Lift Your Eyes

By Regina Carey, M.Ed.

“Momma always said ‘Look up into the sky, find the sun on a cloudy day.’” ~ Tones and I

This is a line from one of my favorite songs from Tones and I. It’s a powerful reminder, especially living in Michigan. I know the sun is up there, somewhere, because I have witnessed it shining here! ☀️ Just like the weather, we have our sunny days, and we have our rainy days. But occasionally there is an unforeseen natural disaster.

There are no words in our language that adequately express the emotions we feel or the thoughts we have about the horrible act of violence on our campus. As healthcare providers, you face tragedy and difficult situations on a regular basis; however, nothing prepares you for acute horror. If you are someone who carries on, no matter what, that’s a method of operation instilled in you a long time ago – “pull yourself up by your bootstraps!” This coping technique helps us deflect the pain so we can keep helping those who need our help. This coping technique can also result in burnout or illness.

There are other ways to heal our hearts and still stay strong:

#1 Connect with People Who Get You

It’s natural to want to isolate ourselves and “deal” with the situation alone. If we are going to heal and grow, it is essential to seek support from colleagues, family, friends, or other important connections. Talking with someone who understands can be incredibly beneficial, and it can also help you to process your feelings. In addition, when you are willing to open up and share it may have an equally beneficial effect on the person in front of you.

#2 Get Your Sleep (as though your life depended on it)

Whatever it takes, make it happen. Call in the troops (partners, parents, siblings, friends, neighbors) to help with chores, kids, carpooling, animals, or grocery shopping. Plan for your nighttime routine: face washing, brushing your teeth, showering, journaling, etc., about 15 minutes to fall asleep and sleep time that gets you to 7 hours. Moving toward 7 hours of solid sleep will help you to make better decisions, feel confident in your daily interactions, and actually attend to what your body is telling you throughout the day.
#3 Stop Rescuing Everyone

Take a minute to recognize how often you are doing someone else’s job. How often do you complete the chore you’ve asked a family member to do? How many times do you step in to “fix” a problem that someone else created? How freely do you say “Yes” to extra responsibilities with the mindset that if you don’t do it, it will never get done? STOP IT! Pause when you are tempted. Take a deep breath. Allow other people to take responsibility for themselves, to get uncomfortable when they make a mistake, and to say “Yes” to an opportunity they might benefit from. Rescuing will bring you down every time, whether or not you notice it happening.

You know how important it is to stay strong. That does not mean robotic. Share your feelings with your team and ask for help from your supportive community.

Get your sleep. Lack of sleep, restlessness, and insomnia cause anxiety, impaired cognitive function, a weakened immune system, and an increased risk of chronic health problems. Do whatever you can to get that shut-eye, because it helps you do the great work in the world!

Pause when you are compelled to rescue those around you. You know the difference between those who need help and those who look to you for a way out. Initially, it will feel uncomfortable. Stopping this behavior will leave you healthier and happier; in addition, it will give those you are used to rescuing an opportunity to grow and experience the pain necessary for that growth.

You are so important to so many.

Your life is valuable and necessary in our world.

Consider removing the Superhero armor and fall back into a place of support, rest, and freedom. And you know what happens when we fall back? Our eyes are up and we can find the sun on that next cloudy day!

Make it a strong day!
How many of you remember feeling scared as a child? What do you remember from that experience? What was comforting to you? Many times, parents and care givers offer children reassurance (warm hugs!) and work with their children to help assuage their fears. However, validation of fears is important to the healing process. Dismissing the “monster” by saying “there’s no monster under your bed, go back to sleep” is not only detrimental to the child but also is ineffective in teaching the child how to cope with feelings. To the child, the monster is very real. Sadly, when children grow into adults and have not had effective coping mechanisms reinforced, these “monsters” can be pervasive and affect quality of life.

Many questions that are often asked after experiencing a trauma are, “Will I ever feel safe again? Why did this happen? How can I get through this? What if it happens again? “Car accident victims are often faced with having to confront “getting back behind the wheel” as soon as possible to work through the fear of getting into another accident. For many, this can be a very difficult task.

Considering the trauma associated with the Covid 19 pandemic and recent mass shootings at various institutions, it is imperative that we find healthy and effective ways to recognize, confront, and process our fears. I recently heard of a patient asking a specialist about getting an operation done on a joint. He wanted to know the risks and benefits and whether recovery was possible. The specialist noted that recovery was possible but very difficult because many patients do not want to endure the suffering associated with going through recovery.

Recovery from any trauma is painful and difficult, but possible. There are various resources one can access to help with the process of recovering from traumatic experiences. One very successful method is called EMDR – Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy. This is a psychotherapy that enables people to heal from the symptoms and emotional distress related to traumatic memories.

Multiple studies have been done demonstrating the effectiveness and efficiency of EMDR therapy. A study presented by Dr Francine Shapiro discussed the role of EMDR in medicine (Permanente Journal 2014 Winter 18(1) 71-77: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) There are certified therapists who offer EMDR services (Check www.psychologytoday.com to find a therapist near you)
In addition to EMDR therapy, there are several resources to help with PTSD related trauma. Speaking with a counselor, seeking group therapy, and trauma support groups have been vital in helping cope after traumatic circumstances. Self-awareness and accepting that you are going to be different because of the situation is crucial. Trying to identify good that can come from an adverse event, accepting feelings in various forms and understanding they are normal are all part of the coping process. After a trauma, waves of emotion are also normal, including feelings of guilt or happiness.

Mindful meditation, deep breathing relaxation, engaging in activities and trying new hobbies, talking with close friends, and sharing honest feelings (I want to cry all day and eat ice cream!) are all positive coping skills that can effectively improve the recovery process. We are never the same after any traumatic event, but recovery is possible.

**Collaboration with American Medical Association**

*MSUCOM-SCS is excited to announce a collaboration effort with the American Medical Association to provide access to AMA Wellness Resources to our GME Member Community.*

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**Newsletter Committee**

- Cara Ludlow, LMSW, CAADC
  - ludlowc@msu.edu
- Brenda Lovegrove Lepisto, PsyD
  - Brenda.lepisto@mclaren.org
- Tracey Pickard, MS
  - pickar20@msu.edu
- John R. Taylor, Psy.D.
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