

Well-being buddy system templates

A buddy system is a program for peer support for faculty, staff, and trainees. It is flexible and can be adapted to the specific needs of a department or team. Buddy system models have been used in other settings, such as with CDC Ebola workers and the military (see references at end of document.)

Approaches to setting up a buddy system include:

1. Program needs assessment and leadership buy-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Survey and/or interview trainees-Consider department values and culture-Solicit input from key stakeholders- Determine the pairing structure (peer to peer vs. senior to junior; assigned vs. self-selected buddy)
2. Introductory communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-States background and goals-Provides instructions and buddy checklist-Refers to resources-Sign-up link (opt-in vs. opt-out)
3. Buddy system checklist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Frequency, length, type of check-ins-Content-Guide for effective support
4. Interval follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Reminders to check in with buddy-Program evaluation (consider feedback, metrics)

Below is a compilation of materials for buddy system implementation in three different programs at MSHS that were started during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Each program has its own needs, values, culture, and preferences. Consider needs assessment in order to design a system that best suits your program.*

1. Introductory communication example (program-wide email)

Dear residents,

It is of the utmost importance that we prioritize our well-being as we rise to meet the tremendous challenges of working in the health care system. We are working on several initiatives related to resident wellness and support...

Our first initiative will be the **Buddy System**. The main goal of the buddy system is that everyone in our program have at least one person checking on their well-being and with whom they can check in. Your ideal buddy can be someone you already go to for support, someone who lives near you, or someone who makes sense to you for whatever reason. [Please click on this link](#) [sample only; link inactive] request a specific buddy or a buddy can be assigned.

- This is NOT intended to replace emergency contact, healthcare proxy, or family support
- [Buddy system checklist](#) [sample only; link inactive] is intended as a guide

We recognize that other concerns, such as those related to basic needs, may arise. We encourage you to share any concerns via [this LINK](#) [sample only; link inactive] and/or with your Well-being Champion, so that we can escalate them to health system leadership including the [Office for Well-being and Resilience](#). Additional MSHS wellness resources are also available [here](#).

2. Buddy system checklist examples

Example Department 1: (Well-being emphasis on basic needs and safety)

Buddy System Checklist

The main goal of the buddy system is that everyone in our program has at least one person checking on their well-being and with whom they can check in. We ask you and your buddy to check in with one another weekly or more, at your discretion.

Below is only a guide, based on concerns that have been brought up by our residents. You may share with your buddy as much or as little as you feel comfortable with, and do not need to share with anyone else:

Buddy System Checklist

- Physical health check (ex: COVID-19 sx: cough, SOB, fever, sore throat, etc.)
- Mood and Mental health check
- Supplies check (food, meds, thermometer, cleaning products, etc.)
- Concerns about family or loved ones
- Pet care/supplies
- Share home address, consider spare key, emergency contacts 'phone numbers
- Advance directives (written and/or share verbally); identify HCP and share that person's contact info
- If hospitalized, where would you go? Permission for buddy to help coordinate care?
- With whom else in the program may your buddy share information, and under which circumstances (eg. If sick at home, if hospitalized, critically ill,

Example Department 2: (Well-being emphasis on emotional support and resilience)

Below is only a guide. In a buddy system, two people partner together to monitor each other's stress and to support each other. You may share with your buddy as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. We ask you and your buddy to check in with one another at least weekly, at your discretion.

Buddy System Checklist

- Get to know each other. Talk about work, home life, hobbies, and family.
- Set up times to check in with each other. Listen carefully and share experiences and feelings. Acknowledge tough situations and recognize accomplishments, even small ones.
- Offer to help with finding services for basic needs
- Monitor each other's workloads. Encourage each other to take breaks. Share opportunities for stress relief (rest, routine sleep, exercise and deep breathing)
- Support your buddy in communicating their needs to leadership – make your buddy feel “safe” and supported to speak up
- Encourage your buddy to seek help and access mental health resources when needed

Adapted from NIOSH Fact Sheet: The Buddy System
<https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/buddy-system.pdf>

Example Department 3: (Detailed guidance for check-in process)

Buddy System Check-In

- Contact your buddy at least weekly (more if needed) for 1 - 10 minutes
- Contact can take any form: text, phone call, virtual meeting, socially distanced in-person
- Listen, validate, provide feedback
- Identify issues requiring more support/attention, or referral to other resources
- Escalate operational issues

What do Buddies do?

- Listen to each other's concerns, anxieties and reactions to stressors. Validate each other's experience.
- Do not argue or debate each other's perspective
- Provide perspective and support and encourage additional help if needed
- Find ways to cope with stressors
- Identify system issues that can be escalated to leadership

Goals of the Buddy System

- Create a work environment of support and validation for *all* residents
- Address work related stressors at work allowing home to be a place of respite and recovery

Example Questions for Checking In

- What are you worried about?
- What was hard today?
- What went well today?
- How are things at home?
- What challenges are you facing with... (sleep, exercise, nutrition, family)?

Potential Stressors

- Hazardous work-conditions, insufficient supplies
- Fear for safety of family and bringing illness home
- Performing duties outside normal scope of practice
- Difficult decision making for patients
- Witnessing death
- Helping patient family members with grieving
- Financial burden

Potential Resilience Factors

- Finding meaning in work
- Having an emotional support system (at work and at home)
- Receiving validation of your reactions
- Regular sleep, hydration, nutrition
- Regular exercise
- Focusing on positive emotions including gratitude and compassion (including self-compassion)
- Spiritual beliefs
- Hobbies and interests outside of work

3. Follow-up

Send emails confirming sign up with buddy system and periodic reminders to check-in with buddies¹

References

1. Albott CS, Wozniak JR, McGlinch BP, et al. Battle Buddies: Rapid Deployment of a Psychological Resilience Intervention for Healthcare Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Anesthesia & Analgesia*. 2020. Publish ahead of print. DOI: 10.1213/ANE.0000000000004912
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/buddy-system.pdf>

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