

# Princeton House Behavioral Health

today

## Building Your Own **Resiliency During the COVID-19** Crisis and Beyond

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### COVID-19 Updates

Please visit [princetonhouse.org](https://princetonhouse.org) for the latest information and updates related to COVID-19.

# Building Your Own Resiliency During the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond

By George F. Wilson, MD



The American health care system is facing an unprecedented demand to treat patients who are seriously ill. The COVID-19 pandemic has confronted our medical and behavioral health community with professional, personal, and emotional demands unlike anything most of us have seen in our careers.

At the same time, this crisis reminds us of the importance of seeking support and preserving self-care while maintaining clear professional roles and engagement with patients. Based on my experience with trauma, below is some advice for managing the emotions and physical symptoms created by the stress of this situation, so that you're able to maintain balance between your health and your professional role.

## Viewing the Crisis as a Natural Disaster

Perhaps the best way to view the radical changes that health care providers are experiencing is to view the COVID-19 crisis as a natural disaster of worldwide scope—one that has had unprecedented demands on hospitals and health care staff.

In viewing the virus outbreak as a natural disaster, we can apply the same concepts around resiliency that we would to supporting and caring for victims of trauma. This approach can help reduce the secondary traumatization of providers and enhance their ability to care for patients.

## Resilience: An Antidote to Fear

The idea of resilience has become fundamental to protecting all types of responders in a natural disaster. Resilience is the capacity to recover mentally and emotionally from stressful events, return quickly to the pre-crisis functional state, promote personal strengths needed to manage the stress, and reduce the risk of post-traumatic stress.

Resilience for a particular person relates to temperament, the inborn flexibility and stability of the nervous system, which is shaped by life experiences. Rating scales have been developed to measure resilience, and these have proved helpful in predicting recovery from trauma in survivors of hurricanes and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These suggestions are derived from efforts to assist healthy individuals in coping with natural disasters by enhancing their resilience. They're intended as prevention rather than treatment, but also can enhance function and quality of life in times of intense stress.



**Dr. Wilson** is Medical Director of Women's Programs at Princeton House Behavioral Health and Former Chair of Psychiatry at Princeton Medical Center.



## Building Resilience

The approach to building resilience combines cognitive, biological, and emotional actions of intentional self-care which can be applied to support well-being. Online resources also can provide valuable advice and support.

### COGNITIVE APPROACHES:

**REMAIN INFORMED** through factual sources such as [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), but limit the tendency to live in the 24-hour news cycle to avoid amplifying fearful ideas.

**RELY ON A SOURCE OF RELIABLE, FACTUAL INFORMATION** so that you can take a realistic daily inventory of your fears and categorize them according to whether they are relevant to you, your work, and your family in the present, or whether they are projections into the future.

**SHARE YOUR CATEGORIES OF FEARS** with someone close to you or keep a journal to help you focus on what needs to be and can be done today. This can help you avoid catastrophizing and projecting fears about the future into scenarios that become obsessive or exhausting.

### BIOLOGICAL APPROACHES:

**MEET YOUR BASIC REQUIREMENTS** for nutrition, hydration, sleep, and limited use of stimulants like caffeine and alcohol.

**UNDERSTAND** that the nature of our work likely means that some of these needs may not be fully met, but we must maintain our health and function.

**EXERCISE REGULARLY** with the available options, such as a 20- to 30-minute daily walk. Exercise can contribute not only to physical health, but also to mental alertness and emotional wellness in both the short and long term.



### INTENTIONAL SELF-CARE:

**PRACTICE SELF-REGULATION** through deliberate practices like yoga, meditation, and tai chi, which can reduce stress, stabilize the cardiovascular system, and improve mood. At Princeton House, our staff members advocate mindfulness practice that focuses on the breath while allowing the mind to briefly clear. The usual recommendation is one or two 15-minute sessions daily, but evidence shows there are benefits associated with brief episodes of 3 to 5 minutes throughout the day and as preparation for sleep. For additional resources, visit [nccih.nih.gov/health](https://nccih.nih.gov/health).

**MAINTAIN SOCIAL CONNECTIONS.** During times of social distancing, we can look for creative opportunities for space and scheduling that allow even brief interactions. Used wisely, technology and social media can provide constructive sharing of experiences, advice, and emotional support for health care providers who have unique perspectives to share.

Creating meaning as we build resiliency is another important consideration. This relates to the set of ideas about yourself, your family, your community, your work, political and social commitments, and spiritual beliefs that identify you and give a sense of purpose to your daily life over a lifetime.

For many health care professionals, career is a key contributor to this identity and purpose. This involves a commitment to the practice and ideals of the profession and the care of patients, as well as a commitment to the hospitals and related institutions that foster these values. The crisis now facing hospitals and their staff will challenge these commitments and create tension between conflicting values, such as between work and maintaining safety for ourselves and families.

As this crisis confronts us personally and our institutions broadly with the greatest challenges in our lifetime, I am optimistic that our values and commitment will hold strong, and that we will come together to support each other in ways that are also unprecedented.



# Princeton House Behavioral Health Is NOT YOUR ORDINARY WO

Princeton House is well known for its high-quality, evidence-based patient care—yet staff members also extend that level of care and support to one another.

“We truly work as a team,” says Nancy Zorochin, who has advanced her career with Princeton House over nearly 40 years in nursing, admissions, and marketing roles. “We believe in what we do, and it shows in the compassion we have for patients and each other.”

While each site is unique, every environment embraces the support, self-care, and appreciation of colleagues, as shown by these examples.

## Putting the Pieces TOGETHER at Eatontown

With a culture that celebrates big and small successes, the Eatontown team nominates fellow staff members weekly for “Star of the Week” recognitions that range from making someone laugh to completing a particularly challenging treatment plan. They also practice team building in another unique way: through puzzling.

Completed collectively as a team, these challenging puzzles are set up in an area accessible to all staff members, who stop by periodically to work on them. The puzzle pieces are uniquely shaped and made of wood, with a scent reminiscent of a forest. The simple act of working on a puzzle provides staff with an opportunity to decompress and practice self-care. Once the team celebrates the completion of a puzzle, it is framed as art for everyone to enjoy.



## GRATITUDE Abounds at Moorestown

With gratitude in mind, staff members at Moorestown give back to others in the form of annual events like a Thanksgiving food drive and holiday gift drive. But gratitude also has taken a more prominent, year-long presence in the form of a Gratitude Tree in the main hallway. Patients, visitors, and staff are encouraged to add leaves to the tree to share what they are thankful for or wish for. In December, the leaves were transitioned to snowflakes to recognize the special hopes and challenges of the holiday season.



## The MINDFULNESS MINDSET at Hamilton

At the Hamilton site, every therapy group in the Women’s Program starts with a mindfulness exercise—and so do all the staff meetings. Each morning, a different staff member shares a mindfulness exercise of their choice, which might range from a calming meditation to a discussion on the latest books they’ve read.

“We practice what we preach,” says Hazel Jamieson, MSW, LCSW, Senior Primary Therapist at Hamilton. “Starting the day with mindfulness and intention helps us better support our patients while reinforcing a nonjudgmental stance toward ourselves and others. An added benefit is the opportunity to really get to know one another.”





# RKPLACE

## Showcasing HEALING ARTS at North Brunswick

Creative art therapies are an integral component of healing across Princeton House, but the North Brunswick outpatient site has taken a particularly unique spin on this approach. With a nod to reality television, Women Got Talent was developed as a quarterly event that showcases the many creative abilities of staff and patients in the Women's Program, with therapeutic benefits.

The cohesion of the team shines through in the coordination of the event, which features activities like singing, playing an instrument, displaying artwork, and baking. While talents vary, the purpose is consistent: to have fun, instill confidence, provide a non-threatening way to express what someone may not be able to verbalize, and demonstrate that everyone has a talent to share.



## TEAM SYNERGY at Princeton Inpatient

Teamwork is a strong focus at the Princeton inpatient site, where every opinion matters. Each morning, the multidisciplinary team gathers to discuss the plan of care for patients. Sharing insight and expertise in this way enhances patient safety while ensuring that every aspect of care is considered.

"We can be lighthearted with each other, but we also recognize that we're caring for acutely ill patients with conditions that are often life-threatening," says Rose Ravelo, LCSW, Director of Social Work Services. "There's a level of trust and cohesiveness among staff that's very evident during these morning sessions. Everyone has an important role in caring for our patients, and input from all levels is valued."

## INSPIRATION Through ART at Princeton Outpatient

It's well known that art can be powerful, and team members at the Princeton outpatient site have harnessed the strength of that medium to inspire colleagues and patients in unexpected ways. Several staff members—including patient driver Nicholas Tamasi—use whiteboards to

create and display beautiful images or sayings, or post signs near printers reminding colleagues to take a mindfulness break. Tamasi also creates beautiful birthday cards for colleagues.

"We talk so much as therapists, yet sometimes an image can instantly uplift your mood without words," says Amy Hiraldo, MSW, LCSW, Director of Outpatient Services. "We're all very passionate about helping others, and sharing inspiration through this unique approach goes a long way."





# Expanding Safe Spaces with a **New Inclusion Curriculum**

In a recent adult group therapy session at the Penn Medicine Princeton House Behavioral Health outpatient Princeton site, participants created a vision of a town that was accepting and unconditionally loving of all people residing there. Using this concept, they discussed how the community and the interactions between people there would be different from the world we live in—and even more important, how they would present themselves to others in this safe space.



This exercise is part of a new, evidence-based curriculum developed by Nina Nechay, MS, LPC, NCC, Senior Primary Therapist at the Princeton outpatient site, and Rachel Friedman, MA, Psychology Doctoral Intern at Princeton House. Open to all patients at the site, the eight-week psychoeducational group is designed to build awareness and provide an inclusive, confidential, and supportive environment for all people across the gender identity and sexual orientation spectrums.


“The idea evolved as we considered Princeton Health’s overall diversity and inclusion initiatives,” explains Nechay. “We examined the needs and issues facing our own patients, and formulated ways to help them feel not only more integrated and involved, but also safe, valued, and heard.”

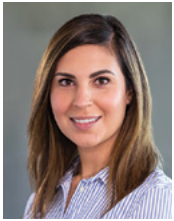
Incorporating feedback from participants, the interactive curriculum addresses various learning styles through multimedia tools like YouTube videos, role playing, journaling, and collaborative thinking. Focus areas include:

- The history and evolution of gender identity and sexual orientation language
- The relationship between gender identity/sexual orientation and issues like depression and anxiety
- How to cope with invalidation and encourage self-validation and self-compassion
- Effectively communicating needs to professionals regarding one’s identity
- Learning to live an authentic life

“Because people identifying as LGBTQ can be chronically invalidated by others, they may not have the tools to advocate for and express their identity,” says Friedman. “This curriculum helps participants recognize that invalidation isn’t the norm. It also fosters self-compassion, understanding, and empowerment.”

Another important aim of the group is to welcome LGBTQ allies: those who don’t identify as LGBTQ but want to learn more about connecting with those who do. The curriculum facilitates a conversation between members of the LGBTQ community and their allies on how to best support one another. This type of open dialogue can be particularly valuable for patients who might struggle to relate to family members identifying as LGBTQ.

 *We’re really creating a home base where everyone can feel comfortable,” adds Friedman. “It’s exciting to see new conversations and skills evolve in the context of an established treatment program.”*



## New Senior Clinical Liaison Serves as Resource for Providers

**Cassie Carlino, MSW, LSW** has joined Princeton Center for Eating Disorders as Senior Clinical Liaison, serving as a point of contact for the many providers and referral sources who treat children, adolescents, and adults of all genders with eating disorders. Most recently serving as Community Relations Representative for Princeton House Behavioral Health, she brings experience in behavioral health outreach, admissions, and treatment as well as eating disorders outreach to her new role. Carlino can be reached at [cassie.carlino@pennmedicine.upenn.edu](mailto:cassie.carlino@pennmedicine.upenn.edu) or 609.423.3171 for more information about Princeton Center for Eating Disorders.



## Resilience for First Responders

**Michael Bizzarro, PhD, LCSW**, Clinical Director of First Responder Treatment Services at Princeton House Behavioral Health, presented "Resilience and Well-Being: Taking Care of Yourself" to an audience of nearly 300 firefighters and first responders at the 2020 NJ FMBA Educational Convention in Atlantic City in February. The presentation covered the multifaceted impact of trauma on first responders, simple tools for self-care and enhancing well-being, and available behavioral health resources, including Princeton House services.

## REGISTER NOW for the Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Course —in New Jersey!



Sensorimotor psychotherapy, a body-oriented approach that helps patients become more aware of the role their bodies play in their experience and with the lasting effects of trauma, is an invaluable evidence-based addition to the behavioral health professional's repertoire of healing strategies. In the past, area residents had to travel to New York City for this intensive course. Princeton House is proud to partner with the Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute to make the Level I Sensorimotor Psychotherapy course available close to home this year.

Princeton House will offer 82 continuing education credits for social workers and counselors for this 12-day course. It will be provided by Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute at Princeton Medical Center.

For more information or to register, visit [sensorimotor.org](https://sensorimotor.org).

- September 12-13, 2020
- October 24-25, 2020
- November 21-22, 2020
- December 5-6, 2020
- January 30-31, 2021
- March 20-21, 2021



## Creative Therapy with Compassion in Mind

### Patients Create Pouches for Orphaned Baby Marsupials



When disasters like the Australian bush fires happen half a world away, it can be difficult to fathom how to help in an impactful way. Yet it becomes easier when you can focus on a single idea, such as the plight of orphaned baby kangaroos.

With 18 million acres of land burned, some experts have estimated that as many as 1 billion animals died in the fires and countless others were displaced. Animal rescue organizations took to social media earlier this year to request donations such as pouches for rescued baby marsupials, including kangaroos, koalas, wombats, and wallabies.

That led to a light bulb moment for Gabrielle Skinner (*pictured right*), MA, Mental Health Associate at Princeton House Behavioral Health's outpatient site in Hamilton. Skinner proposed a patient art project to craft pouches for the baby marsupials, also known as joeys. Not only would the animals benefit from these "joey pouches," she reasoned, but patients would get a real-life opportunity to practice contribution, a skill emphasized in dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) as a positive way to distract yourself from negative thoughts or emotions.

"When people are facing difficulties and are stuck in their own thoughts, they can help themselves by helping others," she explains. "Practicing contribution can be something as simple as sharing good intentions in a relevant way."

After researching and purchasing the appropriate fabric and supplies, Skinner began working with patients in child, adolescent, and women's groups on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which is designated as a national day of service. Patients decorated the pouches with positive phrases and messages of care for rescue workers, and Skinner sewed the pouches herself before sending them to Wildcare Australia, a nonprofit organization coordinating relief efforts.

"I'm so thankful to work for an organization that supports and encourages this kind of creativity," Skinner adds. "It's wonderful when patients can practice these skills in a real, attainable way."

