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2023 MENTAL HEALTH Resource Guide





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— MEMO FROM OUR TITLE SPONSOR —

Keeping Care Local

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports nearly half of the 60 million Americans living with mental health conditions go untreated. The bad news – the pandemic has further increased the rates of anxiety and depression over the past three years. Across this country and in Michigan, we are experiencing a steep increase in demand for mental health services. The good news – within this broader crisis, Michigan’s public mental health system continues to provide high quality, locally driven services, customized to meet the specific needs of each community.



Tammy Warner
Executive Director
Montcalm Care Network

Not many realize Michigan is one of the few states in the country with a public mental health system that not only oversees and coordinates care, but also has boots on the ground in providing that care to local communities. For Montcalm Care Network, the bulk of services are provided in people’s homes, in schools, and other community settings. Services are inclusive and go far beyond treatment in addressing root causes such as poverty, lack of housing, lack of transportation, unemployment, or chronic physical illness, all of which can impact a person’s mental health. Through a whole health approach to services, Montcalm Care Network is better meeting the needs of the community, and each

person and family it serves.

So while the Medicaid Health Plan giants (headquartered in other states like California, Utah and Florida), have been trying since 2016 to buy legislation that would give them the funding to control your local mental health services, agencies like Montcalm Care Network have been hard at work building a broader footprint in the community. We’ve done this through new partnerships with schools and law enforcement, with same day scheduling and telehealth visits, and expanded mobile crisis and substance use services. These are just a few ways in which local services have grown to better meet local needs. And best yet, at the end of the day, if you’re not satisfied with your public mental health services, you have local board members and county commissioners who can listen and intervene on your behalf – because we know, local care is the best care.

For more information about accessing mental health services in Montcalm County, visit montcalmcare.net or call 989-831-7520.

Tammy Warner is the executive director of Montcalm Care Network, serving Montcalm County residents.

Thank you for reading Help & Hope.



A MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE GUIDE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MONTCALM CARE NETWORK AND THE DAILY NEWS

How to Combat Seasonal Affective Disorder

The common cold is synonymous with times of year when temperatures dip. When people spend more time indoors, they're more vulnerable to contagious cold viruses. But the common cold is not the only health issue that presents itself most often when the mercury drops.

Seasonal affective disorder, also known as "SAD," affects millions of people every year. The National Institute of Mental Health notes that SAD is a type of depression characterized by its recurrent seasonal pattern. Symptoms of SAD include nearly daily and day-long feelings of depression, changes in appetite or weight and feelings of lower energy, and they can last upwards of four to five months.

Researchers are unsure about the exact cause of SAD, but in most people, its onset is believed to be connected to the reduction in hours of sunlight during the winter. Interestingly, some experts report that around 10 percent of people with SAD get it in the reverse, experiencing symptoms of depression at the onset of summer as opposed to winter.

Despite uncertainty about the causes of SAD, the NIMH notes there are ways to treat the condition. And it might benefit people who have experienced SAD to begin treatment prior to winter. NIMH notes treatments that begin before fall could help to prevent or reduce the depression associated with the condition.

Individuals who suspect they have SAD should relay their concerns to their health care provider, who will then ask patients to fill out a questionnaire to determine if symptoms meet the criteria for SAD. If such a diagnosis is confirmed, individuals may be presented with any of the following treatment options:

Light therapy

The NIMH notes that light therapy has been used to treat SAD since the 1980s. The crux of light therapy is to expose individuals with SAD to bright light every day with the hope that such exposure can serve as a stand-in for natural sunlight. Individuals undergoing light therapy typically begin their day sitting in front of a very bright light box for around 30 to 45 minutes. The boxes filter out potentially harmful UV light, but alternative therapies may be recommended for individuals with certain eye diseases or those taking particular medications .

Psychotherapy

According to the NIMH, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) has been adapted to help treat people with SAD. CBT is a type of talk therapy, and CBT-SAD typically entails two weekly group sessions for six weeks. These sessions focus on replacing negative thoughts related to winter with more positive thoughts. The therapy also tries to help individuals identify and schedule pleasant, engaging indoor or outdoor activities. The NIMH notes that researchers' comparison of CBT-SAD with light therapy found both treatments were effective at improving SAD symptoms.

Medications

Doctors may recommend patients with SAD take medications known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. Various types of depression have been found to disturb serotonin activity, and SAD is no exception. SSRIs have been proven to effectively improve patients' moods, but it's important that individuals discuss the side effects of SSRIs with their physicians prior to taking medication.

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Shaping up for Mental Health

With a new year comes fresh goals and aspirations of shaping up, eating nutritiously, sticking to a daily workout regimen and feeling great. Don't lose sight of those New Year's resolutions now that the first month of this year is behind us. Keeping the momentum going to improve your physical health can set the pace and progress for your wellbeing for the year and for life.

Studies show that physical health can affect and shape emotional and mental health. If you've fallen off the wagon, get back on. Pull that yoga mat and treadmill out. Scratch the potato chips and soda from this week's grocery list.

Physical health is described as the condition of your body as a whole. This includes any illness or disease you may be dealing with, the activity level at which you are able to participate comfortably, patterns of behavior and habits. Physical health plays a major role in our overall wellbeing.

Physical fitness is only a fragment of a person's physical health. Fitness is often determined by athletic abilities. However, there are other aspects to consider, as well. Physical pain affects mood, movement and endurance. Chronic conditions such as cardiac or lung diseases are associated with shortness of breath and fatigue.

These health conditions can limit productivity of your day-to-day tasks or can even make simple conversations difficult. Imagine telling your child that you are physically unable to attend their recitals or telling your significant other that you are too exhausted to go on a date. These limitations can take a toll on a person's emotional and mental wellbeing. Feelings of guilt, sadness, regret, hopelessness and defeat may follow.

Mental health and emotional security is often driven by how a person feels. Joy, productivity, task accomplishment, and close connections with family and friends all foster positive mental health. Endorphins that are released during physical exercise and activity affect your brain and trigger chemical reactions that promote happy feelings. Physical exercise and physical activity are similar and both can improve your mood.

Physical activity is simply moving your body. Physical exercise consists of voluntary movement with an intent to maintain or increase muscle composition. Increasing activity levels above your normal day-to-day baseline doesn't have to be in the form of exercise. You can intentionally park further away in the parking lot and take the stairs instead of the elevator. Creating good habits such as these are a good starting point in your journey to good physical health.

Scheduling exercise on your calendar is a way to hold yourself accountable. Exercise can include many things such as weight lifting, running/walking, yoga, group fitness and other activities that get your heart pumping. However, before engaging in any physical activities, it is best to consult with your physician to determine what is safe for your body and current health status.

When you feel depressed or anxious, exercise is often the furthest from your mind as a way to decrease these emotions. However, studies show that physical activity can decrease these feelings by taking your mind off negative or distracting thoughts. This effect can last even after your workout is completed.

Resetting your mindset with physical activity can help you think clearer and manage stressors more effectively. To keep yourself motivated, start off small and build. You can begin with a simple task such as a one minute plank or wall sit each day. Next month add as many sit ups as you can do in five minutes along with your plank or wall sit. Then add a brisk walk for 10 minutes. The following month strength train for 15 minutes each day. Keep building until you are comfortably

doing 30 to 60 minutes of physical exercise each day. Keep track of how this affects your mental and emotional clarity.

Maintaining a healthy body mass index (BMI) is also an important component of physical and mental health. Stress and inability to cope can lead to binge eating or not eating enough to provide your body with the fuel it needs. Body fat composition is affected 80% by what you eat and 20% by exercise.

Ensuring you are eating foods that are wholesome and nutritious can provide you with the proper energy to fuel your activities. Your primary care provider can assist in finding your ideal caloric intake and help you with food selections to meet your BMI goals. Regular screening exams and physicals can help with early identification of physical and nutritional needs.

As we age, our life duties and desires continue. We go from energetic teens to sleep deprived parents with careers. Then, in a blink of an eye, we are enjoying retirement and playing with grandchildren. Remaining healthy throughout this process is essential to keep up physically and emotionally. We have identified a few of the many benefits of ensuring good physical health and how it greatly affects and supports mental health.



Amber Ryan
NP-C, Sparrow Medical Group
OB/GYN Carson City

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Think Vaping Isn't Harming the Brain Development and Causing Addiction in Our Kids? Think again!

“STUDIES SHOW NICOTINE IS DELIVERED TO THE BRAIN WITHIN 10 SECONDS AND ITS EFFECTS CAN REWIRE THE UNDEVELOPED BRAIN TO BECOME ADDICTED TO NICOTINE AND OTHER DRUGS AT A MUCH QUICKER RATE.”

There is an alarming rise in the number of our kids that vape. Vapes are also known as E-Cigarettes and most contain nicotine.

Did you know that the brain isn't fully developed until around the age of 25 and nicotine has been found to interfere with brain development? Did you know that many of the kids that vape are physically addicted to nicotine? We need to educate ourselves so we can play a role in decreasing this health crisis to save our children.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each time a new memory or skill is created in the developing brain stronger connections called synapses are built between the brain's cells. Research shows nicotine changes the way cells communicate in the frontal lobe, which can disrupt the way brain circuits work and synapses are formed. With the disruptions in normal formation of the brain, we can see problems with learning, attention, memory, concentration, decision-making, impulse-control, and control of emotions. These issues are thought to be long lasting because synapses are not formed appropriately. How will our kids learn to cope and live a healthy adulthood with these parts of the brain harmed?

Nicotine addiction is so strong that it is compared to quitting cocaine



Beth Trefil

*BSN, RN
Healthcare Resource Advocate
MAISD*

or heroin. Studies show nicotine is delivered to the brain within 10 seconds and its effects can rewire the undeveloped brain to become addicted to nicotine and other drugs at a much quicker rate. Nicotine is inhaled, hits the nicotinic receptors in our brain which signal to release dopamine that provides a temporary pleasure feeling. The brain then trains itself to repeat the action when the nicotine starts wearing off to get the pleasure response. This rewires the brain to crave more. As the brain receives nicotine the nicotinic receptors increase, and the desire becomes stronger resulting in addiction.

When someone quits using nicotine, they cut off the pleasure response and stop feeding the receptors. Eventually the number of receptors return to normal but not without withdrawal symptoms. The person will start craving the nicotine and may begin experiencing some of the following symptoms – irritability, restlessness, headaches, fatigue, problems sleeping, anxiousness, feeling sad, trouble concentrating or thinking clearly. The following strategies can help a person successfully make it through withdrawal:

- **Stay hydrated and eat healthy.**
- **Prioritize sleep.**
- **Surround themselves with a support system of friends and family.**
- **Use cessation resources to help prepare for cravings. Many are free for teens.**
- **Sign up for This is Quitting – Text Ditch Vape to 88709.**
- **Sign up at teen.smokefree.gov/quit-vaping or text QUIT to 47848.**
- **Seek professional help.**

Vaping is harmful. Vaping is an addiction that is negatively impacting the way our children interpret and cope with life. As a society, we have a responsibility to help make this change through educating ourselves and our children on detrimental health outcomes associated with vaping. Together, we can change the lives of our children for the better.

For further information on vaping dangers and cessation please contact Beth at btrefil@mmdhd.org.



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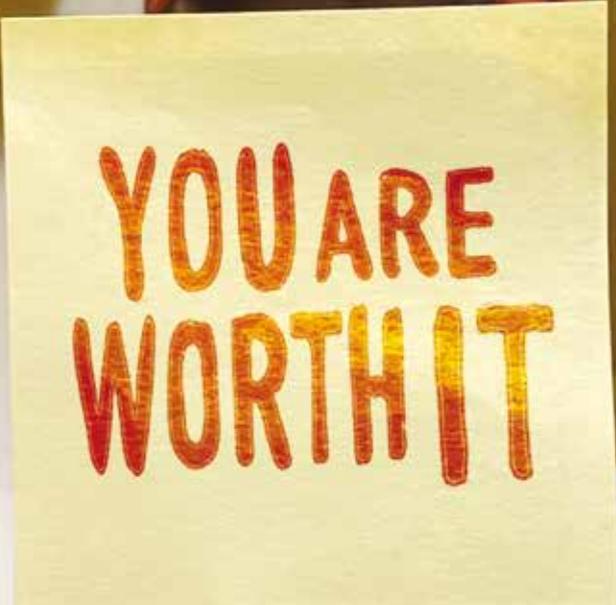
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Giving Yourself Grace: It's Okay to Not Be Okay

The COVID-19 pandemic, along with continued violence in schools and communities, has led to increased awareness of the importance of good mental health and the need for accessible mental health treatment. It has been an incredibly tough three years for students, parents, educators, and the community overall. For many, there has been a feeling of heaviness, as we try to navigate everyday life. This heaviness can be feelings of sadness, loneliness, overwhelm, loss, guilt and/or shame.

How can we take care of ourselves when we are in the midst of taking care of everyone and everything else?

A little self-care goes a long way in maintaining good mental health. While getting a massage and going to the salon can be a part of self-care, effective self-care really is much more than that. Consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. At the base of the triangle are our physiological needs, our most important and basic needs. We cannot live without these needs being met. Physiological needs include sleep, food, water, air, and health.

We often take our physiological needs for granted, particularly when it comes to sleeping and eating. We skip a little here and indulge a bit too much there. Generally, it's not a problem and it all works out at the end of the week. However, under stress, the imbalance grows. Sleep becomes more difficult and our need for it increases. We skip



Tara Allen
Outreach Services Manager
Montcalm Care Network

lunch, trying to get more work done, and grab a candy bar and soda to make up for it. In the end, we feel worse.

Day by Day try to:

- **Get enough sleep.** Sleep allows your brain to store information and process the events of the day. Aim for 7-9 hours with a consistent sleep and wake time.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** Eat at regular intervals and take a lunch break. You will increase your afternoon productivity by doing so. Reduce caffeine intake, especially in the evening.
- **Increase your water intake.** Water assists in flushing stress hormones like cortisol from our bodies. It helps clear our minds and reduce fatigue.
- **Practice mindful breathing.** Look up Conscious Discipline's Pretzel Breathing. The combination of crossing your arms with taking a shorter breath in, paired with a longer breath out tricks your brain into thinking you are calm. It helps both sides of your brain work together, which aids in problem-solving.
- **Schedule an appointment with your healthcare provider.** Scheduling that appointment you've been putting off can help reduce anxiety about your health. Whether it's your annual physical or routine dental cleaning, taking care of your body feels good and can rule out any physical conditions impacting your mental health.
- **Avoid substance use.** Dependence on alcohol, marijuana, sedative or pain medications, and other substances to cope with stressors can lead to further difficulty in functioning.

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WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT:

- Changes (for more than two weeks) in appetite, sleep, energy, memory
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness
- Ongoing feelings of emptiness, sadness, worry
- Loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- If you have thoughts of harming yourself or others

— WHO TO CALL —

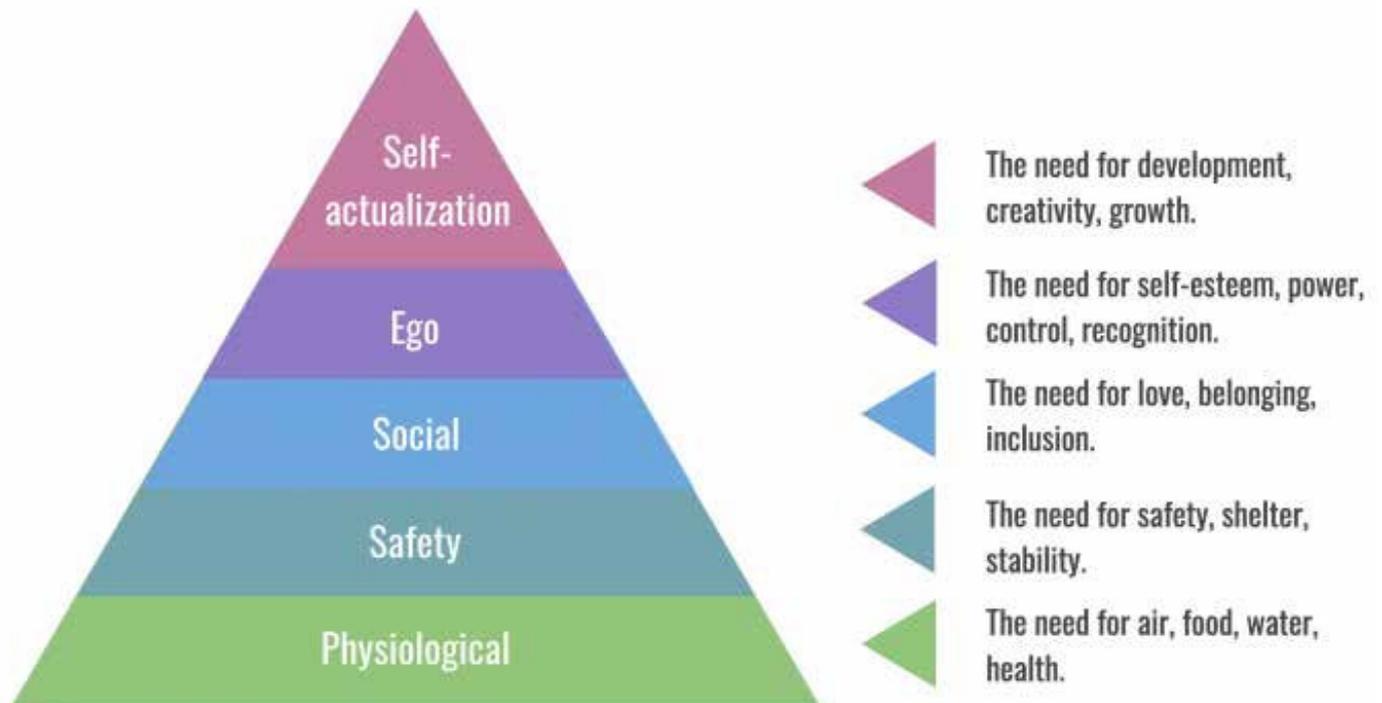
There are several mental health providers in the area, but it can be intimidating to find the right one.

Here are some tips:

- Check with your primary care provider. They may have mental health services available.
- If you're comfortable, ask your friends and family for their recommendations. Perhaps they have had experience with a particular practice.
- Call your insurance company. They can explain your benefits to you and give you a list of providers that accept your insurance.
- Contact your local community mental health agency. As the Community Mental Health provider for Montcalm County, Montcalm Care Network is available to the community 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for crisis intervention and connects people to providers to meet their mental health needs. Call **989-831-7520** or **1-800-377-0974** for assistance.
- Call or text **988** to reach the Suicide and Crisis Hotline to connect to a trained crisis counselor.

- **Get moving.** Simply stretching and sitting up straight can improve breathing. Moving from one environment to another can help leave anxiety behind. Fresh air and sunlight reduce depression. Exercise releases endorphins, helping us feel better.
- **Let it out.** Emotions are not the problem; it's the way we handle them. Whether it's reaching out to a friend, journaling, gardening, or crafting, expressing yourself releases the built-up emotion. Releasing emotions when we experience them keeps them from building and having a negative impact.
- **Let go of perfection.** There is a lot of pressure to do things well, but sometimes it's just important to do them. Don't have a half hour for exercise? Walk to a colleague's desk instead of sending an email. Forgot your healthy lunch? Make better choices at the drive-thru. Every little bit adds up.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Forgiveness, the Silent Robber

When we harbor bitterness, resentment and anger in our hearts it begins to eat away at our physical, mental and spiritual well-being. It is easy to let these vengeful emotions creep in over time as we get hit left and right with offenses, hurt feelings and challenging circumstances. Before you know it you have an ulcer forming in your stomach, a headache that won't go away, cycling thoughts of disgust and betrayal and all hope is lost. Did you know that not dealing with the hurt and pain of your past could be causing so much havoc in your mind, body and soul? Augustine of Hippo is quoted as saying, "Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies."

In therapy, I find myself talking to clients about the need to extend forgiveness. This is such a taboo topic in our world.

It is seen as a weakness to forgive or unnecessary. Some say forgiveness equates to acceptance of the wrong that was done to you. Others go as far to say that if you forgive then you have to let

that person back in your life and fully trust them again. These statements simply aren't true and they strip us of our power to find healing and hope through the gift of extending forgiveness.

We have a choice, we have the power within ourselves to extend forgiveness to our offenders and ourselves.

When we do this we take our power back from bitterness, resentment and anger.

We can have clear hearts, free minds and healthier bodies. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine: "Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk

"STUDIES HAVE FOUND THAT THE ACT OF FORGIVENESS CAN REAP HUGE REWARDS FOR YOUR HEALTH, LOWERING THE RISK OF HEART ATTACK; IMPROVING CHOLESTEROL LEVELS AND SLEEP; REDUCING PAIN, BLOOD PRESSURE, AND LEVELS OF ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND STRESS."

of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress."

If you find yourself in need to forgive others, use these three tips to find freedom:

- **Make the choice.** Make the choice in your heart and mind to take your power back and forgive your offender. The choice is **YOURS** to make.
- **Get it out.** Journal the name, the offense that occurred, and all the emotions that you have towards this act of wrongdoing.
- **Release the offense and the offender.** Let go of the wrongs you are holding onto so tightly. Take your hand, make a tight fist and then say out loud "I choose to forgive (insert name) for (insert offense). I let go of (insert emotions) that I have been holding on to all this time. As you say this release your fist as a physical representation of letting this go.

If you need further help processing forgiveness reach out to a local mental health professional and they can help you take your power back where bitterness, resentment and anger have been robbing you.



Kara Savage
Executive Director & Therapist
Community Hope Christian
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Tips To Relieve Stress & Anxiety Naturally

Stress impacts us all at one time or another. When the stress goes unmanaged it can lead to anxiety in a variety of forms. Anxiety affects an estimated 31% of the U.S. population during their lifetimes and is often accompanied by other co-occurring disorders. These conditions include OCD, PTSD, depression, fibromyalgia, insomnia, and substance abuse disorders just to name a few. While it is estimated that over 60% of anxiety disorders go untreated, there are natural ways to alleviate stress and anxiety that can fit into any lifestyle.



Shawnee Bonner
RPh, Green Medicine Shop

These tips can help you manage your stress and relieve anxiety symptoms without the side effects from prescription medications and can be used alongside other treatments to help improve the effectiveness and keep you feeling calm. Pick and choose what works for you or try them all and get on the fast track to wellness.

- **Meditation & Mindfulness.** Research shows that just 30 minutes a day can alleviate anxiety and depression symptoms. If you're not sure where to start, there are apps for your phone and YouTube videos that do a great job guiding you along.
- **Exercise & Yoga.** This can be great for your overall physical and mental health as well as helping with stress and anxiety. Staying active can improve your brain chemistry to elevate happy neurochemicals like serotonin and endocannabinoids that help with focus and keep you calm. The breathwork involved in yoga can also



help stimulate your vagus nerve and add another boost to soothe anxiety symptoms.

- **CBD & CBG.** Many studies have shown that CBD can improve mood, sleep and quality of life, but you may not be as familiar with CBG which is another cannabinoid from the cannabis plant that offers neuroprotective, anti-inflammatory, anti-depressant and anti-anxiety properties. They can be used together or individually to help manage anxiety symptoms and offer advantages over traditional medications. Unlike many prescription medicines, this natural duo doesn't cause drowsiness, cognitive side effects, or physical dependence and has a faster onset of action. A recent Harvard study showed clinically significant treatment responses in just 1 to 3 weeks of low doses of CBD. Full spectrum cannabinoid products containing CBD with CBG and terpenes from the plant can offer increased efficacy and faster action due to the 'entourage effect'. Each of these plant chemicals can be effective alone, but when used together the synergistic effect increased their effectiveness in improving anxiety symptoms and relieving pain. CBD and CBG do not impair your cognitive function and may help increase focus and clarity while reducing the impact of stress and anxiety. While these products are considered safer than aspirin, you should always talk to your doctor or pharmacist to determine the best dose and timing before starting anything new with other medications or medical conditions. Always remember that not all CBD is created equal and should only be made with U.S. grown hemp by reputable sources to verify it is contaminate free and has been processed safely.
- **Aromatherapy.** This natural healing method has been used for thousands of years all over the world to promote wellness of the mind and body. The use of essential oils can enhance both physical and emotional health by helping you relax, sleep and boosting your mood. There are many essential oils that are believed to relieve anxiety, but some of the favorites are: lavender, ylang ylang, chamomile, and bergamot. They can be used alone or in blends via diffuser, roll on, or inhalers to help inspire calmness - plus they smell great!

Stress is a typical part of living in the world today, and some is helpful to keep us motivated and organized. When stress becomes chronic and impacts quality of life try these natural solutions to take control of your self-care, or better yet, use them to keep anxiety at bay and reduce your risk of other health complications.

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False Myths About Aging

Aging can be intimidating. Television, billboards, and internet popups bombard us hourly with images of youth. Birthday cards mock people at 40, 50, 60 - focusing on hair loss, weight gain, sagging body parts, and excremental (mis)functions. Over-the-hill implies that life henceforth is all downhill. Research shows that life is less of an upside-down bell shape and more of a line projecting upward like a staircase. Granted, physically there can be a decline in physical response time and mental processing is sometimes slower. However, when it comes to wisdom, social connections, knowledge, and spirituality, these aspects of life continue to improve.

The culture has popularized false myths about aging (fragility, weakness, helplessness). So let's take a look at what the National Institute on Aging says about aging.

Myth One: Depression and loneliness are normal among older adults. In fact, all the research demonstrates that older adults are less likely to feel depressed. In your 20s and 30s, you were under constant pressures - marriage, mortgage, the first job, kids, creating your own personality. You had reasons to feel stressed. As we age, we have more and more deaths among friends and family. It can be easy to mistake grief for depression. Most older adults have developed life-affirming relationships with family and friends. They learned how to manage stress and depression in their youth.

Myth Two: The older you get, the less sleep you need. No. Older adults need the identical amount of sleep - 7 to 9 hours - as everyone else (except babies). Babies have the right approach. Sleep makes you healthy.



Sue Ellen Pabst

*LCSW, ACSW
Owner Transitions: Counseling Services*

Myth Three: Older adults can't learn anything new. Nonsense. Older adults may find some difficulty remembering names, multitasking, and maintaining attention.

Studies show that older adults possess larger vocabularies and greater insight into word meaning. Similarly, older adults own a lifetime of experience and knowledge. They apply past experience - their perceptions of new problem situations are enhanced by their lives. Older adults may not grasp new concepts as quickly as younger. However, given a bit more time, older adults come to the same level of knowledge.

Myth Four: Dementia is part of aging. No, Alzheimer's - or any form of dementia - are not the natural process of aging. With any disease, the chances of suffering with dementia increase as we age. Maybe they forget car keys, but at 45, did you always remember where you left the car in the Meijer parking lot? When you discover yourself in the kitchen without a clue, laugh at yourself. Call friends to tell the story. (And, while talking, casually mention you've lost your cell phone. Wait for the reaction.)

Myth Five: Older people should not exercise; they might get hurt. Evidence shows that those who sit most of the day and don't move are more likely to fall into poor health and need to live in a dependent living environment. Moving provides physical, emotional, and mental benefits.

Jamie Lee Curtis remarked, "This word 'anti-aging' has to be struck. I am pro-aging. I want to age with intelligence, and grace, and dignity, and verve, and energy. I don't want to hide from it. . . . I'm not denying what I look like, of course, I've seen what I look like. I am trying to live in acceptance."

Accept your wrinkles. They are the road maps of your life experiences. Embrace your age, it is the marker of accumulated wisdom.

Transitions: Autism Services

www.TransitionsAS.com

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"LIFE CAN ONLY BE UNDERSTOOD BACKWARDS;
BUT MUST BE LIVED FORWARDS."

SØREN KIERKEGAARD



Fun Ways for Seniors to Stay Active

Physical activity is an important component of overall health. Health experts advise that exercise can increase lean body mass, prevent conditions like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, improve balance, and positively affect mental health/cognition. Exercise also can foster socialization with others, helping people overcome boredom and isolation.

As individuals get older, they may not be able to participate in all of the activities they enjoyed as youths, but that doesn't mean older adults must resign themselves to sedentary lifestyles. There are plenty of entertaining ways to remain physically active that can accommodate any limitations a person may have. Explore these methods for staying active.

Explore community offerings

Community senior centers, local gyms and organizations such as The Gathering Place in Greenville often fill calendars with a vast array of activities, some of which can include physical activities. Hikes, volunteer opportunities, and other activities all serve as entertaining ways to get out and about while meeting some fitness goals.

Garden or do yard work

The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotions says



adults should get 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. Raking leaves, mowing the lawn, digging in flower beds, trimming bushes, and other outdoor tasks could help a person meet this quota in a way that doesn't seem like exercise at all.

Play games with grandchildren

Little kids may inspire older adults to be more active, as it can be difficult to keep up with those youngsters. Take infants or toddlers for walks or push them in strollers. Attach a child seat or towing carriage to a bicycle and ride around the neighborhood. Play games that require movement, such as hide-and-seek or Marco

Polo in the pool. If it's snowing, have a snowball fight or make a snowman in the yard.

Take up a new hobby

Find hobbies that incorporate physical activity. Perhaps learning to salsa dance or taking Zumba® will be fun? Pickleball has caught on in our community, too. The sport is a mix of tennis, racquetball and badminton that caters to all ages. Joining a bowling team is another way to get active and meet new people.

Physical activity is important at any age. Seniors can explore fun ways to stay in shape and be active to reap all the benefits of exercise.



SUPPORT

CONNECT

COPE

MICHIGAN STAY WELL COUNSELING

1-888-535-6736 and press "8"

TALK TO A STAY WELL COUNSELOR FOR FREE | CONFIDENTIAL HELP 24/7

- Talking to a counselor can help you cope with feelings about how COVID-19 is impacting your life, job and routines.

MICHIGAN STAY WELL RESOURCES

Visit Michigan.gov/StayWell for helpful resources, such as:

- Videos with coping tips.
- Brochures and guides for families, children, teens, older adults, health care workers, and others – some in a variety of languages.
- A list of hotlines and text lines for those in emotional crisis.

YOUR LOCAL CRISIS LINES ARE:

Montcalm Care Network 800-377-0974
The Right Door for Hope, Recovery and Wellness
888-527-1790

STAY WELL
Michigan.gov/StayWell

IF YOU ARE DISTRESSED, REMEMBER – YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

Eating Disorders: Why, What, and Where to get Help

Why should I be concerned about eating disorders?

Since COVID-19, disordered eating has been on the rise, particularly in young people. Some Michigan hospitals saw their admissions double in 2020. There are many reasons people develop eating disorders. Some of the more common ones include having a family history of addictions, being bullied (especially “fat” shaming), perfectionism and an attempt to have control over one’s life. During COVID-19, adolescents were often home alone, isolated from friends and family. Routines were disrupted and skipping meals could go unnoticed. Additionally, adolescents had more time to focus on themselves, while also obsessing over their Zoom appearance. Ninety percent of hospital admissions for eating disorders were females, with an average age of 15.



Cindy Bergakker
*School-Based Outreach Specialist
Montcalm Care Network*

What is an eating disorder?

An eating disorder, or disordered eating, is when a person is clinically diagnosed by a medical doctor or a licensed therapist for having an eating issue. There are several types of eating disorders, but all of them are dangerous. In fact, the National Association of Anorexia

Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD) reports that “eating disorders are among the deadliest mental illnesses and there are 10,200 deaths each year as a direct result of an eating disorder (that’s one every 52 minutes)”. In America, the ANAD reports that an estimated 9% of the population will have an eating disorder in their lifetime and a staggering 26% will attempt suicide.

There are many types of eating disorders, but two are commonly known. Anorexia Nervosa is the most severe of all the eating disorders and the deadliest. A person with this disorder restricts food and may over-exercise and use other purging behaviors. Symptoms can include an intense fear of gaining weight, losing weight rapidly and staying underweight, often trying to hide how they look to others by wearing baggy clothing. They also usually refuse to admit they have a low body weight and women often develop a lapse in their menstruation.

These behaviors can lead to heart damage or other heart threatening conditions due to stress on the cardiovascular system. Our brains need nutrition to function and so much of our intake feeds the brain to keep it functioning properly. A lack of nutrients to the brain can cause seizures, muscle cramps, difficulties concentrating, confusion, fainting and dizziness. Other medical afflictions can be stomach pain and bloating, nausea and vomiting, blood sugar fluctuations, blocked intestines, bacterial infections, constipation, and weakened muscles of the intestines for elimination, which can lead to bowel obstruction. A person with anorexia nervosa may also have a preoccupation with weight, shape, and appearance.

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IS IMPORTANT TO US!

We are here to help with Mental Health, Substance Use and Autism Services!

Serving: Medicaid, Medicare, Healthy Michigan Plan, Uninsured and Underinsured and Autism Services.

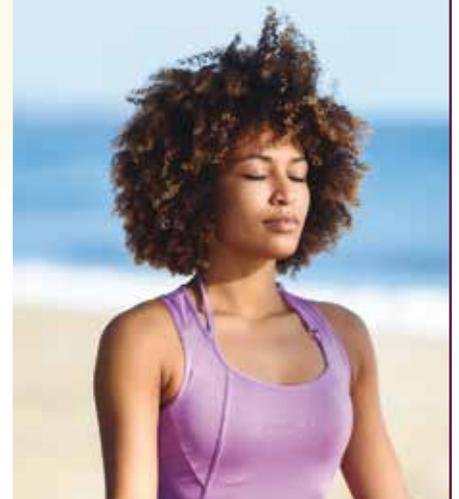
FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS OF IONIA COUNTY

Call: 616-527-1790 | Crisis Line: 888-527-1790

Visit: www.rightdoor.org

Locations in: Ionia, Belding and Portland

THE right DOOR
for hope, recovery and wellness



Bulimia Nervosa is the second most common eating disorder. It occurs when a person repeatedly binges on large amounts of food and then forces themselves to throw up, over exercise or use diet pills and/or laxatives to avoid gaining weight. This disorder can cause teeth to rot due to the acid from the stomach and can damage the gums. Vomiting can wear down the esophagus and cause it to rupture, creating a life-threatening emergency. Vomiting also can cause sore throats and a hoarse voice. The person can have more issues with acid reflux and ulcers. It is important to note that binge eating can cause the stomach to rupture and cause a life-threatening emergency. Abusing laxatives can damage nerve endings and leave the body dependent on laxatives to have a bowel movement. There are many more medical concerns with any eating disorder that it would take pages to list them all!

Getting Help:

If a person is already at very low weight, they may need to go to a psychiatric hospital or residential facility that has a medical and mental health team to surround them for the best results. It is normal for the person to deny they have a problem, but they can die from an eating disorder so they must get treatment. There

are psychiatric hospitals that specialize in eating disorders in and around Grand Rapids, as well as residential facilities in neighboring states.

Once an eating disorder has been diagnosed, it is very important to find and stay with a professional team to support, educate and help monitor the health of the person. There are doctors who specialize in eating disorders, as well as therapists and nutritionists. Recovery is possible but it is a long process and the person with the eating disorder will need the support of family and friends, who should also become educated on how to help. Avoid rationalizing their disordered eating behaviors. Openly share your thoughts and concerns with the person.

Once a person has stabilized for about six months, they are in the maintenance stage. During this time, they need to continue to practice new ways of thinking, with healthy self-care, and using coping skills. It will be important that they revisit potential triggers to prevent relapse. Establishing new interests and learning to live their life in a meaningful way will help them to not relapse and stay healthy.

If you are concerned you or your child may have an eating disorder, talk to your doctor. Montcalm Care Network can also assist in finding treatment providers. Call **989.831.7520** for assistance.

HOW TO HELP A PERSON IN RECOVERY:

- If the person is under the age of 18, insist they receive professional help from a qualified eating disorder specialist.
- Be a good listener and do not try to fix the problem yourself. Find your own support from friends and family.
- Identify your role in the recovery, explore your own thoughts about food, weight, shape and appearance.
- Ask the person and their treatment team how you can support them best.
- Follow the treatment team's recommendations and remove triggers from the environment (No diet foods, scales, and stress).
- Be warm and caring but determined with boundaries, rules, and guidelines while reinforcing positive changes without focusing on weight, shape or appearance.

Offering help and hope throughout Montcalm County.

**We can help
build a strong
community
together.**

*Visit gacfmi.org or
call 616.754.2640*



225 N. Lafayette, Greenville, MI 48838
alison@gacfmi.org | laura@gacfmi.org
kristen@gacfmi.org | sally@gacfmi.org

Managing Grief and Loss

Grief, Loss, and Trauma often go hand in hand. Grief is defined by Merriam-Webster as the “deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement”. Similarly, loss is defined as “the act or fact of being unable to keep or maintain something or someone”. Lastly, in the context of this article, trauma is “a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury”. It is not uncommon for a new loss to bring forth feelings related to a past loss, even if the survivor was not close to the person that recently died or the loss is related to employment, loss of status, illness, or other factor. The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of a loss that impacted so many of us on so many different levels, yet it was difficult to define as a loss. Trauma is like a wild card that shuffles the deck of grief, increasing the intensity. There are different types of trauma and what is traumatic to one person may not be to another. Past trauma can complicate grief and loss.



Tara Allen
Outreach Services Manager
Montcalm Care Network

Stages of Grief:

There are five stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Not everyone goes through all of the stages and certainly not in the same order. Denying that the loss has occurred allows time for the brain to process what has happened. It is not uncommon for a grieving person to be angry with the person who has died or others around them. Bargaining occurs in an attempt to bring the person back. Depression or feelings of sadness is common and can lead to the need for intervention. Acceptance is difficult and can depend on the circumstances surrounding the loss. Not everyone is

able to accept the situation. There is no one right way to grieve.

How to Cope:

During times of stress, routines become even more important - especially mealtime and sleep routines.

- Eat small, nourishing meals throughout the day versus meals with high sugar and caloric intake.
- Give yourself permission to say “no”. Do what you can and let the unimportant things go for now.
- Talk to family and friends about your loved one. Sharing memories helps.
- Take a movement break. Moving both sides of the body helps the brain get “unstuck”.
- Take prescription medication as prescribed, especially when it comes to medications for sleep, pain, and anxiety.
- Avoid using alcohol, marijuana, or other substances to cope or feel “normal”.

When does grief become a problem?

There is no timeline for grief. Much depends on the relationship with the person who is gone and the circumstances of the loss. For example, the loss of a close friend to a debilitating illness may not cause as much distress as the loss of a child in a tragic accident. Grief and loss become a problem when they consistently impact the survivor’s ability to function in their everyday life.

Areas of functioning that are considered are: appetite, sleep, mood, thinking, energy, hygiene, relationships, and activities of daily living (employment, parenting, school, budgeting, etc.) Certainly, grief and loss impact all of those areas in the short term. However, changes in appetite that lead to significant weight loss/gain, inability to go to work leading to job loss, inability to get out of bed or not being able to fall asleep are examples of grief and loss impacting functioning long term and are indicators that help is needed.

In addition, treatment is recommended

when you are unable to stop using alcohol, marijuana, anxiety or pain medication (beyond what is prescribed), or other substances. Montcalm Care Network distributes Narcan to the community upon request.

If thoughts of harming oneself or others are present, call Montcalm Care Network’s crisis line at 989-831-7520 or 1-800-377-0974. If urges to harm oneself or others are uncontrollable, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Where to go for help:

As the Community Mental Health provider for Montcalm County, Montcalm Care Network is available to the community 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for crisis intervention and it connects people to providers to meet their mental health needs. Call **989-831-7520** or **1-800-377-0974** for assistance.

Call or text **988** to reach the Suicide and Crisis Hotline to connect to a trained crisis counselor.

In addition to school counselors and school social workers, school-based mental health providers are in local school districts through the 31n partnership between Montcalm Area Intermediate School District and Montcalm Care Network. They are available for crisis intervention in addition to brief individual and group intervention addressing trauma, depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns.

For some people, an appointment with their primary care provider may be needed to assess for any health concerns and to determine whether medication may be needed, such as an anti-depressant.

You can find grief support groups here: <https://www.griefshare.org/findagroup>. Additional information related to traumatic grief is available at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network <https://www.nctsn.org/> as well as Montcalm Care Network’s trauma page at <https://montcalmcare.net/>.

CHILDREN AND LOSS:

Children experience emotions, just like adults. However, children often do not have the vocabulary to express how they are feeling and they respond with behaviors instead. Just because a child doesn’t talk about it, doesn’t mean that the loss is not felt. Children are susceptible to multiple losses through separation/divorce of parents, abandonment, incarceration, and death. As a caregiver of a child experiencing loss:

- **Be honest with them.** Saying “Mom will be back,” when you know that she will not creates mistrust and can lead to separation anxiety. Saying “Grandma is sleeping” creates a fear of falling asleep. Use words that describe what happened, while being sensitive to the child’s development. For example: “Mommy was in an accident and died” or “Grandma was really sick.”
- **Don’t automatically assume the child should or should not be involved in burial rituals.** It is an opportunity for the child to say goodbye and can help them understand the finality of what has occurred. For others, it may be scary and overwhelming.
- **Listen when the child wants to talk about the loss.** Talking about positive memories of a loved one can be healing. Validating the child’s emotions lets them know they are valued and their emotions are not bad or wrong.
- **Expect that the child may regress** in sleep, using the bathroom, speech, or behavior. Do not punish; instead provide nurturing and clear expectations.
- **Continue to be available to the child.** Help them identify five people they can go to for help.

WARNING SIGNS FOR DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

Did you know that 1/3 of all depressed people attempt suicide and that suicide is the 3rd leading cause of DEATH among 10-24 year olds?

If someone you know is suffering five or more of these symptoms for over a two-week period of time, he/she may be suffering from **DEPRESSION**.

CONSULT A PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY!



Inspire  Persevere  Succeed

IS YOUR CHILD, TEEN, OR LOVED ONE EXPERIENCING ANY OF THESE SIGNS?

- Feeling sad
- Change of appetite
- Loss of interest in activities
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Energy loss or fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling helpless and hopeless
- Risk-taking behavior
- Extreme withdrawal from friends & family
- Giving away favorite possessions
- Neglecting school work
- Stomach aches, headaches

**NATIONAL SUICIDE HOTLINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

The Power of One Caring Adult

Motivational speaker and best-selling author Josh Shipp teaches, "Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story." I believe this wholeheartedly and from my professional role as Director for the Montcalm Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program I am privileged to witness this incredible dynamic between child in need and supportive adult play out time after time. It's powerful and life affirming to walk alongside volunteers and watch the positive change caring hearts can make in our community.



Jamie Gorby
Montcalm Program Coordinator
CASA

In our work with the CASA program, we assign volunteers to children who have been abused and neglected and removed from their homes, through no fault of their own. Despite being disregarded and mistreated the vast majority of kids we work with end up persevering and thriving. They often end up teaching us, the adults and professionals assigned to their cases, a powerful lesson in resilience. So many times, we witness them regaining their power and confidence and proving to us the future can be a better and more hopeful place despite challenges.

What helps these kids rise up instead of becoming an unfortunate statistic? I firmly believe it's the introduction of one caring adult into their life during a very difficult time. An adult who shows up and who puts in the effort. Someone who works to make sure a child feels important, smart, worthy, capable, and loved. How many times in our own lives have we felt the power of just one person who listened and believed in us? Can you imagine your life without that person?



Montcalm CASA

CASA Volunteers Needed

The Montcalm Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program is seeking volunteers to serve as advocates for abused and neglected children in court. CASA volunteers receive specialized training and direction from program staff.

**Apply now to become a CASA Volunteer
or CASA Advisory Board Member.**

Make a lifelong difference for an abused child.

**To find the application please visit www.montcalmcasa.org
call the office at (989) 831-3561 or
email montcalmcasa@8cap.org**



“A CHILD WHO HAS HEARD AND FELT THEIR OWN POTENTIAL IN THE WORDS AND ACTION OF THE VOLUNTEER AND LITTLE BY LITTLE THEY START TO BELIEVE IT”

We may not have understood it for what it was at the time but having someone believe in you can change the way you think, empower you, and give you strength. It can alter who you are.

Imagine the difference we could make in our community if we could spread the power of one to more children and even more adult people in need of support in our community. At first it may seem like a daunting and impossible task, especially with busy schedules. If you do not know how to connect with people in need, it's really not as difficult as it may seem. Who do you know that needs some extra support? Can you identify just one person? If not, there are so many organizations out there to help you connect with someone who needs some help. The CASA program, the Senior Companion/ Foster Grandparent program, Big Brothers/Big Sisters local chapter, Montcalm Area Reading Council, just to name a few. Once you identify the way you want to be involved it just takes showing up. Consistently and intentionally invest time with that person. Do for ONE person— what you wish you could do for ALL people.

I would urge you to not get discouraged and as Josh Shipp teaches, “kids spell TRUST like T-I-M-E.” Don't we all? Time and continued effort will eventually result in a child who begins to see themselves through the eyes of the volunteer. A child who has heard and felt their own potential in the words and actions of a volunteer will, little by little, start to believe it. It's the best, most rewarding feeling in the world to be a true encourager. Often our CASA volunteers tell me they feel like they've been given so much more than they could have ever imagined when they started their journey. They have a hard time describing the tremendous amount of joy they have found in their own lives through the opportunity of helping others.

YOU can be that one caring adult for someone and just imagine how that can grow. Positive support can alter life for the person you are helping and for all of us, because we are all better off when people go forward in the world believing they are capable and loved.



NATIONAL
SUICIDE
PREVENTION
LIFELINE
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.**



WORKING TOGETHER TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE WHOLE CHILD.

The Greenville Public Schools Staff and Board of Education

Please contact your child's school for available support for student mental health concerns.

Social Work, Counseling and other services available.

- Baldwin Heights: 616.754.3643
- Cedar Crest: 616.754.3641
- Lincoln Heights: 616.754.9167
- Walnut Hills: 616.754.3688
- Greenville Middle School: 616.754.9361
- Greenville High School: 616.754.3681

THERE IS UNITY IN OUR COMMUNITY!



Massage and Mental Health

“REGULAR MASSAGE WORK MAY ALSO BENEFIT OUR PHYSICAL HEALTH, WHICH IN TURN WILL AFFECT OUR MENTAL HEALTH.”

When we think of massage, we picture laying on a warm table, listening to soft music and having an hour of relaxation at the hands of a skilled massage therapist. Sometimes, we get a massage because we're experiencing muscle soreness or maybe we've had an injury and need to have some professional massage work done to help in recovery. But did you know that massage work can also be beneficial for our mental health?

Massage can be very beneficial for anxiety. Maybe you have a high stress job that is keeping your neck and shoulders tense or giving you headaches or your stress levels are so high, you have problems focusing on the tasks at hand. Massage therapy can be a highly effective way to reduce stress and relieve anxiety. When you are laying on the massage table, you don't have to think about your job or your stress or issues that may be plaguing you, and the increase in blood flow will help your brain work better. Regular massage work also can help to reduce cortisol levels and balance our feel-good hormones.

Massage is also very beneficial for depression. Depression can be very isolating, as it often leads to disengaging with family and friends. Regular massage work can help increase serotonin and dopamine levels, the feel-good hormones that are involved in depression. Massage also adds in the element of human touch, in a safe way, which helps to establish trust with another person and helps with those feelings of isolation.

Seniors, or person's that live alone, or are in an abusive relationship, can benefit from regular massage work, as well. Maybe they don't have someone to discuss things with, or they have a spouse that



Kathie Graves

LMT, CMLT, CNHP
Owner

Holistic Massage and Wellness, LLC.

doesn't talk much about things that are bothering them. For some, massage therapy provides a safe, non-judgmental space to allow a person to open up about their feelings or concerns. Being face down on a massage table, behind closed doors, allows a measure of safety and privacy to talk about things that may be bothering them and by adding in that element of human touch, we can establish that human connection that we crave.

Regular massage work may also benefit our physical health, which in turn will affect our mental health. Massage therapy can lower heart rate and blood pressure, increase circulation throughout our body, boost energy levels and help us sleep better. Regular massage work can also help with chronic pain, osteoporosis, arthritis, and persons undergoing chemotherapy.

The next time you book a massage, remember that you are not only doing it for your physical health, but you are doing it for your mental health as well!

Holistic Massage and Wellness LLC

Your Path To Wellness Begins Here

We offer a complete line of holistic services, under one roof, for your health and wellness needs.

Massage Therapy, Naturopathic Services

Reflexology, Reiki, Aromatherapy

Doula Services, Herbal Teas

Coming Soon: Herbal Medicine and Bulk Herbs

Check out our website at holisticmassagewellness.com or visit us on Facebook!
We look forward to getting you back on your path to health and wellness.

The Impact of Reading on Personal Health

Books transport people to different times, provide a sense of escapism and introduce readers to different schools of thought. Individuals may read for pleasure and/or to expand their intellectual horizons. Reading also may help improve mental and physical health.

Reduces stress

Immersing yourself in a story requires focus and concentration. Research has shown it took just six minutes of reading for study participants to experience slower heart rates and reduced muscle tension. Stress is one of the biggest threats to overall health, as the stress hormone cortisol can lead to inflammation in the body that may impede the immune system, according to Piedmont Health. Finding ways to reduce stress, including through activities like reading, is a win for anyone who wants to improve his or her health.

Impacts longevity

One study found that reading exerts its influence on longevity by strengthening the mind. Reading positively impacts the way the brain creates synapses, optimizing neurological function. It also expands vocabulary, and helps with memory.

Changes the brain

Reading involves a complex system of signaling and networking in the brain. As one's ability to read matures, these networks become stronger and more sophisticated. MRI scans found that brain connectivity increased throughout studied reading periods and for days afterward.

Increases empathy

Through literary fiction, readers are exposed to the situations, feelings and beliefs of others. This can help a person develop a greater ability to empathize with others.

Helps improve sleep

Reading is an effective way to wind down and relax before going to bed. It can be a positive nighttime ritual, provided one reads a paper book or utilizes an e-reader that is not backlit, as bright lights from digital devices may hinder sleep quality. In fact, doctors at the Mayo Clinic often suggest reading as part of a regular sleep routine.

Reduces depressive feelings

Individuals diagnosed with depression may feel isolated and estranged from other people. Books may reduce those feelings by helping a person temporarily escape his or her world into another. Also, books can serve as a common ground through which conversations over shared interests can begin with others.

Reading has many positive health benefits, which is why resolving to read more can be beneficial.

Spiritual Peace

Our lives can sometimes be overwhelmed with busy schedules, financial issues, family problems and any number of other stresses that cause us to become down and depressed. Life is no longer enjoyable and we can't seem to find peace with anything in our lives. During these times, the issues that plague us seem to be so big and so undefeatable that we begin to lose hope that we will ever feel good again.

We are told by people around us that we need to get our heads right. We need to get our minds focused on the right things. Others tell us that we need to go out and exercise. By strengthening our bodies, it will help improve our state of mind. We sometimes believe that by getting our minds and body in harmony, our mental issues will simply disappear. Even when we do those things, we still struggle to find peace and contentment in our lives. Trust me, I know how it feels. I have felt the same way. Not having any answers to the questions and sometimes not even knowing what the questions are. I have, however, found that when I add spiritual strength and peace into my life, I can better cope with the obstacles and challenges that life throws at us.

If we only focus on improving our mind and body - which are both very important - without improving our spirit, our lives will be like a three-legged stool that is missing one leg. It is impossible for that stool to work correctly unless it has all three legs. We need all the legs attached to make the stool solid, secure and able to hold our weight. Growing in our relationship with God and being in connection with those who believe in Jesus Christ, helps to guide our spirit towards peace even when life seems out of control. The Gospel of John tells us in chapter 16 verse 33: "I (Jesus) have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will

**"WHEN SOMEONE FINDS SPIRITUAL PEACE,
IT PUTS A WHOLE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE
ON THE TRIALS THAT WE FACE."**

have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

When someone finds spiritual peace, it puts a whole different perspective on the trials that we face. We began to understand that regardless of our situation, there is

always hope for a better tomorrow. It is in that hope that we can find our stress reduced and the mental pressures of life relieved. Christian author Hal Lindsey says this, "Man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air... but only for one second without hope."

Hope is the key to a peaceful and joy filled life. Spiritual strength and contentment come with intentional focus and growth. If you are struggling with life's challenges and feel overwhelmed with what is going on in your world, I encourage you to find some time to nurture your spirit and grow in your relationship Christ. There are many wonderful churches in our area that would be able to help you and help balance your three-legged stool.



Ed Milam

Senior Pastor
First Congregational Church
of Greenville

"The Lord gives strength to his people, and the Lord blesses his people with peace."
~ Psalm 29:11

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Located at the corner of Cass & Clay Streets | Visit us at firstccog.org
or on Facebook

Parenting Without Shame

Much of the way we parent comes from how we ourselves were parented. What can make parenting challenging is changing negative patterns of how we were parented and developing more positive strategies for discipline.

We all make parenting mistakes and we may feel shame about them. During the past three years, parents have been under even more pressure to perform - at work, at home, in education - all while trying to keep the family healthy mentally and physically. It has been exhausting. At the same time our children need us, we are trying to keep ourselves afloat. It can be easy to slip into thoughts of self-doubt and shame. Unchecked, that can lead to shaming our children, especially if that was how we were parented.

Over the years we have all witnessed a caregiver shaming children on social media or in person. This type of reprimand could seem effective at first, yet it can cause lasting and long-term problems with shaping the unwanted behavior. Furthermore, it can have a serious effect on the child's mental wellness, perception of themselves, and the parent-child relationship.

What does shaming look like?

The following are examples:

- Deliberately making a child feel bad about themselves as a person, rather than focusing on the actual behavior you're trying to change.
- Taking what should be a private conversation about behavior or consequences and making it known to others by sharing it with friends, family, or on social media.
- Stating embarrassing or even revealing stories about the child, attempting to manipulate their attitude or behavior.

Unfortunately, these techniques can seem to work at first, but shaming your child will quickly have an adverse effect. While parents have probably used shame for many years, adding the reach of social media makes it more dangerous than ever before. Not only do you lose significant relational equity, but shaming children in public or online also breaks down trust, self-esteem, and mental wellness. At the same time, shaming discourages your child's motivation to engage in the positive behaviors you're trying to encourage.

Shaming children doesn't work because shame tends to be a feeling that does not just go away. It often lasts longer than you realize or intend. So while it may seem on the surface like parents who shame their kids online may initially get results, be mindful that this approach to parenting actually damages what you're working hard to create: your long-term relationship with the child and their perception of themselves.

Avoid using shaming phrases such as:

- "You're such a bad kid." This is an accusation that doesn't help your child understand what they've done wrong or need to change.
- "I'm so tired of dealing with you." Stop this sentence with "I'm so tired." Period. Then try to take a break and get some rest. A fresh perspective will help you address problems you're experiencing with your child without destroying their self-esteem or your relationship.

Positive ways to influence your child's behavior without shame:

- "Tell me what happened." Take some time to listen to your child before you respond.

"IF YOU'VE SHAMED YOUR CHILD, THEY NEED TO HEAR YOU GENUINELY APOLOGIZE AND COMMUNICATE CLEARLY, GIVING ASSURANCE THAT YOU WILL WORK TO NOT SHAME THEM."



Shannan Kooistra
Outreach Connections Specialist
MSW Intern- Montcalm Care Network

- "What could you have done differently?" Ideally you want your child to name the alternatives that might have been more effective with the situation. In this moment, it's important for you to encourage positive ideas. The idea is to empower your child with strategies for future situations.

- "How can I help?" This is often a missed opportunity, but sends your child a powerful message. This will help your child to hear you make a

genuine offer to work with them toward a solution with their situation.

If you've shamed your child, they need to hear you genuinely apologize and communicate clearly, giving assurance that you will work to not shame them. A genuine apology will have a restorative effect on your relationship with your child so that you can begin to strengthen your connection. A restored and stronger connection will be the best influence on positive behavior.

Shaming yourself can be just as detrimental to your relationship with your child. If you find yourself doing so, remember that being present is more important than being perfect. There is no perfect caregiver, so part of this relationship depends on the concept of rupture and repair. There will be times the caregiver is unavailable, either emotionally or physically, and the child will be left to cry or with an unmet need (rupture). What is important is the ability to reconnect once this has happened (repair).

When you start to feel shame as a caregiver:

- **Take a break.** Talk with a friend, do something you enjoy.
- **Use positive self-talk.** If you find yourself talking negatively about yourself, remind yourself of 4 positive things about yourself or that happened that day.
- **Remind yourself you are doing the best you can in that moment.** When we know better, we do better.
- **Consider therapy for yourself and/or your child.** Therapists trained in Infant Mental Health and family therapy can help families stop harmful parenting patterns.



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SIX STEPS TO BETTER MENTAL HEALTH:

- **Stay Connected:** Keep in touch with family and friends.
- **Manage Stress:** Take time each day to digitally unplug, connect with yourself.
- **Stay Active:** Commit to daily or weekly exercise time.
- **Eat Healthy:** Strive to eat more vegetables, drink more water or limit sugar/caffeine.
- **Get Quality Sleep:** Set a regular bedtime and find ways to wind down each night.
- **Accept Help:** You are not alone. There is always help and there is always hope.

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