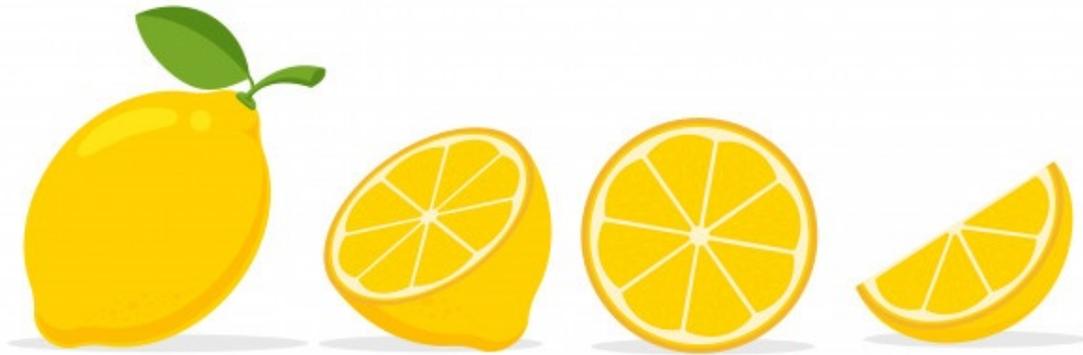


Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog from the Director

When Life Give You Lemons. . .

We are all familiar with the proverbial phrase “making lemonade out of lemons,” a nod to optimism and making the best of a bad situation. Just as lemons are sour, challenges and difficulty in our lives can sometimes leave a bitter taste.

During the times we are currently living through, it may seem trivial to suggest people make lemonade out of lemons. Loved ones are getting sick with 200,000 Americans lost to COVID-19. Individuals and families are facing so many uncertainties...financial hardship, trying to balance school and work remotely, and all of this is creating a mental health crisis in our community and in our country.

Making lemonade out of lemons, however, is a reference to resilience and a grateful mindset, which can improve our mental health and wellbeing. According to the Mayo Clinic, positive thinking can help reduce stress and even improve our health. This doesn’t mean we have our heads in the sand and ignore what is happening around us. “Positive thinking just means that you approach unpleasantness in a more positive and productive way. You think the best is going to happen, not the worst.”

“Every **experience**, no matter how bad it seems, holds within it a **blessing** of some kind. The **goal** is to find it.”

- Buddha



The article from Mayo Clinic staff encourages a focus on positive thinking, noting the process is simple, but takes time and practice. Here are some ways they recommend thinking and behaving in a more positive and optimistic way:

- **Identify areas to change.** If you want to become more optimistic and engage in more positive thinking, first identify areas of your life that you usually think negatively about, whether it's work, your health routine or a relationship. You can start small by focusing on one area to approach in a more positive way.
- **Check yourself.** Periodically during the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are mainly negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.
- **Be open to humor.** Give yourself permission to smile or laugh, especially during difficult times. Seek humor in everyday happenings. When you can laugh at life, you feel less stressed.
- **Follow a healthy lifestyle.** Aim to exercise for about 30 minutes on most days of the week. You can also break it up into 10-minute chunks of time during the day. Exercise can positively affect mood and reduce stress. Follow a healthy diet to fuel your mind and body. And learn techniques to manage stress.
- **Surround yourself with positive people.** Make sure those in your life are positive, supportive people you can depend on to give helpful advice and feedback. Negative people may increase your stress level and make you doubt your ability to manage stress in healthy ways.
- **Practice positive self-talk.** Start by following one simple rule: Don't say anything to yourself that you wouldn't say to anyone else. Be gentle and encouraging with yourself. If a negative thought enters your mind, evaluate it rationally and respond with affirmations of what is good about you. Think about things you're thankful for in your life.

MHA's National Affiliate also writes about staying positive. Experts site the fact that negative thinking can drag down our moods, our actions and even our health. MHA recommends some ways to foster optimism:

Write about a positive future. The idea is to envision your goals and dreams come true. Set aside time so you can go into detail. Researcher Laura King PhD, who proved this exercise a great mood booster, assigned 20 minutes a day on four consecutive days.

Search for the silver lining. I know this may be difficult right now but looking for the positive in a negative situation can actually show great strength. To find your silver lining, ask yourself:

- How have I grown from this situation?
- Are my relationships stronger now?
- Have I developed new skills?
- What am I proud of about the way I handled this situation?

While these can be dark days, finding gratitude in the here and now, can help us cope. At MHA, it has been critical for us to continue meeting our mission to provide help, offer hope and promote mental wellness. To that end, staff, Board and many wonderful volunteers have embarked on a virtual journey and I am grateful for the hard work of so many to help those who can often be the most vulnerable in our community.

MHA has been making lemonade out of lemons for the past several months, striving to find ways to stay connected and provide support during these challenging times. Over the past several months, we have shifted to virtual education programs such as QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention Training, and are just beginning virtual Mental Health First Aid classes. MHA's

ParentVOICE and Compeer Teams are working with participants via phone or Zoom support groups and wellness checks. Advocacy work has continued with a virtual Town Hall series.

In addition to maintaining our current programming and services, MHA has added new programs, including Mental Health Matters a bi-weekly 30-minute show featuring various mental health professionals, workplace educational offerings, a new Yoga Therapy series, and quarterly networking events with mental health professionals.

Author C.S. Lewis said, "Hardships often prepare ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny." Through the past several months, we have collectively faced many hardships and a rain of lemons, but I see so many people making lemonade out of those lemons. This inspires me and gives me hope for a better tomorrow.

As we continue to find ways to connect, I hope you will join MHA Board President Rob Jones and me for one of four upcoming Making Lemonade Out of Lemons events. We'll share how MHA has been addressing the many challenges of the pandemic and hope to hear how you are coping during these times.



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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas is dedicated to providing help, offering hope and promoting mental wellness through advocacy, education and prevention in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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