

There is so much going on in the world. Our newsfeeds are overloaded with updates of a lingering pandemic, shortages, the latest political drama, and horrific events taking place around the corner and across the globe. At times, it seems as if we are just getting used to the chaos.

But, that doesn't mean we aren't impacted in some way. Maybe you have noticed that you aren't sleeping well, maybe you find that you are easily irritated, or you feel more down than usual. Maybe you are avoiding your friends and family. Or, maybe, like so many, you just feel overwhelmed.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and a reminder to all of us to prioritize our mental health. While we cannot easily change the world around us, we can change how we respond to stress. Here are a few self-care suggestions according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness:

- Practice relaxation – Try deep breathing or meditation
- Keep moving – Take time to walk or hike, bike ride, go to the gym, take a yoga class
- Make healthy food choices - Eat more vegetables, fruit, and whole grains. Avoid processed foods.
- Get enough sleep – The Center for Disease Control recommends 7 or more hours per night
- Connect with others – Spend time with friends and family. Join peer support groups, or talk to your spiritual advisor

For some, the problems may extend a little deeper. Sometimes you need more. If you, or someone you know, has a history of mental illness, you are not alone. The National Alliance on Mental Illness estimates that 1 in 5 Americans experience some form of mental illness. Seeking help will connect you with a mental health professional who will assist you by exploring issues such as anger, depression, anxiety, relationship problems, self-image, trauma, or grief and loss. Your therapist will provide a safe, private space to help where you will:

- Learn new skills to manage your symptoms
- Develop a better understanding of your mental health issues
- Identify triggers which might be making your symptoms worse

Everyone wants to be considered the type of person that their closest friends and family can lean on if they need to. It can be a comforting feeling to know that those around you trust you, and being a reliable confidant to someone struggling with mental health can make a huge impact. What would you say if I told you your words can make a difference in someone's life? You might think.... "hmmmm.....maybe." What if I told you your kindness and compassion could save a life? If that sounds a bit much, keep in mind we do not always see the impact we have on the people whose paths we cross.

During Mental Health Awareness Month, please reach out to others who may not be able to ask for the help they need; the neighbor who lost her husband to COVID-19, the friend who was recently divorced, the co-worker you saw crying in the restroom. Or it may be the people we are closest to who are struggling; a sister, brother or aunt. If the past couple

years have taught us anything, it is the value of human connection. A kind word, or an offer to listen, may be enough. Checking in on friends, family and others who do not seem to be able to cope may prevent a crisis. It may just save a life.

Know the warning signs that someone may be at risk for suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

In New Jersey, there are designated screening services throughout the state for psychiatric emergencies and crisis intervention services. See the link below to learn where your local screening center is located.

At the Center For Family Services, our Zero Suicide Initiative is focused on ensuring that suicide prevention and care is recognized as a priority across all aspects of our work. We are here to help. By offering a full range of counseling and behavioral health services across the state of New Jersey including access to private and confidential counseling services we provide a space for people to heal and work towards a healthy future.

During these challenging times, remember to take care of yourself. When the people in your circle, and even those whose lives you touch only briefly, seem as if they are having difficulty coping, remember that help is available. You *can* make a difference in someone's life.

If you or someone you know is experiencing challenges in your everyday life, including grief, loss, or depression, please reach out to learn more about our specialized services for adults, children, teens, and families.

Call 877.922.2377 or email access@centerffs.org to schedule an appointment.

To locate your local Screening Center:

https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dmhas/home/hotlines/MH_Screening_Centers.pdf

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK

Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.

Daily Calm – 10 Minute Mindfulness Meditation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI_B45DpMLU

NJ Mental Health Association Locator:

<https://www.mhanj.org/find-your-mhanj/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

www.nami.org

https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/how_much_sleep.html