

May is Mental Health Month, and it has never been more important than this year.

Just weeks ago, we had no idea that all our worlds were going to be turned upside down by the coronavirus. Or that the associated worry, isolation, loneliness, and anxiety would be something that literally everyone – all five in five – would experience

The Geneva 708 Mental Health Board is here to help share some vital messaging from Mental Health America, a community-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote mental health and prevent mental illness through advocacy, education, research and services.

Mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and wellbeing, and mental illnesses are common and treatable.

While one in five people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges that can impact their mental health.

There are practical tools that everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase resiliency regardless of the situations they are dealing with.

It is important to recognize your emotions and own your feelings, work to find the positive even when facing adversity or loss, reach out and try to connect with others, remove those people in your life who are bringing you down, and create healthy routines to take care of yourself.

There are ways that everyone can be supportive of friends, family, and co-workers who are struggling with life's challenges or their mental health.

Living a healthy lifestyle and incorporating mental health tools to thrive may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes.

Recognizing your feelings, finding the routines that lift you up, removing toxic influences, and connecting with others can all help you on your path to recovery as you develop your own mental health #tools2thrive. Resources can be found at <https://mhanational.org/about>

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS



It's possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone. It's the connections we make with other people that help enrich our lives and get us through tough times, but sometimes it's hard to know how to make those connections.

TIPS FOR CONNECTING



Connect with others at places you already go to. There are places that you go to over and over again - these are great places to strike up conversations and start to make friends. At work you might ask a co-worker to join you for lunch or to grab a cup of coffee. If you have kids involved in extracurricular activities, you probably see the same other parents attending their practices or dropping them off each time. If you go to the gym at the same time each day, you may notice others who are on the same workout schedule.



Use shared experience as a topic of conversation. Use your current situation as a topic to talk about. Maybe you're stuck waiting in a long line, or you noticed someone is wearing a shirt from a place that you've been. Hometown sports, local news and events, or even the weather can also get a conversation going.



Give compliments. If you're struggling to figure out what to say to someone to strike up a conversation, try starting with a compliment. You can comment on a person's outfit, tattoo, or a piece of jewelry that you like and maybe ask them where they got it. Use their response to continue the conversation, for example if they tell you they got it at a certain store, ask where that is.



Make time to be social. Going to work and taking care of life's other daily responsibilities is time consuming and many of us feel exhausted by the end of the day. While it's tempting to just sit on the sofa and zone out in front of the TV, that time can be spent in a more meaningful way. Set aside at least half an hour each day to connect with other people outside of work.



Not all connections have to be done in person. While spending time with someone face-to-face helps to create the strongest relationships, phone calls, text messaging, emails, and video chats can maintain friendships when distance or time constraints get in the way of hanging out.



Accept invitations. If someone asks you to go somewhere or do something with them, accept their invitation. When you turn people down over and over, they may stop inviting you. It may not be your favorite place or activity, but you can use the time to build your friendship and suggest things you like better for the next time you get together with that person.



Pay attention to what other people are interested in. For instance, you may notice a family portrait or a pet's picture on a coworker's desk. Ask them how old their children are, or what their pet's name is - and show genuine interest in their answers. Ask follow up questions and if appropriate, share something relevant about yourself, like how many children you have or the name of your pet.



Organize activities. If there is something that you are interested in doing, ask someone else (or a group of other people) to join you. It can be hard to make the first move, but it may end up that someone else wanted to do the same thing all along and was waiting to find out who else was interested. Don't be discouraged if schedules don't cooperate sometimes. Keep making invitations!

FAST FACTS



Research shows it can take 50 hours for someone you don't know that well to turn into a true friend.¹



During the week, Americans watch an average of 2 ½ hours of TV per day, but only spend half an hour per day socializing.²



The number of friendships you have early in your adult life and the closeness of those relationships can influence your wellbeing 30 years later.³

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR MENTAL HEALTH, VISIT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK YOUR SYMPTOMS.



It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you have your results, MHA will give you information and resources to help you start to feel better.

Sources

¹Hall, J. A. (2019). How many hours does it take to make a friend? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(4), 1278–1296.

²US Dept. of Labor. (2018). American time use survey. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/tus>.

³Carmichael, C. L., Reis, H. T., Duberstein, P. R. (2015). In your 20s it's quantity, in your 30s it's quality: The prognostic value of social activity across 30 years of adulthood. *Psychology and Aging*, 30, 95–105.