

BALANCED**YOU**  
King County

# Self-care Toolkit for King County First Responders and Essential Personnel



For more information, contact [balancedyou@kingcounty.gov](mailto:balancedyou@kingcounty.gov)

## Introduction

First responders and essential personnel – including front line and essential medical professionals and support staff, first responders, corrections officers, transit workers, emergency management employees, and others – are heroes in the battle against coronavirus. King County is grateful for your dedication to our community's health.

Balanced You knows you are working long hours, making difficult decisions, enduring trauma, and facing human tragedy. Many of you are tired and stressed. Balanced You is here to support first responders and essential personnel as you care for your own well-being and our community. Below, you will find tips and resources you can use as you respond, professionally and personally, to coronavirus.

**In this toolkit**, which was designed to be printed or read electronically, you will find resources and tips to help you support your physical and mental health. This includes information on:

- Physical health
- Burnout and secondary traumatic stress
- Mental health resources and stress reduction techniques
- Tips for integrating well-being into the workday

**For more information**, please see the following resources:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides fact sheets and tips on self-care for emergency responders.  
(<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/responders.asp>)
- Balanced You, King County's employee health and well-being team, is available to support you in brainstorming well-being for teams and individuals. Contact [balancedyou@kingcounty.gov](mailto:balancedyou@kingcounty.gov) for more information, requests, or suggestions.
- King County's benefits team is available to provide guidance in navigating your health insurance. Contact [kc.benefits@kingcounty.gov](mailto:kc.benefits@kingcounty.gov) for support.
- King County's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to help with workplace stress, coaching and consulting. For more information, call 206-263-8733, or email [HRDEAP@kingcounty.gov](mailto:HRDEAP@kingcounty.gov).

## Physical Health

Be gentle with yourself. Your normal routine may be difficult right now, considering your current work hours and stress. If your schedule allows you to develop a new, modified routine for regular exercise, rest, and food, do so. If not, just do your best each day.

**Rest:** Aim for 7-9 hours of rest. Remember to keep your sleeping space cool, dark, quiet, and without bright screens. If sleep is difficult, try winding-down before bed with a meditation.

**Exercise:** Moving your body each day will help you release stress and sleep better. Remember, exercise does not have to be done at once; it can be done in five to 10-minute increments throughout the day. For inspiration, try Balanced You's videos of easy desk stretches and exercises (<https://www.vivecorp.com/balancedyou>) that can be done whether you're working at home, in the field, or in the office.

**Nutrition:** If you have time to cook, check out this Balanced You blog post (<https://kcbalancedyou.com/2020/03/26/healthy-eating-during-coronavirus/>) on healthy eating during the pandemic. Cooking in large batches and freezing leftovers can save time and money. If you don't have time to cook, consider stocking up on nutritious shortcuts – including healthier frozen meals, low-sodium canned soups, pre-packaged salads, and quick snacks like nuts and fruit – and storing some at work, or ordering healthy delivery from a favorite restaurant.



**Hydration:** Long hours can mean more caffeine. Remember to also drink water or herbal tea, 6-8 cups per day, if possible.

## Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress

First responders and essential personnel experience stress during a crisis. When stress builds up, it can cause burnout or secondary traumatic stress.

**Burnout:** Feelings of extreme exhaustion and being overwhelmed

**Secondary traumatic stress:** Stress reactions and symptoms resulting from exposure to another individual's traumatic experiences, rather than from exposure directly to a traumatic event

Recognize the signs of both these conditions in yourself and other responders to be sure those who need a break or need help can address their needs.

### Signs of Burnout

- Sadness, depression, or apathy
- Easily frustrated
- Blaming others, irritability
- Lacking feelings, indifferent
- Isolation or disconnection from others
- Poor self-care or hygiene
- Tired, exhausted, overwhelmed
- Feelings like:
  - You are a failure
  - Nothing you do will help
  - You are not doing your job well
  - You need alcohol or drugs to cope

### Signs of Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Excessively worry about something bad happening
- Easily startled, or "on guard" all the time
- Physical signs of stress (e.g. racing heart)
- Nightmares or recurrent thoughts about the traumatic situation
- The feeling that others' trauma is your own

If you are not currently seeing a mental health provider and are experiencing any of the signs of burnout or secondary traumatic stress, consider seeking mental health counseling. This benefit is covered by King County.

## Mental Health Resources for King County Employees

Remember that to help others, you must care for yourself. If you are under the care of a mental health professional, it is especially important during this time to follow the plan you have established with them. If you would like additional support in caring for your mental health, the following resources are available to you:

**Mental or physical healthcare via telehealth:** Regence and Kaiser counselors and other healthcare providers can be accessed from the comfort and safety of your home, via telehealth. If you have a provider, ask them if telehealth is available so you can continue your treatment routine while social distancing. If you don't have a certain type of provider and would like one, contact your insurance company.



[www.kingcounty.gov/telehealth](http://www.kingcounty.gov/telehealth)

**Making Life Easier and Employee Assistance Program:** Making Life Easier (MLE) provides many daily living supports, including free counseling and referrals, mortgage assistance, and childcare resources and referrals, The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free counseling to help employees navigate workplace stress. (<https://kingcounty.gov/audience/employees/safety-claims/MLE-EAP.aspx>)

**Better Choices, Better Health:** Better Choices, Better Health is a six-week, online, small-group based workshop designed to improve the lives of people living with long-term health conditions, including anxiety and depression. This program is free for King County employees and dependents. (<https://enroll-kpwa1.selfmanage.org/>)

**Mental Health Resource Guide:** View the guide at the end of this document for additional King County and community-based mental health support resources. (<https://www.kingcounty.gov/~media/audience/employees/balanced-you/KCMentalHealthResourceGuide.ashx?la=en>)

## Stress Reduction Techniques

Stress levels are understandably high right now and the emotions in response can range from numbness to sadness to anger. Here are some techniques you can practice to help manage stress during this time:

**Buddy system:** Pair up with someone at work and check-in on each other. Learn each other's interests, workloads, and points of stress. Encourage breaks and self-care.



**Journal:** Write about what you are experiencing. Label your feelings and describe them. Remember, whatever you are feeling is valid. Journal prompts are available later in the toolkit.

**Box breathing:** Inhale while counting to four, hold your breath for four, exhale for four, and then hold again for four. More information is available later in the toolkit.

**Connecting with the senses:** Name five things you see, four things you feel, three things you hear, two things you smell (or like to smell), one thing you taste (or like to taste), and one good thing about today.

**Coping skills:** We all have things we do to help manage our stress; some of us clean, some of us exercise, some of us watch funny tv or play video games, some of us call friends. Use the skills that work for you and be careful not to focus too strongly on only one. Moderation is important, even in coping skills.

**Other stress relieving techniques:** Sometimes, when our normal coping skills or stress relievers aren't working, it can feel defeating. Review the 101 stress relievers on the next page and use them for inspiration if your go-to skills aren't cutting it.

**Mindfulness:** A mindfulness practice can help you reduce stress at work and at home. Free classes are available to King County employees.

<https://kcbalancedyou.com/2020/04/08/april-and-may-mindfulness-class-schedule-now-available/>

# 101 Stress Relievers

Need a quick – or not so quick – stress-break? Fresh out of ideas? Try one of these

**ANGRY? TALK TO A FRIEND ABOUT IT.**

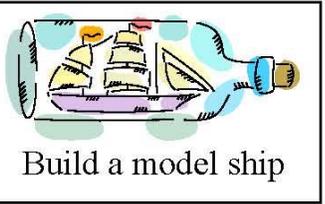
Apologize for a mistake **Meditate**

Stand up and **STRETCH**

**ASK FOR HELP**

Call up  an old friend **Run**

Change coffee break to exercise break



Build a model ship

**TELL** someone "I Love you" a joke

**STOP AND YAWN**

Stop and look out the window

Work on a crossword puzzle

Close your eyes. What do you see?

Count to ten – or 1000 – before exploding  
Count your blessings – make a list

**Dance**



Cut back on...

**WATCH A REALLY GOOD MOVIE**

Eat an orange slowly, segment by segment



**CLIMB A MOUNTAIN**



**DAYDREAM**

Plan ahead

**Do one thing at a time**

Get a massage  
Spend your coffee break at the beach

Get a pet



**PLAY WITH YOUR DOG**



Eat a good breakfast

Forgive someone

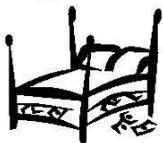


Fly a kite

**Find someone you're grateful to and thank them**



**Go Fishing**



Get a good night's sleep



Get up fifteen minutes early

**GO**

for a brisk walk swimming to work a different way

**Hug a tree**

**Hug someone you love**

Keep a journal of thoughts and feelings

Leave the car at home and take the bus

Lie in a

**Laugh at something you did**

Listen to the birds

**Look**

at the big picture closely at a flower, leaf, blade of grass or tree trunk off into the distance

hammock



**LIFT WEIGHTS**

Quit smoking

**Massage your temples**



**WASH THE CAR**

Plant a flower

Read a good

Read something



**SMELL A ROSE.**

... a cat in your lap  
... on some music  
... plants in your office  
... your feet up

Make a list. Then follow it

Share your feelings with someone

Ride your bike to work

Sit by a fountain or stream. Close your eyes and hear the water

**PRACTICE YOGA**

**Write...**

Wear earplugs when it's noisy

down your fears  
down your dreams  
your congressman

**Write a poem**

**Write a letter to the editor**

**Work out at the gym**

Do a good deed

TALK TO YOURSELF: "I CAN DO A GREAT JOB." "I CAN STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE."

- ✓ Take a child to the playground
- ✓ Take a deep breath and let it all out
- ✓ Take a leisurely stroll
- ✓ Take a long bath
- ✓ Take a nap
- ✓ Take an herb tea break
- ✓ Take one day at a time
- ✓ Take the back roads
- ✓ Take the stairs
- ✓ Take time for the sunset – or sunrise
- ✓ Take up knitting

**Make time for play**



**Spend an evening without TV**

**Sit by a fire**



**Practice Laughing Out Loud**

Paint a peaceful scene – in your imagination

Watch a cloud for 5 minutes. Watch an ant or other insect for 5 minutes.

**SING A SONG**



Turn cocktail hour into exercise hour



**LEARN TO SAY NO**

Roll your shoulders up and around in a circular motion

**CLASP YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD AND STRETCH YOUR SHOULDERS**

## Stress Reduction Technique: Box Breathing

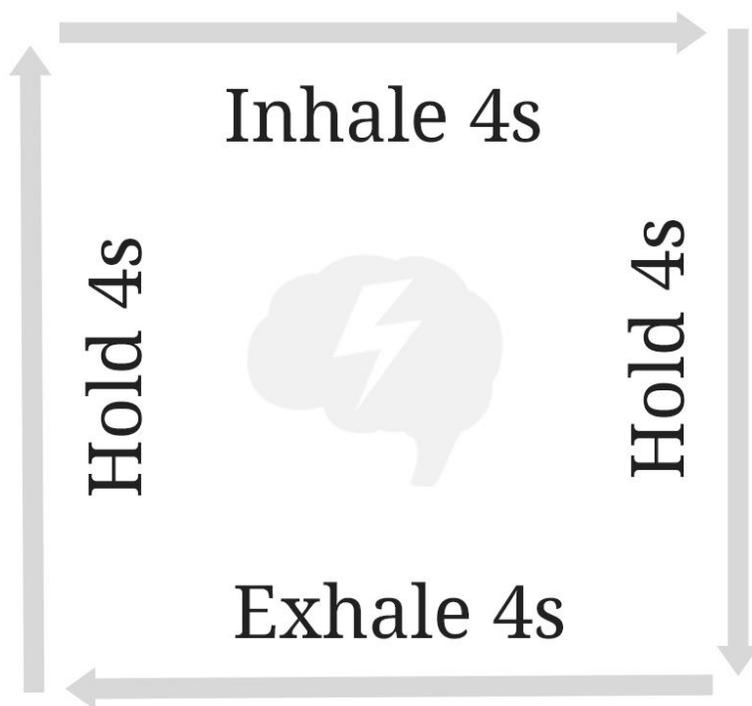
Box breathing, also known as square breathing, is a technique used when taking slow, deep breaths. Box breathing can reduce stress, improve your mood, and help you sleep better. Box breathing is used by everyone from athletes to U.S. Navy SEALs, police officers, and nurses.

### Getting started with box breathing

Before you get started, make sure that you're seated upright in a comfortable chair with your feet flat on the floor. Try to be in a stress-free, quiet environment where you can focus on your breathing.

Keeping your hands relaxed in your lap with your palms facing up, focus on your posture. You should be sitting up straight. This will help you take deep breaths. Practice box breathing for as long as you'd like. Even 60 seconds helps.

### Box Breathing



## Stress Reduction Technique: Gratitude

**Write down what you're grateful for:** Scientists performed an [experiment](#) in which they asked one group of people to write down things they were grateful for on a weekly basis, while the other group recorded hassles or neutral life events. The folks who kept gratitude journals exercised more regularly, reported fewer physical symptoms, felt better about their lives, and were more optimistic in general.

**Start today:** At the end of each day, write down one great thing that happened. Use a notebook or download an app that lets you keep a digital log.

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**Even a single act of kindness can go a long way:** [Scientists studying positive psychology](#) found that a one-time act of thoughtful gratitude produced an immediate 10% increase in happiness and 35 percent reduction in depressive symptoms. The happy effects disappeared within three to six months, which shows that gratitude is an act to be repeated again and again.

**Start today:** Every act of gratitude counts, even something as simple as saying 'thank you' or telling someone important how much they mean to you.

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**Saying 'thank you' to a colleague:** When was the last time you said 'thank you' to a colleague? According to [research by psychologists Adam Grant and Francesca Gino](#), a 'thank you' can go a long way. Especially if you are in a supervisory position, expressing your thanks for a job well done can make your employees feel a strong sense of self-worth and confidence. The study also revealed that being grateful has a ripple effect, leading to an increase in trust between colleagues and more initiative to help one another out.

**Start today:** Acknowledge a colleague for their professional contributions with a genuine heartfelt thank you. Use the King County values cards.

*Note: Be mindful to not use gratitude as a shield against the difficult feelings that come up during this stressful time. It is still important to acknowledge and honor the sadness, anger, and uncertainty you may be feeling.*

The image shows a green-bordered card titled "We are one team" with a logo of a person holding a globe. It includes fields for "To:", "From:", and "Date:". Below these is a list of values: "You modeled one of our values: We are one team" followed by four bullet points: "We put the team's interests first.", "We partner well with others to get work done and achieve County objectives.", "We value listening, seeking diverse perspectives, and engaging others to challenge our assumptions.", "We assume positive intent of others.", and "We are honest, direct, and actively share information." At the bottom is a "Thank you for:" section with a dashed line for writing.

## Stress Reduction Technique: Journaling

Try journaling in a way that helps you name your feelings and find self-compassion. Start with five minutes a day – before you get up, during your commute or break, or before you sleep - and go from there. Here are some journal prompts you can try:

### 1. Describe a difficult situation from the day.

- What were you thinking?
- What were you feeling?
- How were you behaving?
- What physical response were you having?
- Are there things you can do to ease your physical response in the moment?



### 2. What went well today?

- What am I proud of today?
- What strengths have I used today?

### 3. What was challenging today?

- How can I better face these challenges next time?

### 4. What did I learn today?

### 5. What did I do today to practice self-kindness?

### 6. What did I do today to show others compassion?

## Tips for Integrating Well-being into the Workday

First responders and essential personnel can support their own and each other's well-being by looking for ways to integrate the practices in this toolkit into their daily work. Consider the suggestions below. If you would like more information on how to integrate well-being into your workplace, contact [balancedyou@kingcounty.gov](mailto:balancedyou@kingcounty.gov).

### Coworkers:

- Practice the buddy system by taking your 15-minute break together during the day.
- Take a five to 10-minute humor break by watching a favorite funny or inspiring video with co-workers.
- Develop a gratitude wall using King County values recognition cards.

### Healthy meetings:

- Start meetings by describing what you're grateful for.
- End meetings by sharing what your self-care plan is for the day.
- Integrate breaks into meetings and workdays. Try doing a two-minute mindfulness exercise as a team or watching the Balanced You stretching or exercise videos together.



(<https://www.vivecorp.com/balancedyou>)

- Host walking meetings to get some fresh air and exercise. If you can't walk outside due to social distancing, walk inside the building to give your muscles a break from sitting and other repetitive motions.
- If you're purchasing snacks for a meeting, try to choose healthy options like fruit and cheese platters, or cut vegetables with dip.

### Modeling well-being:

- Set a reminder on your phone to do some box breathing throughout the day.
- Set up a personal healthy snack supply at your workplace.
- Normalize language and conversations around mental and physical self-care.
- Model work/life balance by unplugging from technology during off hours, when possible.

### Telehealth:

- Set aside a private room that employees can book for privacy during telehealth appointments.

# King County Mental Health Benefits and Resources Guide

Mental health is an important part of overall health and well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. King County and Balanced You support the mental health of employees in many ways. Whether you're seeking support for yourself or your loved ones, there are many tools, programs and resources available.

## Resources for King County Employees

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP):** Offers free assistance for problems at work, including workplace stress, conflict with co-workers, and supervisor support. EAP is available Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm.

*Website:* [www.kingcounty.gov/employees/eap](http://www.kingcounty.gov/employees/eap)

*Phone:* Heather Steffensen: (206) 477-0631 or Tony Hansen: (206) 477-0632

**Making Life Easier (MLE):** Provides short-term counseling, legal and financial services, support for caregivers, and other daily living supports. Eight free counseling sessions per issue are provided for employees or anyone living in your home. MLE is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

*Website:* [www.KCMakingLifeEasier.com](http://www.KCMakingLifeEasier.com) Username: KingCounty

*Phone:* (888) 874-7290

**Mindfulness Training:** King County employees can learn how to manage stress with mindfulness training, offered by Balanced You. Contact the Balanced You team for more information.

*Email:* [balancedyou@kingcounty.gov](mailto:balancedyou@kingcounty.gov)

*Phone:* (206) 263-9626

**Better Choices, Better Health:** These six-week web-based workshops, available at no cost for benefits-covered employees and eligible family members in both King County's Kaiser and Regence plans, are designed for people living with long-term health conditions. Participants receive support while learning about and practicing self-care. Topics can include handling pain and fatigue, reducing stress, managing medicines, planning healthy meals, designing an exercise program, and communicating with friends and family.

*Webpage:* <https://enroll-kpwa1.selfmanage.org/>

*Phone:* 1-888-384-1933

## Insurance Benefits for Mental Health and Substance Use

*Mental health and substance use are covered benefits under King County employee insurance plans. Telehealth is available.*

**Regence BlueShield members (KingCare and KingCare Select plans):**

Members can call the customer service number on the back of your member ID card for assistance in finding a qualified therapist or doctor. *Phone:* (800) 376-7926

**Kaiser Permanente members (SmartCare):**

*First-time appointments* for mental health and substance use support (regular business hours): Call 1-888-2872680 or (206) 901-6300

*After hours urgent or crisis care:* Contact the [Consulting Nurse Service](#) at (206) 630-2244 or 1-800-297-6877, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Support for mental health doesn't stop at work. Learn about some of the resources and programs available in the community. (Note: this list is not exhaustive.)

## Help Finding Mental Health Resources

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** Maintains a directory of mental health resources in the community and provides referrals. NAMI also offers free programs for those affected by mental illness.

Website: <http://namiwa.org>

Phone: (206) 783-4288

**Washington 211:** Provides information on Washington's mental health resources and other types of assistance.

Website: <https://win211.org>

Phone: 2-1-1

**Crisis Connections:** Provides phone-based crisis intervention, peer support, and resources for King County and other communities. Programs include the 24-Hour Crisis Line, King County 211, Teen Link, WA Recovery Help Line and WA Warm Line.

Website: <https://www.crisisconnections.org>

Phone: (866) 427-4747

## Support for Suicide Prevention and Crisis

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:** Provides support for survivors of suicide loss and those affected by suicide.

Website: <https://www.asfp.org>

Phone: (206) 523-1206

**Crisis Text Line:** Offers trained crisis counselors available for texting, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Website: <https://www.crisistextline.org>

Text: HOME to 741741

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** National network of local crisis centers that provide free and confidential emotional support for people in distress.

Website: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Phone: (800) 273-8255

## Support for Substance Use and Addiction

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA):** Free 12- step program and support for recovery from alcohol use and addiction.

Website: <http://www.seattleaa.org> Phone: (206) 522-9472

**Narcotics Anonymous (NA):** Free 12- step program and support for drug use and addiction.

Website: <http://www.seattlena.org> Phone: (855) 464-7477

**Washington Recovery Helpline:** Provides emotional support 24 hours a day and offers local treatment resources for substance abuse, problem gambling, and mental health and well as to other community services.

Website: <http://www.warecoveryhelpline.org> Phone: (866) 789-1511