

*Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933*



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

### ***We See You:* Kind Words and Generous Thoughts Are Also Contagious**

I've really been struggling with writing this month's blog. There is so much information coming in at such a fast pace around the

Coronavirus and it is changing rapidly.

And then I went for a walk...

On my walk, I listened to one of my favorite podcasts from The New York Times called *The Daily*. This particular episode was about the actor Tom Hanks. What struck me was this comment from the writer, "...contagion is real, but it doesn't just work for viruses. It works for kind words and generous thoughts, and acts of selflessness and honesty."

We can certainly get mired down by the anxiety-inducing information that is coming at us, but it's also important to let the good in as well. I posted the photo above "Better things are coming," and a

former colleague reached out to me and said it brought her to tears. When I responded, she said “Kindness brings me to tears these days.”

I also read a post on social media from one of my friends who is a school psychologist. In the post, she shared her ‘gratitudes’ list for that day. It was beautiful.

In Grier Heights, our partners at the Crossroads CDC reached out asking for donations to help feed families in the community and, in the first day, had more than they could deal with at that time.

And, every day I read of the amazing healthcare workers who now are having to isolate themselves from their own families and loved ones so that they can continue to care for the sick.

I know that the constant influx of emails, social media notifications, and news headlines about Coronavirus can weigh on the most resilient of us. And many who are dealing with a mental health diagnosis will experience heightened anxiety and possible relapses and destabilization during this time. While it is imperative to have an increased focus on dealing with infectious diseases and primary healthcare in the wake of this pandemic, we cannot lose sight of those who are struggling on a day-to-day basis with their mental health. We are all living through a paradigm shift right now and focusing on our mental health and that of others is critical.

At Mental Health America of Central Carolinas (MHA), we are concerned for our community, our participants, our volunteers and our staff. Not only do we want to keep people physically healthy, we want everyone to think about their mental health during this time of uncertainty.

**First of all, let’s call it “physical” distancing rather than “social” distancing.** In this day and age, we have many ways to remain connected with our friends, loved ones, neighbors and co-workers. Use social media, video conferencing, FaceTime, or just pick up the phone and give someone a call. Being physically isolated or in quarantine, does not mean we can’t reach out to one another.

Here are a few other ways to support your mental health during this time from [BeyondBlue.org](https://www.beyondblue.org/):

- Remind yourself that this is a temporary period of isolation to slow the spread of the virus.
- Remember that your effort is helping others in the community avoid contracting the virus.
- Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.
- Keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy foods.
- Try to maintain physical activity.
- Establish routines when possible and try to view this period as a new experience that can bring health benefits.
- For those working from home, try to maintain a healthy balance by allocating specific work hours, taking regular breaks and, if possible, establishing a dedicated work space.
- Avoid news and social media if you find it distressing.

For those living with a mental illness, the virus isn’t the only thing that can be triggering. Those with mental illness are often on medication, in therapy or dealing with other health issues that require frequent visits to a health care provider. A break in the routine can impact the treatment of mental illness, as well as become a source of more anxiety. According to a CBS report, people with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, severe depression, PTSD or other conditions see worsening symptoms by virtue of the illness they have as well as the stigma and discrimination that continues to exist around mental health.

People with preexisting mental health conditions should continue with their treatment and be aware of new or worsening symptoms. Additional information can be found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website [SAMSHA](https://www.samhsa.gov/).

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#### **Recommendations from the CDC:**

We are all feeling the effects that are being brought on by increased uncertainty about the future and fear of the unknown. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) offers the several recommendations. “Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, the things that make you different from other people, and the community you live

in."

People who may respond more strongly to the stress of a crisis include:

- Older people and people with chronic diseases who are at higher risk for COVID-19
- Children and teens
- People who are helping with the response to COVID-19, like doctors and other health care providers, or first responders
- People who have mental health conditions including problems with substance use.

If you, or someone you care about, are feeling overwhelmed with emotions like sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others call:

- 911
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746. (TTY 1-800-846-8517)

You should also call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of normal activities for several days in a row.

Taking care of yourself, your friends, and your family can help you cope with stress. Helping others cope with their stress can also make your community stronger.

### **The Right Information (Not Too Much) Can Alleviate Stress**

By sharing facts about COVID-19 and understanding the actual risk to yourself and people you care about can make an outbreak less stressful. This includes facts on distancing and isolation; and symptoms. The American Psychological Association offers the following tips for putting news reports in perspective and maintain a positive outlook:

1. **Keep things in perspective.** Take a deep breath and remind yourself that most people who contract COVID-19 will only experience mild symptoms. Work is being done to help people who may be more vulnerable to the Coronavirus, such as senior citizens and those with underlying health conditions. As coverage increases, it's important to take the necessary precautions to keep your family and loved ones healthy.
2. **Get the facts.** It is helpful to adopt a more analytical approach as you follow news reports about the Coronavirus. You will also want to verify information that you receive from family, friends or social media. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a [webpage dedicated to information on the Coronavirus outbreak](#). You may also find useful, reputable information from local or state public health agencies or even your family physician.
3. **Communicate with your children.** Discuss the news coverage of the coronavirus with honest and age-appropriate information. Parents can also help allay distress by focusing children on routines and schedules. Remember that children will observe your behaviors and emotions for cues on how to manage their own feelings during this time. You may want to limit how much media they consume to help keep their anxiety in check.
4. **Keep connected.** Maintaining social networks can foster a sense of normality and provide valuable outlets for sharing feelings and relieving stress. You can maintain these connections without increasing your risk of getting the virus by talking on the phone, texting or chatting with people on social media platforms. Feel free to share useful information you find on government websites with your friends and family. It will help them deal with their own anxiety.
5. **Seek additional help.** Individuals who feel an overwhelming nervousness, a lingering sadness, or other prolonged reactions that adversely affect their job performance or interpersonal relationships should consult with a trained and experienced mental health professional. Psychologists and other appropriate mental health providers can help people deal with extreme stress. These professionals work with individuals to help them find constructive ways to manage adversity.

While support groups, mental health trainings, and face to face meetings have been cancelled at this time, all of us at MHA remain available by phone at 704-365-3454, through email or online at [www.mhacentralcarolinas.org](http://www.mhacentralcarolinas.org) to assist the community during this difficult time.

Remember, we are not "socially" distancing ourselves from one another, we are "physically" distancing ourselves...there is a big difference in those terms. Stay in touch with friends, family, loved ones, neighbors and community in ways that do not require physical contact. Let's maintain our humanity and finally, let's show appreciation in any way we can for all those on the front lines of this pandemic: our healthcare workers, grocery store and pharmacy employees, and the many others who provide essential services so that we can go on leading somewhat "normal" lives. TAKE CARE!



## Will You Share With Us?

Will you share with us on social media with the hashtag:

[#MHACopingWithCovid19](#)

how you are dealing with the Coronavirus and how it is impacting your life? Do you have suggestions for others on how to deal with the stress and anxiety this is causing?



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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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