Community Weekly
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COVID-19 and Mental Health
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In all of the discussions around the toll of COVID-19 on the physical health of our communities, an aspect that deserves equal attention is the toll it has taken on mental health. Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit health research organization, reports that during the pandemic about 4 in 10 adults in the United States have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, up from one in ten adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019*.

Whether you have experienced COVID-19 symptoms yourself or not, it is likely that the impact of the pandemic, such as closures or loss of income, have affected you and your loved ones. Sweeping social isolation resulting from necessary safety measures have added to worry and stress. Symptoms of increased depression, anxiety, distress and increases in alcohol and substance use have been more widespread since the pandemic began.

Still, there are reasons to have hope that we are turning the corner on this long, tough year. Just last week some good news came to light, our local new case counts had dropped to below 200. This means that fewer people were infected in one week than any week since early fall. We have hope that if we continue to follow the safety precautions in place and if even more people become vaccinated, we will keep the momentum going in the right direction.

Here are some tips to consider in order to take care of yourself, now more than ever:

- Make time to unwind from stressful activities. Find a little time each week to do activities that you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Call a friend or family member to chat.
- Continue with routine preventive measures (physical distancing and wearing a mask in public) to safeguard your health.
- Create routines for yourself and your household. Routine and ritual are restorative to us. Our brain wants predictable activity so we can relax our vigilant nervous system.
- Get enough sleep. If you are having trouble sleeping at night, set aside some "worry time" during the day to write down your concerns. Writing them down helps to keep your brain from endlessly cycling through your list of worries.
- Treat yourself to healthful foods, head outdoors, and get moving. A simple walk in your neighborhood each day can do wonders to lift your spirits and improve your baseline fitness.
- Find ways to laugh. Humor is a wonderful coping mechanism. Tune in to a favorite TV show or connect with a friend who brightens your mood.

Many in our communities have faced and continue to face serious challenges that can be stressful, overwhelming, and cause strong emotions in adults and children. It is normal to experience a range of emotional responses including grief, loss, and mourning. But learning to cope with stress in a healthy way will make you, the people you care about, and those around you become more resilient. Whether you are on the frontlines or the sidelines, being kind and taking care of yourself can help you be compassionate with and support others.

*https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/