

What if I make the wrong decision?



I am required to screen pupils on entering my classroom. Among other questions I have to ask them if they are coughing. Then I have to make a decision whether or not it is a Covid19 cough. This scares me no end. I am a teacher, not a healthcare worker! I have no knowledge and experience about these things apart from being a mother. I am so scared of making a wrong decision. What if I miss a Covid19-case and the school has to go into quarantine?

These types of decisions which force you to take action while feeling uncertain and overburdened with responsibility, may lead to what is referred to as **moral distress**. It compels us to act on or against our core values. I may even perceive my personal integrity to be under attack.

It can get so bad that I start view myself differently and mostly in a negative way, leaving me disoriented, indecisive and detached. I feel powerless and this increases my anxiety and could make me become depressed.

Moral distress not only affects us emotionally. It also influences us:

- **physically** (e.g. headaches, gastrointestinal complaints)
- **mentally** (unable to concentrate, weakening our self-concept)
- **behaviourally** (absenteeism, insomnia, nightmares) as well as
- **spiritually** (violation of our core values).

What is needed is to become morally fit or resilient to deal with the burden of making decisions we might not feel equal to making.

SELF-CARE SKILLS FOR TEACHERS: MORAL RESILIENCE

Moral resilience or the ability to spring back after having to make a difficult choice, is the antidote to moral distress.

We can't 'fix' moral distress especially in the unusual circumstances we find ourselves. Covid19-virus is here to stay for the foreseeable future and we are required to do things way beyond what we have envisaged.

So, how can we build our moral resilience?

What can we do to manage the feelings of distress and uncertainty?

1. The first step in overcoming moral distress is to **self-reflect** and establish whether you display the signs. Remember, moral distress does not always appear suddenly after one morally challenging decision. It can linger for a long time after the challenging situation, before becoming troublesome enough to affect your daily life.
2. **Be honest.** Stop saying 'I am fine' when actually, you are not.
3. **Expressing your thoughts and feelings** can relieve stress and brings clarity of thought and feeling. Speak to someone close to you, a professional like a counsellor or consider daily journaling.
4. **Create safe spaces** for you and your colleagues to talk about your feelings and listen to each other's perceptions and experiences. Start now, even if you are feeling ok about everything. That we can prevent moral distress and all that goes with it.
5. **Shift the focus** from distress to problem solving and seeing alternatives
6. **Avoid black-an-white thinking** - 'I can't do this' vs 'I will inform myself and do the best that I can'. Changing the way you think and speak is empowering.
7. **Re-affirm you core values** and touch base with who and what you are and what you stand for. Find your purpose and meaning in the situation.
8. **Practice deliberate self-care.** Our bodies and minds are not separate entities. The fitter you are physically the better you are able to deal with mental and emotional challenges. And the other way round.
9. **Care for one another.** Be compassionate.
Those were the driving forces that led you to be a teacher in the first instance.



Take care

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