



# Safety, Productivity, and Stress: Managing Work, Self, and Family in a Pandemic

Presented for the Office of Institutional Equity and Diversity

North Carolina State University

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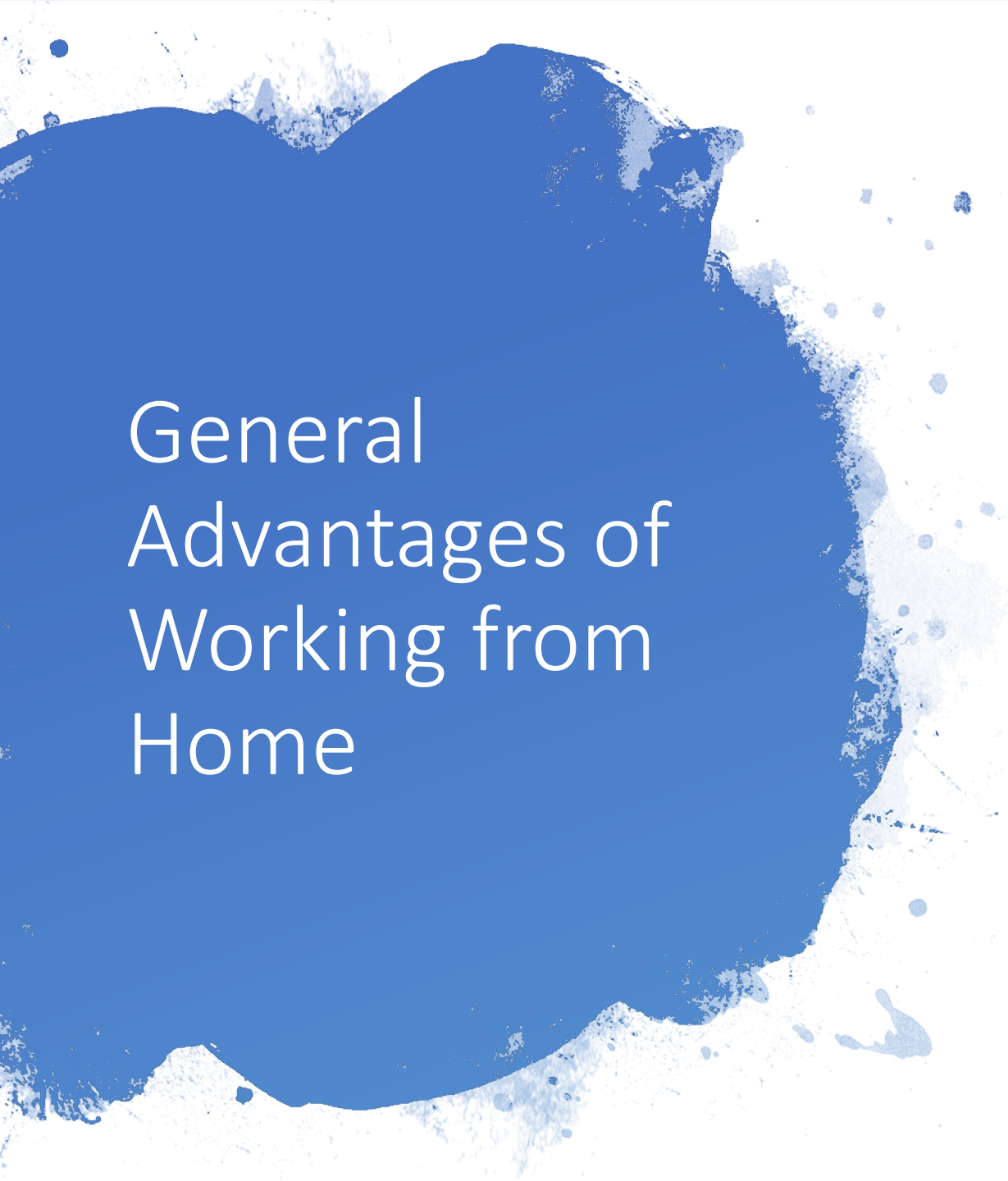


How Y'all  
Doing?



# A Little About Me

- NC Alum and Former Employee
- Vice Provost at Walden University;
- Celebrating 15 Years at Walden on May 15
- Virtual Employee since 2005
- Single Mom
- Used 8 sick days in 15 years (2 for my daughter's appendicitis; 4 for my parents' health care; 2 because it wasn't safe for me to operate machinery because of the prescriptions)



# General Advantages of Working from Home

- Companies reduce the carbon footprint
- Companies don't have to pay for office space
- Companies are able to hire the best employees no matter where they live
- Employee retention increases
- The playing field is leveled for underrepresented groups like people with disabilities, women, and people of color
- Some people are more productive because they are working in a comfortable space
- Some employees have the opportunity to work from any
- Employees don't lose time telecommunicating
- Employees get to spend more quality time with loved ones
- With some companies, there is

- Work and not worry as much about childcare on sick days or teacher workdays
- Work from my parents' home
- Volunteer at my daughter's school
- Use the time I would have spent commuting to cook a hot breakfast for my daughter and the neighbor's child
- Take both children to school each morning
- Watch my neighbor's daughter on snow days
- Take breaks to go outside and pull weeds from my flower bed
- Not experience the career challenges many single parents do
- Work in comfort and not have to navigate office politics in the way that I used to



# General Stressors Associated with Working From Home

Managing time

Establishing boundaries and a work routine

Managing diet and exercise

Unbalanced family and friend expectations

Having the right access to office equipment

Lack of connection with in-office team

No access to water cooler conversation

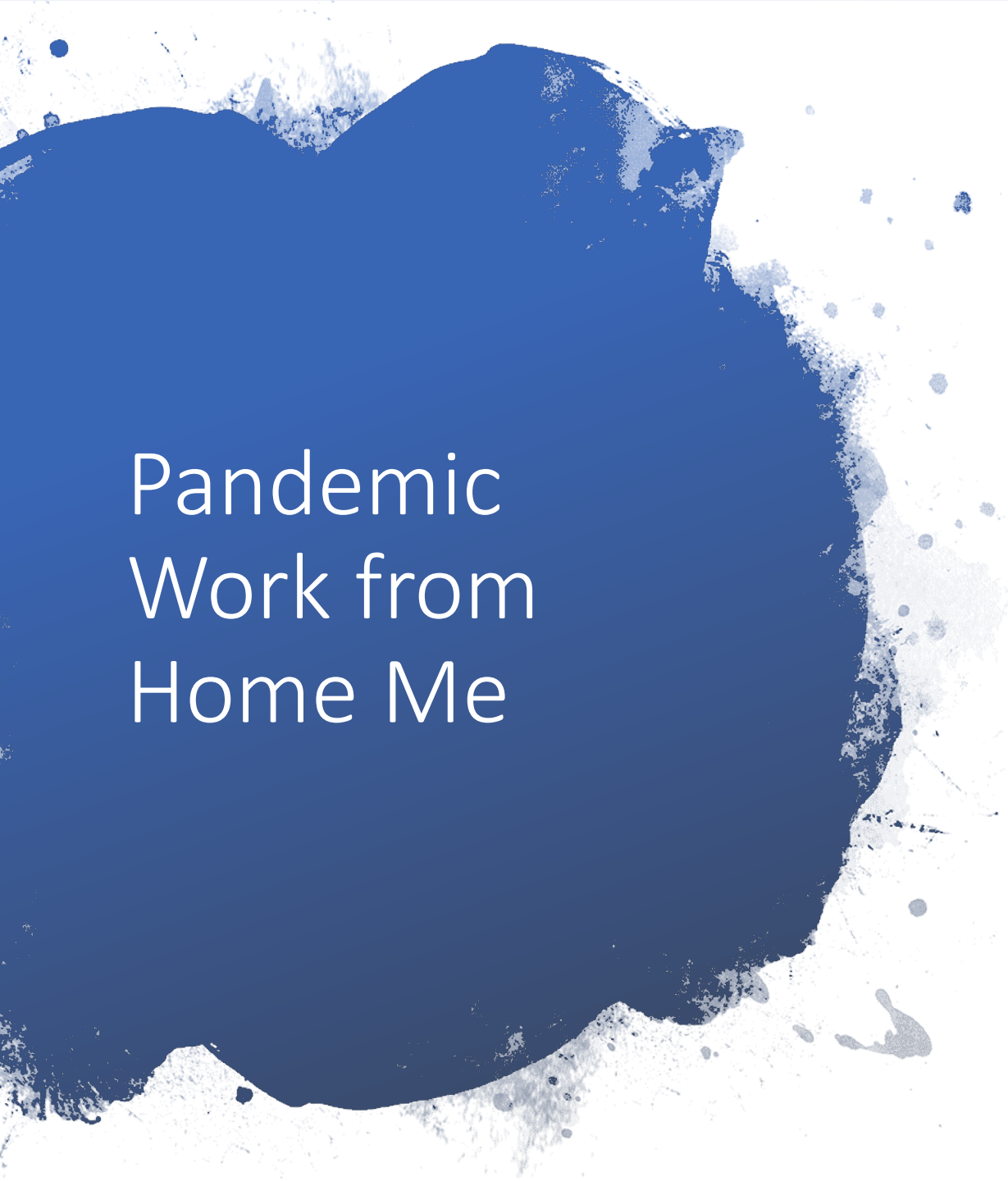
Reduced opportunity for advancement

Limited professional networking





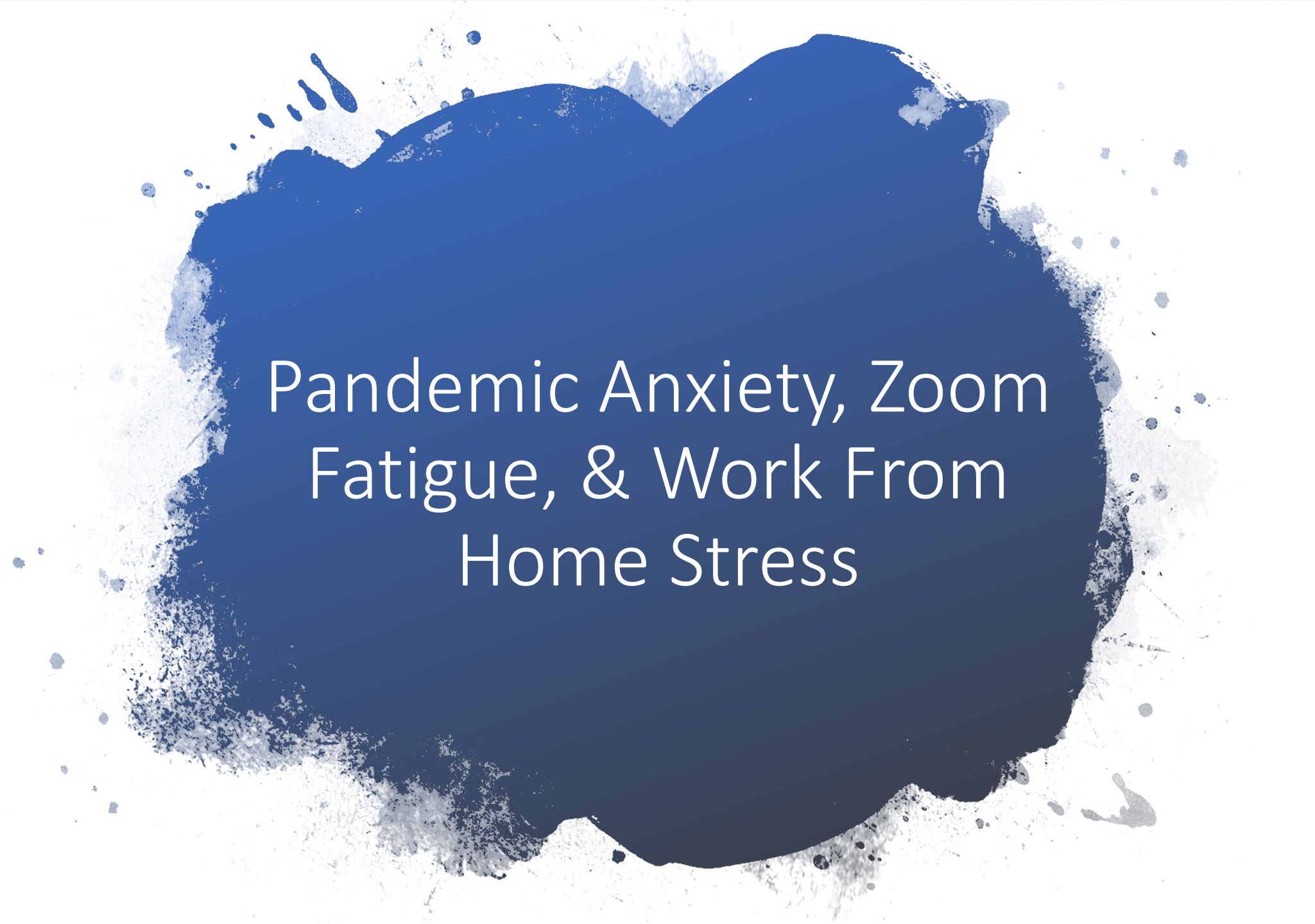
What I Did  
During the  
Pandemic



# Pandemic Work from Home Me

- Logged 114 hours of yard work;
- Baked 5 pound cakes, 1 loaf of banana bread; 1 loaf of blueberry lemon bread; five pans of brownies; 2 dozen sugar cookies; 2 dozen peanut butter cookies
- Quit WW four times
- Learned to sew; Made 51 masks
- Learned to do an acrylic nail fill
- Made friends with a grocery store manager who texts me about toilet tissue supplies
- Made ~37 Instacart orders
- Had 42 Zoom/Teams meeting headaches
- Started and quickly stopped using Zoom backdrops
- Screamed at my teenager 38 times about her home-school work ethic
- Considered taking a sick day at least three times every week in the last 8 weeks
- Took a lunch break to Zoom-watch a memorial service for my friend's husband who died of COVID-19 on





Pandemic Anxiety, Zoom  
Fatigue, & Work From  
Home Stress

# Pandemic Stressors

Invisible danger

Conflicting reports about pandemic and how to remain safe

Concern about relatives, friends, and self

Limited supply of necessities and safety items

Job uncertainty

Work-space disruption

Children in virtual school

Childcare disruptions

Video-conferencing

Social disruptions

I'm having a hard time with regular exercise

I can't sleep at night

I have no idea what will happen next

I'm so tired

I don't know who to trust

I'm eating the wrong things

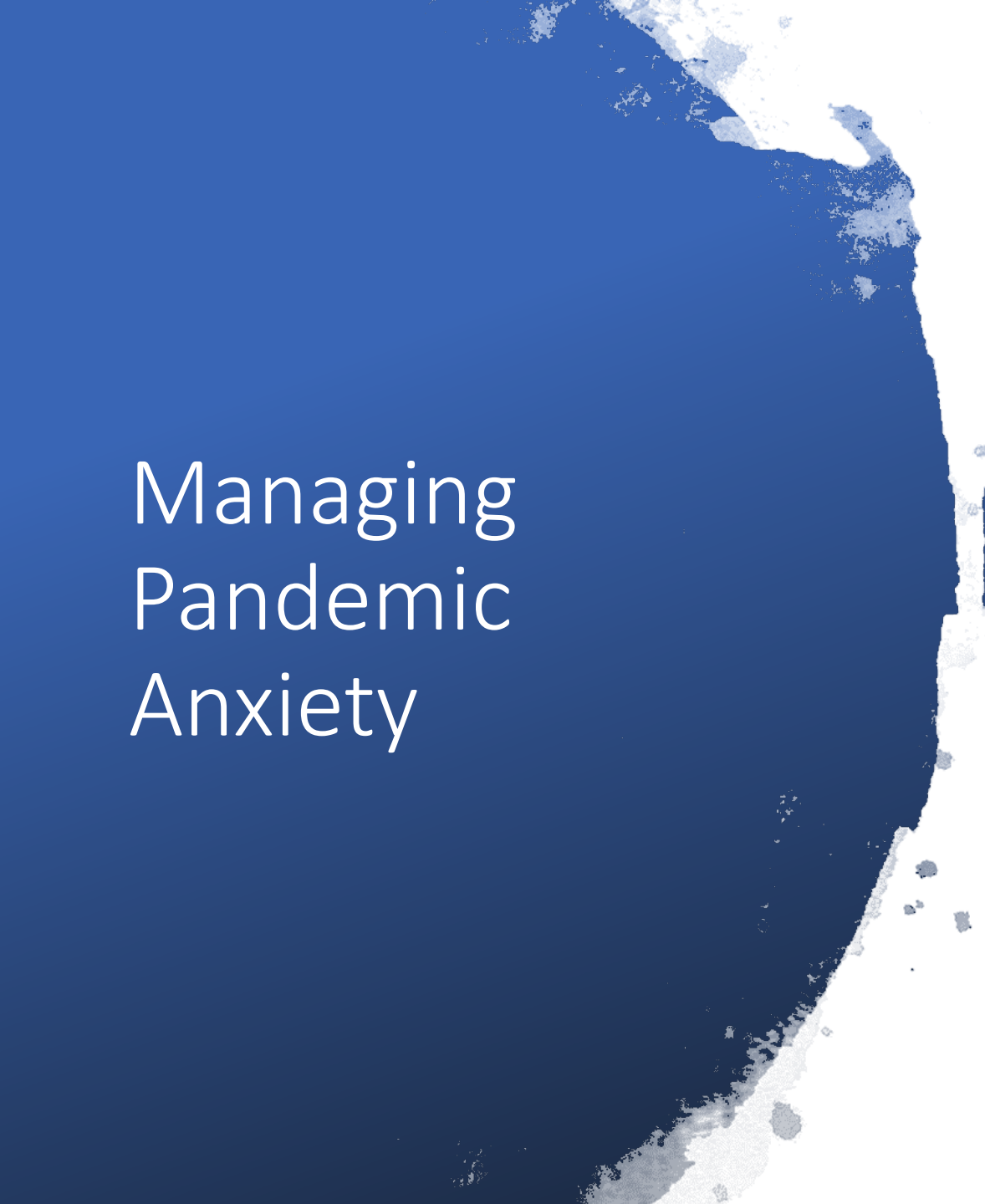
I'm jumpy and nervous all the time

I am busy doing projects and learning new skills.

I'm confused about family's safety

# Pandemic YOU



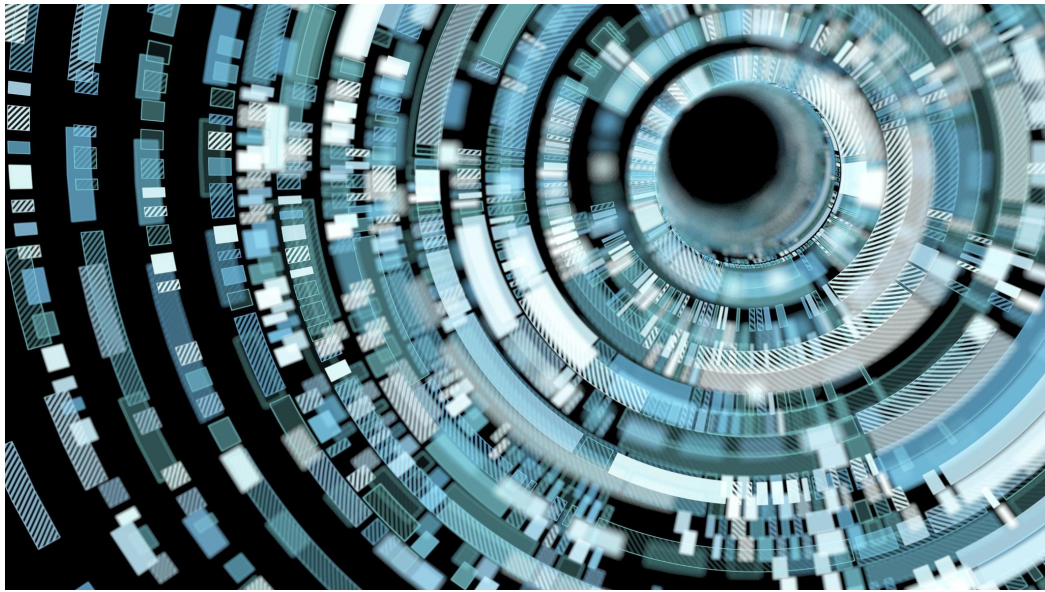


# Managing Pandemic Anxiety

- Stay informed, but set limits of who informs you and how much information you consume—too much information puts you at greater risk for vicarious trauma
- Focus on what you can control—you can reduce your personal risk
- Plan the things that you can
- Identify the things that worry you to most and focus on concrete ways to problem solve
- Stay connected with others—use Zoom, social media, telephone calls, social distance meals as tools for maintaining a sense of community
- Attend to your body and spirit
- Find ways to help others in need



# Zoom Fatigue



the physical and mental exhaustion that results from information processing while on videoconferencing.

# Zoom Fatigue....How and Why?

"Alice, turn your video on. No, it's the button on the bottom. Not that one, over to your left FFS. Jan, you're on mute. UNMUTE YOURSELF!"



- Requires us to focus more intently on conversations to absorb information

- Requires a constant gaze in order to look engaged

- Easier to be distracted by our own image on screen

- Easier for us to lose focus

- Numerous virtual meetings in a day



# Zoom Fatigue...What's the Fix?

- Practice some deep-breathing
- Take walking work meetings
- Choose speaker view
- Avoid the distracting backgrounds
- Reduce on screen stimuli
- Avoid multitasking
- Take breaks
- Shorten meetings
- Give yourself a break

# Establishing Healthy Work from Home Boundaries.....

P



**MUTE**



NOPE!!!

**You know you're bold  
when you call off from  
work.. WHILE WORKING  
FROM HOME!** 🙄 🙅 🙇 😂


**#TheStruggle**

**#HappyFriday** 👍



## Physical and Mental Wellness

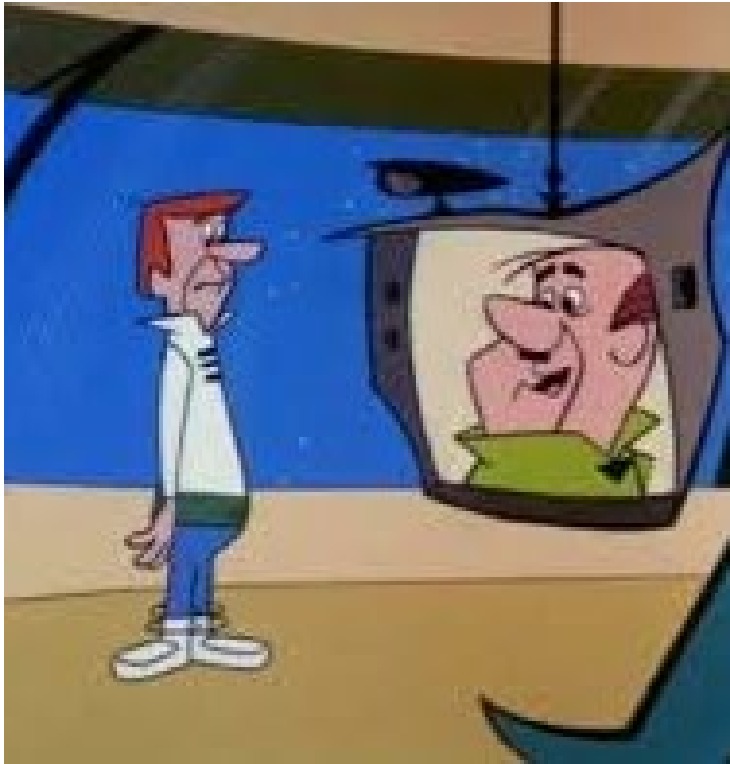
- Establish a routine that allows you to transition from home and family time to work time
- Create a workspace with minimal disruption from family and pets
- Get dressed and tidy up your bedroom
- Communicate boundaries to family and friends
- Communicate to supervisors when you need a break
- Set a start and stop time for work
- Take sick days when you need a mental or physical break
- Maintain the best eating schedule for yourself
- Create an exercise schedule
- Give yourself a break
- Recognize that these are unusual circumstances for everyone
- Get out of the house



# The Work from Home Challenges

- Requires people to establish boundaries for themselves and others
- Requires more work to establish a workplace network
- May impact people's ability to access stretching assignments and promotions
- Employees may overwork with the intention of proving their value and commitment
- Employees may have difficulty accessing support and resources

# Supervising for Wellness



- Set clear manageable expectations
- Make sure employees have the resources and training they need to be effective work from home employees
- Communicate frequently
- Acknowledge productivity
- Role model self-care
- Do regular check-ins with individual team members, especially the more social team members
- Provide opportunities for **optional** remote social interactions
- Look for opportunities to give your team a break



# Personal Safety During the Pandemic

We locked down for our safety, but some of our neighbors, friends, and relatives, and some of us are more vulnerable now than we were before.....

- It is estimated that intimate partner violence will increase by 20% during this stay at home time period (Contributors: isolation, stress, economic anxiety and joblessness, alcohol, loss of resources)
- 22% increase in calls to the National Sexual Assault Hotline to report from people under 18.
- In general, reports of Child Abuse have plunged, but according to the Washington Posts, the reported cases are much more severe (Closure of schools and day cares, financial stress, substance abuse contribute).



Sharing is  
Caring.....

# Support

[NC Office of State Human Resources Employee Assistance Program](#)  
888-298-3907

[Disaster Distress Helpline](#) – Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

[Crisis Text Line](#) – Text with a trained Crisis Counselor. Also available in the UK and Canada.

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) – If you're feeling suicidal, please call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

[National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) – Isolated at home in an abusive situation and need help? Call 1-800-799-7233.

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