

Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933

*“In the small, silent space between last year and next, lies a quiet opportunity. The end of something is always the beginning of something else.” -
Psychotherapist Frances Masters*



**Mental Health Matters:
A Monthly Blog Post from the Director**

**Endings & Beginnings:
Transitions in Life Can Be Times
of Reflection and Healing**

*Endings and Beginnings can be accompanied by a variety of emotions...
A sense of loss as relationships end, the excitement we feel when we
fall in love and begin a new relationship;
Feelings of anxiety as we approach retirement and the end of a career;
anticipation as we enter a new chapter in our lives;
Nostalgia and sadness as our children leave us; happiness when
they succeed and thrive as adults.*

This is a time of year when we often reflect on the past and the future. Throughout our lives, we have “end” dates and “start” dates that mark the days, weeks, months, years of our time on earth. A birthday can be an end, as well as a beginning; anniversaries can be times to celebrate, such as a wedding anniversary, or a time to grieve, as we remember the anniversary of the death of a loved one.

How we deal with the many transitions in our lives, can help us be more mentally well and resilient. Accepting change as an inevitable part of living can provide us with a better outlook on the future and give us tools to weather storms and take joy in the sunny days. Ellen Goodman, American journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist, has said *“There’s a trick to the ‘graceful exit.’ It begins with the vision to recognize when a job, a life stage, or a relationship is over — and let it go. It means leaving what’s over without denying its validity or its past importance to our lives. It involves a sense of future, a belief that every exit line is an entry, that we are moving up, rather than out.”*

Psychotherapist Frances Masters writes, *“From the death of a loved one, separation or divorce, to moving house, job or school; we voyage from one phase to another... and another. On the*

way, we might sometimes find ourselves firmly at the helm of our ship, at others, we may feel tossed and turned by turbulent seas over which we have no control. Our final control, of course, is in our response; in the setting of our sails as we find a way to ride the waves. And sometimes, we just need to stop... and seek refuge in safe harbour while we wait for the storms to pass. Taking time to think, talk, or simply stop and 'be' for a while can allow enough space for us to 'tune in' to ourselves, make adjustments and find the right way forward again."

Endings and beginnings are a good time to reflect and take stock of our lives. That's why many of us make New Year's Resolutions. The dictionary defines "resolution" as "a firm decision to do or not do something." But as we reflect on the past year, my hope is that we look back in a positive way and move resolutely forward to our better self. You are not defined by past mistakes or choices. For me, the New Year is a time of renewal...a time to say goodbye to what went wrong (don't dwell on it), relish the things that were wonderful and good, and focus on what can make 2020 even better.



"New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings." - Lao Tzu

Here are five **New Year's Resolutions** we can all make to improve our mental health (*Five New Year's Resolutions to Improve Your Mental Health*, Joel L. Young, MD, Psychology Today)

1. **Resolve to Get Help With Resolutions.** If you need to make a big change in your life—leaving an abusive partner, quitting smoking, getting out of debt—know that it's rarely as simple as making a resolution to change. You found yourself in this difficult situation for a reason. Getting out demands that you understand and directly address that reason. So rather than resolving to change bad habits, resolve to get help that supports you to understand those habits. You'll feel happier and healthier, and be better equipped to make lasting change.
2. **Resolve to Love Yourself the Way You Are.** You will not be happier if you lose 10 pounds, quit smoking, or start a new relationship. Sure, there might be an initial rush, but happiness does not come from achieving distant future goals. Indeed, believing that it does can be an impediment to happiness in the here and now, particularly if you fail to meet your goals month after month, year after year. You deserve to feel good about yourself right now, no matter where you are on your journey. You deserve happiness now.
3. **Resolve to Live in the Moment.** If you spend your life perennially looking forward to a future in which you're thinner, healthier, have more money, and a better person, you'll never get to enjoy the present moment. There's nothing wrong with self-improvement and plans for the future. But if that is all you can think about, you'll miss out on the wonderful moments life has to offer today. Work on cultivating mindfulness: the ability to live in the present moment. This can be particularly helpful during frustrating moments, such as when your child throws a temper tantrum or you have to wait in line at the bank. Focusing on the sounds and sights you see, the positive aspects of the current challenge, or simply what it feels like to be alive in your skin right now can help you see value even in frustrating moments.

4. **Resolve to Engage in Self-Care.** If you wait until everything is done and you have plenty of time, you will never have time for self-care. There's always something you can prioritize ahead of yourself. Yet if you don't care for yourself, no one else will. You'll feel burned out and unhappy, and you'll be poorly equipped to make meaningful changes in your life. Commit to an act of self-care every day, and engage in larger acts of self-care on a weekly or monthly basis. Make time. You'll be surprised by how much it improves your life to care for yourself.

5. **Resolve to Give Up Defensiveness.** Defensiveness is a great defense mechanism. It allows us to blame a cruel boss or a meddling co-worker for a bad work environment. It enables us to see a cluttered home as the fault of a spouse or children, and fights with loved ones as the product of those loved ones' shortcomings. Yet defensiveness has an ugly side: it blinds us to our own role in our problems. It prevents us from becoming better people. It makes our relationships difficult and one-sided. If you want better relationships this year, resolve to give up defensiveness. That means diligently working to see your own role in every conflict or concern you have. Don't wait for someone else to change before you're willing to. Ultimately, you can only change yourself. By looking inward and making small changes in each relationship, you may begin to see massive improvements in your social and intimate life.

As we transition into this new year and new decade, let's take time to reflect. Think about the things you will celebrate over the next year, and the things you will say goodbye to from the past 12 months. Masters says it most eloquently, "In the small, silent space between last year and next, lies a quiet opportunity. The end of something is always the beginning of something else."



We always want to hear
from you!
Share how you deal with
life's transitions-endings
and beginnings.
Do you make resolutions,
why or why not?

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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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