

Taking Care of Your Mental Well-being during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

As Wisconsin residents continue to stay “safer at home,” many are finding ways to stay socially connected and maintain their mental well-being, despite changes to routines and the need to keep physical distance from others. The Southwestern Wisconsin Behavioral Health Partnership recognizes that the public health emergency is challenging for everyone and wishes to promote the following five strategies to help promote well-being.

1. Maintain social connections. Despite the need to maintain physical distance from others, it is important to find ways to connect. Research shows that when you have positive interactions with others, it is a strong boost to your mood and well-being. With the need to avoid face-to-face interaction, one way to do this is by making a list of people to connect with, and calling them throughout the week. This will be especially impactful if you include people who are living alone or might be isolated.

2. Spend time outdoors or in creative pursuits. As calendars were cleared of events, many people are spending their time differently. If you have an abundance of time at home, look for ways to spend it outdoors or in creative pursuits. Being outside is one of the greatest mood-boosters, and is free and available to everyone. Walking, bicycling, gardening, or just watching the birds can be done while maintaining physical distance from others, while increasing feelings of calm and well-being. To exercise your creativity, think about activities that you’ve enjoyed in the past. Did you enjoy drawing as a child? Do you have a musical instrument that hasn’t been played in a while? Using your time to create something positive can help you feel better, even in difficult times.

3. Control and limit your exposure to news and social media. Being a passive recipient of negative news can be overwhelming. Take control of your exposure to these media and utilize them to connect and benefit you, but turn them off when they are negatively impacting your well-being.

4. Learn something new. Many people are learning to use video-calling and other online services for the first time. Others are exploring cooking, starting gardens, or reading long-set-aside books. If you feel yourself being pushed out of your comfort zone, try to reframe this as a way to invest in yourself and add new skills that could benefit you in the long-run. The Center for Healthy Minds at UW-Madison offers free guided audio and video programs that teach calming techniques and meditation.

Check it out at: <https://centerhealthyminds.org/well-being-toolkit-covid19> .

5. Help is available. If you need additional resources to support your mental well-being, there are a variety of supports that are cataloged for SW Wisconsin on this website: <https://southwestern.wi.networkofcare.org/mh/> This site includes information specific to the COVID-19 public health emergency and supports that are available at any time. Most mental health and substance abuse treatment providers have transitioned to telehealth and many are accepting new clients. Additional supports are documented for Iowa, Grant, Green, Lafayette,

and Richland Counties, including meeting times and locations for support groups like NAMI and AA, and links to statewide resources and community events. Anyone experiencing a mental health crisis should call the 24-hour hotline at 1-800-273-8255 (1-800-273-TALK) or text “HOPE” to 741741.

The Southwestern Wisconsin Behavioral Health Partnership is funded by the Medical College of Wisconsin to improve accessibility, availability, and acceptability of behavioral health treatment in Iowa, Grant, Green, Lafayette, and Richland Counties. Guided and staffed by SWCAP, the steering committee includes Richland County representatives Janis Peterson (Peer Support) and Chelsea Wunnicke (Extension).

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