Opportunities to decompress

What is this?
Psychological decompression is the process of returning to normal, more relaxed state after a period of intense stress.

Why should I be paying attention to this?
People working in health and social care have been working under intense stress and pressure over a prolonged period of time during the coronavirus pandemic.

Sustained stress and pressure can impede decision making, team working, work performance and physical and psychological health. This can have long-term consequences including prolonged sickness and burn out. It's important to remember too that the emotional impact of the pandemic is likely to affect staff for a period of time after the crisis has passed.

What should my first steps be?
It is important to provide compassionate leadership, and to model the behaviour that can help you and your team to decompress.

Acknowledge that your team has been working under intense pressure and that it's normal for them to feel out of the ordinary.

Identify a space where you and your staff can go to sit quietly and comfortably even for a time during or after their shift. Agree with everyone how the space will be used. For example, you might agree that the space is for quiet reflection only, no taking phone calls, no discussing work, etc. It is advisable to have information available on where people can access emotional support if they need it.

Ask your staff 'Are you OK?' and watch out for signs of people not coping well. Team support plays a very important role in people coping in the workplace and you can encourage this.

Consider having reflective team sessions can help the team process distressing experiences and help better future coping.

Most people will be able to cope well without help, but it is important that your staff feel that they can be open about their feelings and that they can ask for support if they need it.

At the same time, it's also important that you lead by example and look after your own physical and emotional well-being.

Please see 'how do I find out more' for some key resources.

How do I find out more?
Toolkit for the support of health and care workforce during and after the pandemic:
https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/toolkits/play_22794#resume=15
https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/toolkits/play_22794#resume=55

Psychological guidance for optimising organisational policies and organisation:
https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/www.bps.org.uk/files/Policy/Policy-Files/Easing lockdown-how employers and employees can prepare for the new normal at work.pdf

Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust detailed guidance on the support of adult social care workers in a pandemic crisis: https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Documents/Learning-and-development/social-work/psw/COVID-19-Guidance-for-Adult-Social-Care-Professionals-CSW.pdf