: positive social support is critical to our health and well-being during hard times. Identify a buddy to connect with today, and help your unit members do the same!



## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 4)



Have you ever found yourself at a point where you can't stop thinking about something, and it almost feels like you're trapped in a loop of negative thoughts? That's rumination. High levels of stress can prompt rumination. You know what can help? Being outside in nature. Time spent in nature is a strategy that can lower blood pressure, decrease the levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and help calm down the mind and prompt it to "jump out" of a negative loop (check out some [studies](#)).

With spring technically starting this upcoming weekend (even if it may not feel like it in your part of the country quite yet), it's time to make a plan to get outside and find some nature! As unit leaders, you can **encourage your team to find their closest "green space" with the [Park Rx tool](#) and spend at least 30 minutes this week in nature. Even better — aim for 90!** This might be your backyard, a local park, or a walking trail lined with trees.

Concerned about allergies? You can also bring nature inside! Listen to nature sound apps ([National Park Service Sounds](#)), and/or watch nature videos ([Yellowstone videos](#)).



## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 5)



Bring it back to the basics, and try breathing intentionally. This simple reminder can make a world of difference if you or your team are feeling overwhelmed. Breathing exercises trick our bodies into feeling totally relaxed. They can help alleviate the symptoms of stress by reducing stress hormones, enhancing focus, and improving mood ([here's a study!](#)). The best part is that breathing exercises can be done anywhere and easily incorporated into your resilience toolkit.

**Encourage your team to take 2-5 minutes before meetings or stressful activities to practice intentional breathing.** Pick one of the breathing exercises below, or use an app like [Breath2Relax](#), [Virtual Hope Box](#), or [COVID Coach](#), which has a five-minute deep breathing tool.

### **4-7-8 Breath:**

**Inhale** deeply through your nose for **4 seconds**.

**Hold** your breath for **7 seconds**.

**Exhale** through your mouth for **8 seconds**.

**Repeat** until you have completed **4 cycles**.

### **Box Breathing:**

Inhale deeply through your nose for **4 seconds**.

Hold your breath for **4 seconds**.

Exhale through your nose for **4 seconds**.

Hold your breath for **4 seconds**.

**Repeat** until you have completed **4 cycles**.

### **Belly Breathing**

**Sit** in a comfortable seat or **lie down** on your back in a comfortable position.

**Place** one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach near your belly button.

**Inhale** through your nose; notice your abdomen rise as it fills with air.

**Exhale** slowly through pursed lips, noticing your abdomen fall as you release your breath.

**Repeat** until you have completed **4 cycles**.

take a deep breath.  
let out all the stress.



you deserve to be okay.

## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 6)



feel better overall.

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful and showing appreciation and kindness. But gratitude goes beyond that; gratitude also involves taking a moment to focus on the positives, even in the midst of challenges. This may sound like being thankful, which is a part of gratitude. Gratitude requires us to make conscious decisions to not only appreciate what we have but to be mindfully aware of how our actions impact ourselves and those around us. [Studies](#) have shown that those who write about gratitude are more optimistic, exercise more, report fewer doctor visits, and

It can be as easy as noticing, expressing, or savoring gratitude. **Encourage yourself and your team members to pick one of the strategies** below — but aim for all three! For more information, look at this [article](#).

### Notice the Good Through Journaling

- Keep your journal (or a designated piece of scrap paper) visible. Keep it in a place where you will see it daily, like a desk or nightstand.
- Do what works for you. Commit to either an amount of time, such as five minutes, to write or a specific count of things (for example, three things) to write about.
- Use journal [prompts](#).

### Express Gratitude

- Show appreciation to the team, and encourage your team to do the same with each other. Say, "It was really kind of you to...", "It really helped me out when you...", "You did me a big favor when...", "Thank you for listening when...", "I really appreciated it when you taught me...", or "Thank you for being there when..."
- Express gratitude through kindness toward team members.
- Recognize efforts even when things go wrong. Even a simple "thank you" means a lot.

### Savor Gratitude

- When good things happen, notice it, let it sink in, and savor it.



## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 7)



Stop me if you've heard this one before, "laughter is the best medicine." Humor and a good laugh have both short and long-term health benefits. In the short-term, laughter stimulates circulation, which can reduce physical symptoms of stress by decreasing heart rate and blood pressure. In the long-term, laughter can improve your immune system, relieve pain, increase personal satisfaction, and improve your mood. Laughter and overall humor can help us take a step back, cope with stressful situations, and build comradery with those around us ([check out this study](#)).

How can MRC unit leaders encourage humor and laughter among volunteers? First, we are not recommending cheesy knock-knock jokes — even if they can be really funny. Encourage your team and volunteers to find some space for humor. You can pick one of the strategies below or explore this [tool](#) for additional strategies.

Ways you can incorporate humor:

- Write down 3 humorous things that happened to you at the end of the day.
- Incorporate funny things into your environment. It could be a funny picture of your friends, family, or pets.
- In your spare time, actively seek out comedic material. Watch stand-up comedy or find a TV show, movie, or book that makes you laugh.
- Get online — there are many comics, memes, videos, and blogs!

Host an online game or trivia night with friends/family.

Did you hear about the astronaut who was a little claustrophobic?

He just needed a little space.



## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 8)



For volunteers and people in helping professions, it can be challenging to say “no” and be assertive about boundaries or personal needs. Assertiveness is about having an inner attitude of valuing yourself as much as you value others. Benefits of assertiveness include improved self-esteem, self-confidence, communication, and decision making as well as increased job satisfaction (here’s an [article](#) and [study](#)).

This week, **encourage your team and volunteers to reflect on their week ahead and intentionally try at least one of the strategies below.**

Incorporate assertiveness:

1. **Prepare:** Pay attention to what you think, feel, want, and prefer. You need to be aware of these things before you can communicate them to others.
2. **Practice:** Practice asking for things and saying what you'd prefer. Start out small. For example, if someone asks, "Would you like green or red?" you can say, "I'd prefer the green one — thanks."
3. **Delay:** When someone makes a request of you, give yourself time before answering. Pause to assess the best answer for you. You could say, "Let me get back to you about that after I check on what I am already committed to doing this week."

Additional [assertiveness](#) strategies include these practices:

- Concisely state what you want or need using I-statements. Ex. I want... I need... I prefer...
- Active listening. Listen carefully to others' wants and needs, and repeat back what you hear to make sure you understand.
- If you sense resistance, try not to argue, but offer collaborative solutions to problems that arise.
- If you reach a stalemate where there's no possible compromise, be prepared to walk away and possibly revisit the conversation later.

To learn more about your own communication style, try out this [assessment](#) from Oxford University

## Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 9)



How often have you lost sleep in the past year because of stress? Are you waking up feeling sluggish? A recent [survey](#) by the American Psychological Association found that 67% of Americans reported sleeping more or less than they want since the pandemic began. When you are *not* well rested, you may not be as effective in the support you're providing (here's some [research!](#)). Morning activities such as getting dressed, commuting to work or school, and even packing lunches are helpful in waking up. Many of these routines have been impacted by the pandemic. So what *can* you do to promote good sleep hygiene?

One strategy is the [RISE-UP method](#), which is evidence based and consists of six principles that can help minimize the experience of sleepiness. **Encourage your team to try out at least three of the strategies below this week and see what works.**

**R** - Resist the urge to hit the snooze button.

**I** - Increase your activity for the first hour upon waking — even just walking around the block or inside your home.

**S** - Shower (or wash your face and hands with cold water).

**E** - Expose yourself to sunlight — this is especially important if you're not planning to leave the house for the day (Pro Tip: If you feel sluggish near the middle of the day, getting sunlight can help with that too).

**U** - Upbeat music — Listen to music, a podcast, or even an audio book.

**P** - Phone a friend — Any kind of social contact you can have in the first hour has been shown to promote alertness.



For strategies to help fall asleep, explore [COVID Coach](#) for sleep tools!

This image is pulled from the [Mind Over Matter Graphics](#)

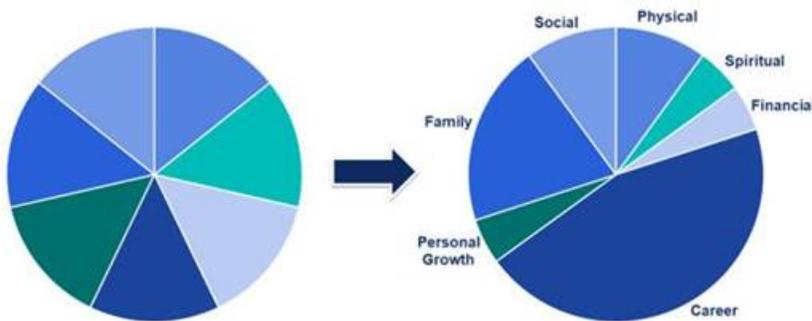
# Hump Day Resilience Tip of the Week! (Week 10)



So many of us have a lot on our plate — juggling work, family, and relationships. Our busy schedules can understandably create feelings of being overwhelmed and stressed. When stress levels spike, it decreases productivity and concentration, increases irritability, and can even harm personal and professional relationships (here's a [study!](#)). For volunteers, it can be difficult to juggle everything, especially when there is so much to do and give.

Creating and maintaining a healthy work-life balance is challenging (to say the least), but individuals who strive to achieve this balance [benefit](#) from better job satisfaction, increased productivity, and improved mental health and well-being. This week, **encourage your team and volunteers to take 5-10 minutes to draw out their “life pie” and to pick one of the strategies below to promote a healthy balance that fits their current pie and where they want to be.**

**STEP 1 - Grab a piece of paper, and redraw the pieces** of the pie to reflect where you're spending your time and energy (you can look to the example below). The seven slices are: Work/Volunteer, Financial, Physical, Social, Family, Personal Growth, and Spiritual.



Now take a moment, and reflect. Are you happy with your pie? Is this sustainable?

## Step 2 – Strategies for promoting balance

- Identify a piece of the pie you want to build, AND identify which pie piece you will need to take time or energy from to do so.
- Refrain from overcommitting to tasks that do not give you time for breaks.
- Set boundaries with your colleagues at work (e.g., only checking emails during work hours).
- When the workday is over, *transition* to home life (e.g., change your outfit, take a walk, or remove yourself from your workspace if virtual).

How you create a healthy balance will be unique to you, and there is no “right” answer for everybody. To explore more strategies on work-life balance, visit [Mental Health America](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net).

