

## PARISH NURSE'S NOTES – MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

It's been a challenging year for mental health. The global pandemic has been rightfully difficult for so many, and it's completely reshaped the way many of us view, manage, and maintain our emotional balance.

But a small silver lining of one of the hardest times in recent history is that everyone now seems far more comfortable openly discussing and prioritizing their mental health — be it commonplace anxiety or more serious clinical depression. With teletherapy and online courses, treatment is more accessible than ever, resources are more widely spread, and talking about your well-being on a regular basis is becoming more common.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and it's also a worthy reminder that prioritizing your mental health is a 365-day affair. Just as everyone needs to care for their physical health even when they're not physically ill, mental health is something everyone should think about, regardless of whether they experience mental illness.

If feelings of anxiety, depression, loneliness, or despair infiltrate your everyday life, you're far from alone, and it's important to know there's no one-size-fits-all approach to caring for one's mental health. Some may listen to positive podcasts, learn science-backed ways to be happier, or take up meditation, while others could benefit from seeking therapy or looking into other professional treatment programs.

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## Setting healthy habits and positive routine

Self-care is often depicted as face masks and exercise routines. While that *can* be true for some, healthy coping strategies span far beyond #selfcare.

True self-care really just means checking in with yourself and considering what your mind and body need for the day. For some, that may mean getting feelings out via journaling; for others, logging into a therapy session or learning how to meditate.

Discovering the coping strategies that work for you is a process of trial and error, and it often comes with a bit of productive discomfort. This may take some time and effort, which is why it's important to try to be as kind to yourself as possible when exploring what does (and doesn't) work for you.

The avenues of support are many, too. If you're recovering from alcohol addiction, there are apps designed to help you stay sober. For families, there are therapist- and education expert-backed products that can reduce stress around the house. Consider using a planner to stay organized, or download a wellness app to help improve your wellbeing. Social media can play a huge role in someone's mental health, so it's important to know how to take a break from that when you need to.

If you're interested in taking online classes, there are plenty of affordable courses that can help improve your mental health, such as Yale's free positive psychology course.

Of course, self-compassion is also a skill that takes time, so be patient with yourself to the best of your ability. Let's be clear: You *should not* be self-diagnosing any mental health conditions.

However, there are many resources available that can help you better understand what exactly you're feeling and why you're feeling the way you are. These can help you make an informed decision about what avenue of support may work best for you.

Maybe you'd like to get better sleep while managing anxiety and stress, or perhaps you're interested in learning more about self-love and its benefits. There are even resources dedicated to teaching people how to feel happier every day and the kinds of grounding exercises that can help manage PTSD, stress, and anxiety benefits of mindful breathing, how adding Vitamin D to your diet can help regulate your risk of depression.

## Seeking professional treatment

The idea of professional mental health treatment can feel intimidating, but it's really not as intense as it sounds. Allowing a professional to listen to your concerns and give you unbiased (and science-backed) advice can be incredibly beneficial, enlightening, and in some cases, life-saving.

The kind of professional treatment that works best for you may vary. It can involve everything from talk therapy to medication to a combination of the two. The process of finding a therapist that's right for you can also feel quite overwhelming, which is why we've laid out exactly how to do it, step-by-step.

## Free resources

If you are in need of mental health support, the following hotlines are available to you free-of-charge, 24/7, and are fully confidential:

- Call 800-448-4663 with **any crisis as a teenager** for the Youth Crisis Hotline
- Call 800-233-HELP with **any crisis at any age** via United Way Crisis Helpline
- Call 800-273-TALK (8255) for **help with suicidal thoughts** via the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- Call 800-DONT-CUT for **help with thoughts of self-harm** via S.A.F.E. (Self Abuse Finally Ends)
- Call 800-395-5755 for **struggles with grief** via GriefShare
- Call 800-67-BABY-6 for **pregnancy or maternal help** via the Crisis Pregnancy Hotline Number
- Call 800-228-0332 for free **post-abortion counseling**

- Call 1-800-398-GAYS for **queer, trans or LGBTQIA+ help** via the LGBTQIA+ Helpline
- Call 800-799-SAFE for **domestic violence help** via National Domestic Violence Hotline
- Call 800-313-1310 to talk to someone about **family violence** via the Family Violence Prevention Center
- Call 1-800-662-4357 for **drug addiction issues** via the Drug Abuse National Helpline
- Call 410-332-0402 for **gambling addictions** via the Compulsive Gambling Hotline
- Call 800-931-2237 with any **disordered eating struggles** via Eating Disorders Awareness and Prevention