



# AUGUST

## Bringing Awareness to Mental Health

### Prioritize Your Mental Health & Well-Being in 2021

An individual may face multiple levels of fear, stress and loneliness at some point in their lifetime. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, isolation has heightened these emotions and has been a major risk factor for anxiety and depression. With approximately one in four Americans experiencing mental illness each year, it is extremely important to raise awareness surrounding one's health, support those around you and to seek out assistance from valuable resources.

#### FOUR WAYS TO REDUCE ANXIETY & DEPRESSION

- 1. *Develop Awareness of Thoughts & Emotions*** — Emotions are chemical molecules that act as command circuits to your body. They both are powerful energies that organize and shape your beliefs, thoughts and behaviors. Feel good emotions like joy, confidence and happiness tell you that your inner drives are being met; however, not all things that create these happy feelings are in your highest interest (i.e. addictive foods, substances or activities). Events that cause stress can be utilized to work for you if you develop awareness around them. It is especially vital to learn to connect empathically to any painful, unpleasant or feel bad emotions because they provide essential information to you that pleasant emotions cannot. In turn, this can help you grow and excel under stressful situations because your body has developed the experience and awareness necessary to cope with challenges.
- 2. *Practice Self-Compassion*** — By practicing self-compassion, you can learn to embrace yourself for who you are. No matter what is going on in your life, you can maintain a sense of emotional balance. The need to see yourself as “better than” can be replaced by a deep sense of interconnection and compassion for yourself. The view that you are just as deserving of love and support can make it easier to treat yourself with kindness and can also help with feelings of isolation.
- 3. *Learn It's Okay, Not to Feel Okay*** — It is perfectly acceptable and understandable if you are feeling down or feel like things are out of your control. For those who are struggling with mental illness and/or grief, dealing with this pressure to always seem happy can be extremely challenging and often exhausting. Remembering you are not alone can help you begin sharing your feelings with your family, peers or colleagues. Having multiple members within one's support system, each able to offer assistance in different areas, may be resourceful in overcoming internal struggles.
- 4. *Add an Enriching Hobby to Your Life*** — Several hobbies are inherently creative such as painting, woodworking, playing an instrument or baking. Practicing a new hobby engages the creative and neural networks of your brain, which makes connections between circuits in the brain that might not have otherwise been connected. This type of neural linking-up can boost your feelings and mood in a measurable way. When you welcome a new, creative hobby into your life, it modulates levels of the feel-good hormones like dopamine in the brain. Research indicates that imaginative pursuits are restorative for mental health and that getting into a “flow” state promotes mindfulness, known for its positive effects on stress and anxiety.