

# DCI Cancellation and Understanding Emotions

by *Jeremy Van Wert*



The cancellation of the summer drum corps season at the same time as a worldwide pandemic is guaranteed to cause mild to severe issues with emotional adjustment in various members of drum corps. Staff and those close to corps members are likely to see adjustment related issues in members that may include irritability, depression, grief, hopelessness, or anxiety. Staff may experience members reaching out for connection and reassurance as they adjust to the loss of an activity for which a member **MUST** be a fanatic to join.

As a point of reference, this activity means everything to these members. This is an unceremonious end to the most fantastic experience many of them will ever have. This is not lost on these members and there will need to be time and support for members to learn to cope with a suddenly changed world. The purpose of this article is to provide staff members and leadership with some perspective and understanding on how to help members in this dark time.

## What Staff Can Do

Members will likely reach out to express disappointment and sadness. Understanding and encouragement is essential. Often these members will simply want to feel heard and understood. Feel free to provide them with encouragement, genuine care, and empathy. You can't go wrong with providing encouragement and telling each member something you acknowledge and appreciate about who they are.

Be sure to set reasonable limits and boundaries. You are not obligated to be taking midnight phone calls from members wanting extended supportive contact. You are correct in limiting your contact times to reasonable times of the day and week. Being available 24/7 can teach certain members incorrect lessons about boundaries and expectations.

## What To Look For

There will be members who take this very hard. Some of these members may have a history of depression, trauma, anxiety or other substantial mental health issues. Be on the look out for:

- ▶ Statements of profound hopelessness (Loss of interest in joyful activities)
- ▶ Any mention of members discussing self harm (Cutting, excessive substance abuse, etc)
- ▶ Evidence of isolation (Does not wish to socialize or be around others. This would go beyond quarantine)
- ▶ Any mention of possible suicidality including statements like "This was all I lived for. It's gone now and I don't know what to do." Pick up on these cues and ask more questions about intentions. Don't be afraid to ask "Are you thinking about hurting yourself?"
- ▶ Descriptions of physical symptoms including chest pain, tingling hands, sweaty palms, or a feeling of disorientation.

## What Should I Do?

If a staff member is finding out any of the above, it's time to help this member reach out to resources. These symptoms can result in very bad outcomes. If the member is a minor, consider getting hold of a parent or caregiver in collaboration with the member. Be careful to do this in a supportive way and don't betray more trust than you might have to. The potential is worse than the cost of action!

If the member is an adult who does not wish to reach out to a parent or relative with you, please provide the member with the resources attached at the bottom of this article. These are all active crisis lines and a member will likely not have to wait long to speak directly to a live person. You can also call the crisis line with the member to make sure he/she gets connected to a live person. These are trained crisis workers who can assess, get help for, or just simply talk to somebody for as long as necessary. These are resources anybody can use.

Be very mindful that you don't get in over your head. Nobody expects an educator to be a licensed mental health professional. If you feel uncomfortable, it might be that you've reached the limit of what you are able to provide for a member and the member may need professional help. Feel free to openly admit that you feel a member needs more support than what you as an educator can provide. Helping the member access that help is essential.

If you become critically/urgently concerned about something happening on the other end of the phone, find out exactly where the member is and contact the closest law enforcement agency. Dispatchers can be amazing at directing law enforcement officers into finding people in crisis. Trust your instincts and take what action is necessary.

The below information are things that can help anybody at this time of massive adjustment and the unknown. These are tangible steps one can use in a time of crisis or panic related to the cessation of the drum corps tour and the COVID-19 shelter in place demands.

## Tips On Staying Centered

**Routine:** Try to replicate familiarity in daily life to the greatest degree possible.

- ▶ Keep bedtime and waking schedules consistent.
- ▶ Listen to the same podcasts, books, and music you love.
- ▶ Stay in contact with the same people you normally contact.
- ▶ Keep a household cleaning and tidying ritual daily.

**Examine panic:** Ask yourself why you may feel discom-bobulated in a moment.

- ▶ Stop, breathe, turn noise off, and stop all movement for a few minutes.
- ▶ Think about why decisions may be difficult in this moment.
- ▶ Only proceed when you've simplified your thoughts and only assign yourself a single thing to do at a time. Stop multitasking if you're having trouble with it.

**Take advantage of opportunities:** What have you been putting off?

- ▶ Get an online certification
- ▶ Finish Continuing Education units.
- ▶ Dig out old musical instruments or art supplies.
- ▶ Sit down and write letters by hand to people for whom you care
- ▶ Do video hang outs with others and talk about happy things
- ▶ A good home improvement project can really put energy into something tangible.
- ▶ Pray, meditate, exercise, or do a Yoga practice

**Meaning:** Take some time to contemplate what you can make out of this

- ▶ Write a thoughtful feelings journal.
- ▶ Do a map of your life events leading to this moment.
- ▶ Give thought to how this experience can help you

grow personally in some meaningful way.

- ▶ Help others in whatever way you can in a tangible way.
  - ▶ Get groceries for an elderly neighbor.
  - ▶ Sweep a neighbor's walkway.
  - ▶ Mow a neighbor's lawn.

**News media:** The media will provide more horror and fear than any single person can take.

- ▶ Limit news intake to specific times of the day
- ▶ Take in news only from sources that do not sensationalize or constantly play frantic background sounds and flash brightly colored banners constantly.
- ▶ Fill your day with tasks and input that enriches joy and balance.

**Crisis:** When the feelings become overwhelming.

- ▶ Stay connected to trusted friends/relatives.
- ▶ Crisis lines are here for everyone.

## 24/7 Resources

- ▶ **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255
- ▶ **Crisis Text Line:** Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a counselor
- ▶ **TTY – Hearing and Speech Impaired Crisis Line:** 1-800-799-4889
- ▶ **Boys Town National Hotline:** Counselors available for teens, youth, and young adults hotline: 1-800-448-3000 [www.yourlifeyourvoice.org](http://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org). Text from Noon to midnight CST. Text the word VOICE to 20121
- ▶ **LGBTQ Crisis for teens and youth:** 1-866-488-7386. Text START to 678678. [www.thetreavorproject.org](http://www.thetreavorproject.org).

## Online Therapy Resources

- ▶ [Talkspace.com](http://Talkspace.com)
- ▶ [BetterHelp.com](http://BetterHelp.com)

## About The Author

**Jeremy Van Wert MFT MBA** is a licensed therapist with 14 years of experience in the field of mental health including community mental health care, private practice, and inpatient services for adults and youth in crisis. Jeremy is currently the Vice President of Summitview Child & Family Services Inc in Placerville California. Jeremy has provided mental health support for Pacific Crest, Mandarins, and currently works on the health and wellness team with the Santa Clara Vanguard. Jeremy is a member of the Board of Directors for Vanguard Music & Performing arts and was a member of the Santa Clara Vanguard A-Corps drum line from 1996-1998.