

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

May is Mental Health Awareness month. Mental health is a broad term referring to a person's emotional well-being. Many people have felt unbalanced in the past several months. The coronavirus pandemic resulted in not only physical challenges in our lives, but mental challenges as well. The following excerpts are from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, ***COVID-19: Resilient Wisconsin – Healthy Coping***

“COVID-19 has temporarily changed the way we work and live, go to school, and spend time together. Limiting close contact with each other protects everyone’s health, including those who are most vulnerable. It also helps ensure vital health care resources remain available for those who need them. But knowing that change is important doesn’t make it easy. As we all adapt to recent events, it’s natural to feel stress, worry, and even anger.”

“Strong emotions, and even physical reactions, are a natural response to traumatic events like a natural disaster or pandemic. There’s no right or wrong way to feel or act, and your reactions may change over time. That’s why it’s important to understand your responses during stressful events—so that you can better manage what you’re feeling and recognize when you may need the support of a mental health or medical professional.

Stress takes many forms. Look for these common reactions to traumatic events...

- Mood swings and intense feelings, including fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones, sadness, anger, guilt, and disorientation
- Denial, detachment or avoidance
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Irritability, strained relationships and conflicts with family, friends and co-workers
- Changes in your normal sleep or eating patterns
- Soreness, nausea, head or stomach aches
- Elevated breathing, heartbeats, and blood pressure
- Sensitivity to unusual sounds, smells and changes in your environment
- A worsening of preexisting chronic or mental health conditions
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs

Research shows that people are resilient. With time and support, we’re able to recover from adversity.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. But taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with the changes you’re experiencing. People who have the skills to adapt and bounce back from hardships strengthen the people around them, and help make their community more resilient, too.

You’re not being selfish, you’re showing self-interest. Taking the time to protect your own physical and mental health ensures you have the resources to take care of others.

Get the 3 “goods”. That’s good-for-you foods, a good night’s sleep, and a good amount of exercise.

Relax your body. Do what that works for you, like taking deep breaths, stretching and exercising, meditation, and spiritual activities.

Do something you enjoy. Eat a good meal, read, create a playlist of your favorite music, play video games, or talk to family and friends.

Set boundaries . Don’t let the pandemic take over what you read, watch, or talk about. And don’t be afraid to ask friends and family to talk about something else.

Avoid negative outlets. Find healthy ways to process your emotions.”

Throughout our communities, people are facing new challenges at work and at home. We face the new challenge of maintaining good health while transitioning to life outside of our homes. Thinking differently will be our reality. During May try to learn more about mental health and its impact on your overall health.