

Tips for Managers

This is a very difficult time for all of our staff as well as service users and carers

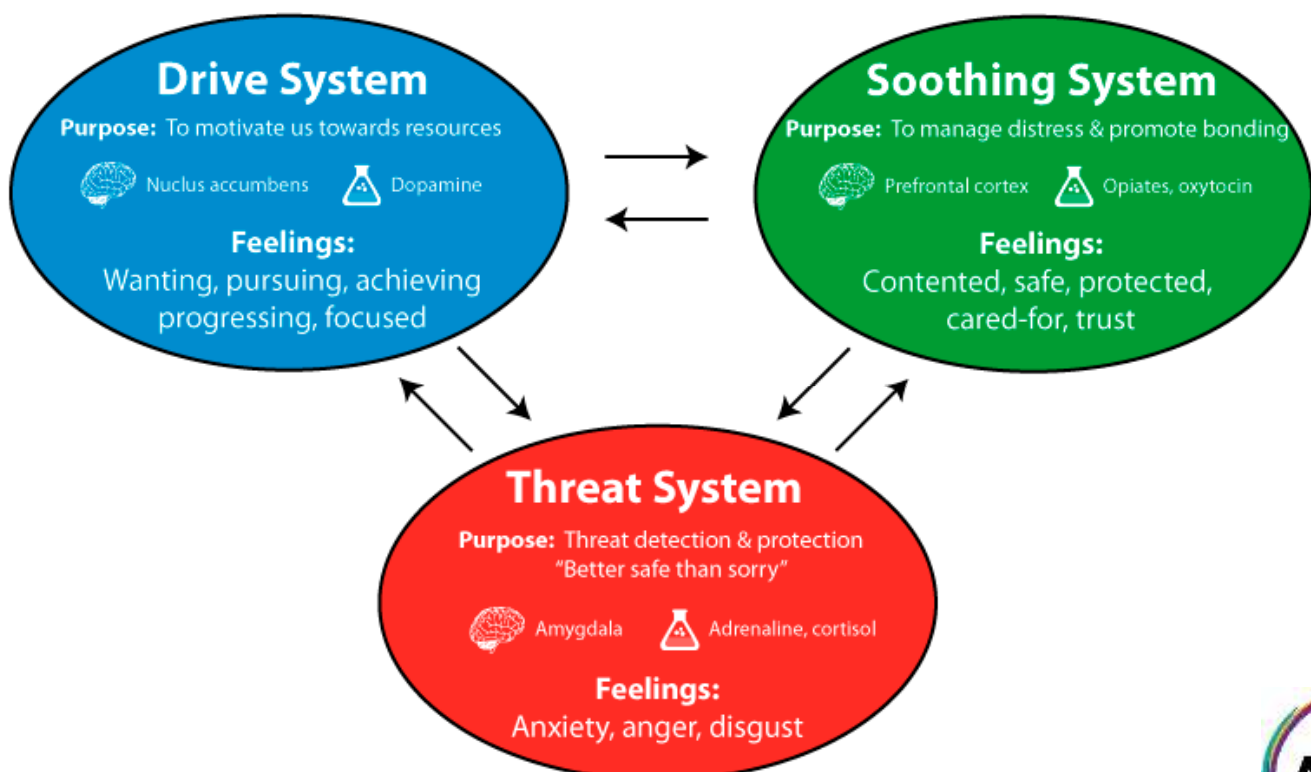
Some learning from research suggests that it can be helpful to think about the effects of this major pandemic when managing your staff. Some thoughts:

- It is helpful for managers to keep contact with staff who are in isolation even if they are not unwell.
- It is helpful for staff to keep contact with each other e.g. through skype meetings to reduce the sense of isolation and support. **You might want to link up with other managers yourself to ensure you have support from your peers**
- Signpost staff to the support which has been developed
- When staff return to work after isolation research suggests that they can be more anxious, low in mood and less confident at work even if they have not been unwell
- **Be kind to your staff but also to yourself as a manager**, it is really important that you are compassionate to yourself. Drawing on compassion focussed approaches might help you and your staff

The COVID-19 situation is a global emergency and is highly likely to be anxiety provoking and feel threatening to us all. Professor Paul Gilbert has developed compassion-focused approaches and at this time it may be helpful to think about the approach based on the fact our brains have three emotional systems – threat, drive and soothing.

Emotional Regulation Systems

Paul Gilbert's evolutionary model proposes that human beings switch between three systems to manage their emotions. Each system is associated with different brain regions and different brain chemistry. Distress is caused by imbalance between the systems, often associated with under-development of the soothing system.



When our *threat* system is triggered, it can also trigger our *drive* system in an attempt to gather resources. This might be evident in staff over working in an attempt to help them feel that they are making a difference and controlling what they can. This is understandable; however, there is a risk of burnout.

During the pandemic, it is highly likely that the *threat* system will be activated making it hard to think clearly. It will mean that we are more likely to react with feelings such as anxiety, frustration or anger. At these times, we should therefore think about activating our own and others *soothing* system so we can restore some balance, helping others and ourselves.

There are wide range of things that help activate our *soothing* system, here are some ideas:

What you can do for yourself		What you can do for others	
1	<p style="text-align: center;">The A-B-C of self care: Awareness – know your own warning signs of becoming stressed and act proactively</p> <p>You will need to listen and not ignore your own threat system. It is there to help you to keep safe. Remember the advice when people are flying, to put on your own oxygen mask before you care for others. By listening to it, and saying to yourself, ‘it is understandable that I feel worried’, will help to trigger your soothing system. You may need to take time and stop, pause, breathe, take some time away from your desk, in order to prevent you from reacting within the threat system.</p>	1	<p>Attending to staff: pay close attention to what they are saying and “listen with fascination”. Be curious and interested. Being transparent to staff about your own thoughts, and feeling and checking in with them about their well-being, will demonstrate that you are holding their safety in mind. Validating concerns will help to soothe emotional distress. Doing things quickly may be necessary during the pandemic but be aware that feeling like we are being ‘done to’ can trigger the threat system. Thinking together about solutions(when possible), rather than doing to, will help to trigger a sense of safety and help with developing collaborative ideas</p>
2	<p>Balance – keep a balance between work and home life, have a mixture of less and more challenging work wherever possible (or within a day).</p>	2	<p>Understand: show that you have a shared understanding of the situation they are in or the problem we have. For example: you may wish to show understanding to each member of staff’s personal concerns and risks associated with the virus and responding with an individual staff plan in order to help staff to feel that their personal safety is understood and cared for.</p>

3	<p>Connection – keep meaningful contact with important and nurturing people – such as friends, family and colleagues.</p>	3	<p>Empathise: express concern for how they are feeling, recognise that the situation/problem is difficult, and validate concerns.</p>
4	<p>Be Kind to yourself- when we are critical for how we are feeling or doing, we are inadvertently further triggering our threat system</p>	4	<p>Helping: remove any obstacles you can to getting the job done, help the person to mobilise their own skills, resources and problem-solving abilities.</p>
5.	<p>Being defensive- remember our threat system can make us feel defensive. Our defences are there to help us to feel safe. However, being defensive can make others feel unsafe, and may produce a vicious cycle of threat and threatening.</p> <p>Try to attend to the emotion you are feeling and the emotion of the other person, rather than the words, whilst holding in mind compassion for yourself and staff and that we are all trying to do our best in one of the most difficult situations in living memory.</p>	5.	<p>Flexibility, praise, & encouragement.</p> <p>Being flexible and voicing regular praise, gratitude and encouragement are all linked to increasing staff well-being. For some staff who are highly anxious, it may be most effective to think with them what would help them to feel safer in this time, which may include working from home, or other solutions.</p> <p>We will need to think carefully about vicarious trauma for all staff, including managers during this most difficult of times. Please take care everyone.</p>

Remember we need balance in our emotional system to be most effective. We need to activate the *soothing* system to reduce emotional burden and help us all to be more resilient and safe in our clinical decision making capacities. By doing this now we will also be more likely to have staff available to our service users following the pandemic.