



Market Place Simplified: News & Views by Pooja

2020 - Year of the Mental Health Pandemic

"You don't have to be positive all the time. It's perfectly okay to feel sad, angry, annoyed, frustrated, scared and anxious. Having feelings doesn't make you a negative person. It makes you human."

— Lori Deschene

2020 has been an eventful year, as the months go on there appears to be new challenges in-store for many of us. Since March, the lockdown many Americans have experienced is a true stress test for our nation. From the foundation and values our country is built, to a global health pandemic, record unemployment and bankruptcies, protests for police brutality, the #BlackLivesMatter movement, social distancing, scarcity of vital resources, and a polarized political system and increasing wealth gap. To many our system is broken, or in the midst of a social revolution. Regardless, 2020 has emotionally scarred many: from grandparents unable to embrace their grandchildren, cancelled weddings, and the first day of school at home in front of an iPad.

During these uncertain times it is important to remember many issues may divide us, however, as members of society we must stand together to protect and lookout for one another. According to research provided by the National Council of Behavioral Health:

- 1 in 5 adults in America experience some form of mental illness.
- Nearly 1 in 25 (10 million) adults in America live with a serious mental illness.
- One-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24.
- Approximately 10.2 million adults have co-occurring mental health and addiction disorders.

Mental Health carries with it, confusion and a negative stigma, oftentimes difficult to identify by family and friends. The Covid-19 pandemic has stemmed more cases of people needing and wanting help and clarity. Ranging from concerns on the front lines from first responders, to those concerned with the economic impact, to the emotional burden a lockdown has cast.

But why is mental and emotional health so important? Experts believe mental health is as, if not more important than physical health. Mental Health, as defined by the Oxford Dictionary, as "a person's condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being". 2020 has caused many families to face unforeseeable challenges, creating a need for stress management. High stress levels, when left untreated can take a toll on other parts of one's health. Research shows increased stress can result in depression, addiction, mental and physical abuse, and suicide.

"Sometimes the people around you won't understand your journey. They don't need to, it's not for them."

– Joubert Botha

Historically, social stigmas, religious beliefs, and family expectations have prevented many people from asking for professional help related to mental or emotional health. Today, in a rapidly evolving and modernizing world, people, minorities particularly, are reluctant to address the subject of mental health: not saying anything could result in crisis. Former First Lady, Michelle Obama came out and addressed the nation: she has suffered from low grade depression. Recently a wave of celebrities have spoken-out about their own emotional health journey, public figures such as Prince Harry, Lady Gaga and Selena Gomez to name a few.

“What I love about therapy is that they’ll tell you what your blind spots are. Although that’s uncomfortable and painful, it gives you something to work with.”

– Pink

While I don’t know what the remainder of 2020 has install for us, I do know what works for me and those closest to me. Here’s a few simple tips for maintaining your mental health at home:

1. Meditate

According to Headspace: “The process of meditating is straightforward and easy: simply sit and practice. All you have to do is close your eyes, stay focused on your breathing, and let your mind do its thing. This is the one skill where you don’t have to strive to achieve something – just a place of stillness where no effort is required.”

2. Breathing Exercises

Like aerobic exercise improves your heart function and strengthens your muscles, breathing exercises can make your lungs more efficient. Similar to meditating, do this for a few minutes until you start to feel better.

3. Write Things Down

Record your thoughts – it could be something you saw on social media or on the news, it will serve as a reminder to be present for this historic phase the world is going through.

4. Stay Connected

It’s important to stay connected with others, even if it’s only virtually. I video call with family and friends, I’ve participated in virtual dance parties, and have seen people host bachelorette parties virtually. Stay connected with people who give you positive energy.

5. Get Vulnerable and Share

During this pandemic, I unfortunately have lost two loved ones within a week of each other, not being able to attend either funeral. When I spoke with friends, I shared my highs and lows because they could relate. When the struggle is real, these conversations allowed me to find solace.

6. Move

I do some exercise daily: go for a walk, play with my niece and nephew, dance for 5-10 minutes between meetings or calls. Not only will it bring some levity to long days or nights, but I find that being so focused on work, I forget to breath, and see what’s physically happening around me. It gives me the mental clarity to remember to check in with myself: do I have to eat, go to the bathroom, am I too stressed.

I encourage people who feel their lives are complex to connect with a mental health professional. Recently, I had an opportunity to interview Kapil Nayar, a Licensed Professional Counselor, asking about his work on the front lines. The following is from our conversation:

Substance abuse and mental health practitioners are not often talked about in media but to my mind are included in the group of first responders as the pandemic unfolds. The overall fear, stress, anxiety, of Covid and the unfortunate grief and loss that we all have faced throughout this time interval is unique. As professionals, we were never provided formalized training for pandemics but also, there isn’t a great way to prepare for a situation like this. The silver lining is that our training has centered on emotions and emotional responses. Our emotions are now heightened and although there’s no tangible way to resolve situations, the treatment approach is similar. Telehealth has been a saving grace during these past few months.

Ultimately, everyone that needs and wants help, should feel safe to ask for it. With Covid-19, adding a mental health strain, problems are only compounding if untreated. We need to start removing barriers. We need to create a “safe space” for people to open up and share their story and their feelings.

“The advice I’d give to somebody that’s silently struggling is, you don’t have to live that way. You don’t have to struggle in silence. You can be un-silent. You can live well with a mental health condition, as long as you open up to somebody about it, because it’s really important you share your experience with people so that you can get the help that you need.”

– Demi Lovato

Resources:

If you or someone you know needs help, please call:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255) or text the Crisis Text Line at 741-741.

National Domestic Violence Hotline – Call 800-799-SAFE (7233)

Trained expert advocates are available 24/7 to provide confidential support to anyone experiencing domestic violence or seeking resources and information. Help is available in Spanish and other languages.

National Sexual Assault Hotline – Call 800-656-HOPE (4673)

Connect with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area that offers access to a range of free services. Crisis chat support is available at Online Hotline. Free help, 24/7.

If you or a loved one is in immediate danger calling 911 and talking with police may be necessary. It is important to notify the operator that it is a psychiatric emergency and ask for police officers trained in crisis intervention or trained to assist people experiencing a psychiatric emergency.

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