

## Decision making (ethical dilemmas) during the Coronavirus pandemic

### What is this?

During a pandemic, health and social care staff may face challenges with regard to using scarce resources. While not all of these challenges can be known in advance, it's possible to plan for them.

First, it's important to think about what challenges and dilemmas might crop up and plan for them.

Secondly, it's important to think about who and where to go if something unforeseen crops up. No one person should have to face these ethical decisions alone.

### Why should I be paying attention to this?

When decisions require us to do things that do not fit with our own values, we risk what is called 'moral injury'. Moral injury can lead to feelings of guilt, anger, and disgust. Unless these feelings are resolved, they can cause lasting psychological damage. It is possible to avoid this damage, however by following certain steps.

### What should my first steps be?

- Think about the types of situations you and your team might face that will present moral dilemmas.
- Talk these with your team and with senior management/owners – don't sugar coat things, be realistic.
- Provide opportunities for your team to talk these things through.
- Agree a clear policy with your senior management/owners to include protocols which will guide decision making.
- Ensure no individual has to make difficult decisions alone – always have a process where a second opinion can be sought and is available.
- Provide a safe place for your staff to talk about any moral issues or challenges they face.
- Identify senior people and peers that you can talk to about your own experiences.
- Ensure there is always an open discussion after any event that presents an ethical dilemma and that everyone who is affected has a chance to take part.

### How do I find out more?

A British Psychological Society guide for leaders and managers in supporting the psychological needs of healthcare staff:

<https://www.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/psychological-needs-healthcare-staff-result-coronavirus-pandemic>

Guidance on moral injury and how to avoid it from the Covid Trauma Response Working Group

[https://232fe0d6-f8f4-43eb-bc5d-6aa50ee47dc5.filesusr.com/ugd/95d7e1\\_70fe0bc417df4e6cbcb77385ec4db87a.pdf](https://232fe0d6-f8f4-43eb-bc5d-6aa50ee47dc5.filesusr.com/ugd/95d7e1_70fe0bc417df4e6cbcb77385ec4db87a.pdf)

Guidance on preventing and responding to moral injury from Support the Workers

<https://www.supporttheworkers.org/briefing-notes/moral-injury>