



## **Well@Work Podcast Season 2, Episode 27: How Not to Lose Faith**

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is brought to you by grant from SAMHSA. On this episode, Emily Smith discusses strategies to regain and rebuild your faith as you recover from the ongoing impact of the pandemic and social changes.

Hi, I'm Emily Smith. COVID has rearranged the way we work, live, and socialize. Political and social differences have led to tense, divisive conversations among strangers and family. The stress from constant change and conflict has increased symptoms of depression and anxiety, in fact new research indicates that as many as 1 in 4 Americans has persistent symptoms of depression. Many workers are suffering from burnout, a result of organizational practices that have put the needs of staff below the needs of the organization. Some communities hit hard by chronic lack of opportunity and systemic discrimination have faced greater morbidity and mortality from COVID, in addition to these historic challenges. To lose faith in the strength of people or institutions that are bedrocks of our lives makes us feel uncomfortable and anxious. Without faith, it can be difficult to look forward, to keep caring for others, and to find moments of joy amid the challenges. In this podcast, I'll share some strategies to regain and rebuild your faith as you recover from the ongoing impact of the pandemic and social changes.

People often associate the word faith with spiritual beliefs, but I'm talking about the broader concept of faith that includes trust, confidence, or loyalty in humanity, institutions, and others. It involves a sense of community and hopefulness in the future. Our faith in others is built from observing patterns in their behaviors and actions. When these behaviors or actions don't match what we expect or when they fail to fulfill an explicit or implicit contract, the result is often broken promises, loss of conviction, even loss of loyalty to someone or something we once trusted. The loss in faith in leadership, colleagues, local or federal government, and even in ourselves has led many to wonder if the work they do is worth doing. Emerging research confirms that as many as 1 in 5 health care workers has considered leaving their job and 1 in 10 has considered leaving the field altogether.

Consider Erica, after serving in the Army as a combat medic, she went to nursing school; she now works at a VA hospital and serves in the Army Reserves. Before COVID, Erica cared for veterans in the cardiac care unit. When COVID began its rapid spread, Erica's unique training put her in high demand and she found herself working 60 or more hours a week. Over time, her job began to exhaust her. She also worried as her community fought against recommendations for masking and distancing, then became increasingly frustrated as so many were admitted to the hospital. As time passed, Erica has grown angry about it. To cope, she's relied on the social support of her friends. Erica felt that they shared similar ideas about the importance of masking and vaccination, but over time she realized that not all felt that way. She was shocked to hear colleagues and friends doubting the value of evidence-based treatments, some even attacked her when she tried to have

conversations about it. Now many believe the pandemic is over and are telling her to “get over it” when she shares her continuing struggles. During a conversation with her supervisor, Erica realized she has begun questioning whether she can keep doing the work she's doing. And she struggles to see why she should put herself at risk for others when they don't do the same. Erica is losing faith.

If you are feeling like Erica, here are some strategies that may help you.

**Tip 1: take a media or social media break.** Extreme stress can be lessened by eliminating or minimizing exposure to hyped up, angry, and erroneous messages, even if that's just for a few hours or days. Delete social media apps from your phone, silence messages during your time off. Use the time away from media to rest and restore.

**Tip 2: perform a purpose checkup.** Part of faith is a strong understanding of our values and beliefs. Knowing our purpose and goals can help us to make sense of the world around us and our place in it. Richard Leider writes of the value in finding your purpose, especially when the world's problems seem huge and you feel small. Purpose helps to create a meaningful life, reminds you that you matter, and can inspire you to continue doing the work that you do. Find a link to his purpose checkup in the episode notes.

**Tip 3: cultivate hope.** Hopefulness will help us as we begin to make sense and create meaning from recent events. Looking forward and expecting positive outcomes takes faith. In his podcast *The Science of Hope*, Dr Scott LaJoie shared that hope is intentional and purposeful, meaning that we have some control over it. Reflecting on past successes, especially things you accomplish amidst adversity, can remind you that you've overcome challenges in the past and offers you the hope of doing so again. Increasing connections with positive people, who offer us support by sharing their hope, can also help us to cultivate our own sense of hope.

**Tip 4: remember that words matter.** Words can help us heal from the impact of stressful experiences. Journaling, poetry, and other ways of putting words on paper have been shown to reduce the effects of burnout and increase our empathy for others. If you aren't able or ready to tell your own story, read the stories of others. We can also use words to reframe difficult situations in a more hopeful and positive way. Instead of thinking “This is awful.” Think “This is difficult, but I have faced challenges before and have been able to work through them.”

**Tip 5: practice self-compassion.** The practice of self-compassion asks us to accept that doing our best is good enough and teaches us that perfection is not as important as progress. Self-compassion relies on the belief that others are also challenged by life and share similar experiences, this common humanity offers a reminder that we are not alone in our struggles. It offers us permission to grow through these experiences and asks us to treat ourselves with kindness and compassion as we do so. Treating ourselves with kindness and compassion can make it easier to treat others the same way too.

Many in health care are struggling to keep their faith as they work to make meaning of recent experiences. Caring for yourself, redefining your sense of purpose, and cultivating



hope are all ways to restore your faith as you begin to heal from the challenges of your recent experiences and all will help you to stay Well@Work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast, follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work, home, and school.