



Back to School During COVID-19

Uncertainty about the upcoming school year is causing mental health challenges for many students, parents, teachers and staff. Will students be able to safely return to the classroom?

The possibility of remote learning at the grammar school, high school and college level is also causing stressors for students and families. How will families manage childcare and will virtual learning result in isolation and depression?

Educators and mental health providers remind us that we are not alone in feeling anxious or depressed as a new school approaches.

According to Melodie Baker, national policy director at Just Equations, and a member of New York's Reimagine Education Advisory Council, educators are in a prepare and problem-solving mode.

"This is a strange time. We are at a place where anything can change at anytime and anything can happen," Baker said.

"Mental health is a significant issue and we need to better support students with mental health issues and disabilities."

Baker notes that a statewide priority is investing time and energy to support parents and provide access to online professionals and mental health resources.

"By sharing our experiences, we can help each other," Baker said.

"Encouraging children to be open and honest and offering a safe environment to share their concerns will help eliminate the stigma of mental illness."

College students and their families are facing an additional layer of stress and uncertainty as they prepare for a move to campus.

According to a survey conducted by Active Minds in April of 2020, 20 percent of college students say their mental health



has significantly worsened during COVID-19 and 48 percent have experienced financial setback due to the pandemic.

"In general, under normal circumstances, this is an exciting time full of challenges," said Carissa Uschold-Klepfer, assistant director of outreach, suicide prevention coordinator and eating disorder coordinator at the University at Buffalo.

COVID is presenting new challenges when students may experience a hybrid of remote and in-person learning. Students are coming from home, establishing their independence and University at Buffalo staff are ready to assist them in adjusting to their new environment.

UB, as well as many other schools and universities, quickly adapted to a telehealth format to provide counseling when in-person appointments that were not possible. Resources are available on college campuses for short-term help and referrals.

According to Uschold-Klepfer, a student may initially seek assistance for a COVID-related issue, but then begin to explore deeper issues. Having a conversation and providing support is the best way to reduce the stigma of mental illness.

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Learn about mental health resources at mhawny.org.

The University at Buffalo offers the following self-care tips for students at the website, buffalo.edu.

Stress is a normal reaction. Many times, you can't avoid it. But you can often lower your stress levels just by taking better care of your body and mind.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



UPward Design for Life
Furnishing Homes & Transforming Lives for Those in Need



Visit letstalkstigma.org/current-members for more information on our current members.

During these unpredictable times, visit our events page at
LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS
For information about mental wellness, stigma and self-care.



FACEBOOK LIVE: HOW TO HANDLE THE STRESSES RELATED TO GOING BACK TO WORK

A recent Facebook Live about how to deal with the stresses of returning to work during the pandemic attracted 14,000 views (and counting). In our current environment, individuals who have never struggled with mental health issues are experiencing symptoms but may be hesitant to reach out for help.

Gulsum Silluzio, director of operations for Horizon Health Services, said "You're not alone and not the only one experiencing this. We are human and are experiencing a major change and something completely new with COVID. Acknowledge the fact that this could be causing your stress and this overwhelming feeling and that it's ok to talk about it."

Other presenters were Lisa A. Coppola, Esq., attorney at The Coppola Firm, Eric Galdys, human resources business partner at ESC. The event was moderated Karl Shallowhorn, Chair of the Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition and President of Shallowhorn Consulting, LLC.

If you missed the event live, you can view the session [on our website](#) or visit [our Facebook Page](#).

August Events

AUGUST 4 & AUGUST 18
Headway's Virtual Support Group

AUGUST 5
Youth MHFA - VIRTUAL Mental Health First Aid Trainings!

AUGUST 10
Adult MHFA - VIRTUAL Mental Health First Aid Trainings!

A Q&A with WNYHeroes, Inc.

The mission of WNYHeroes is to provide veterans, members of the armed services, and the widows and children of deceased veterans with access to essential services, financial assistance and resources that support their lives and sustain their dignity.

Many veterans experience mental health challenges, yet stigma often prevents them from seeking help.

We recently spoke with Chris Kreiger Sr., Iraq war veteran and president and co-founder of WNYHeroes, Inc.

Why did your organization become a member of The Anti-Stigma coalition?

We reached out to your Coalition with high interest to become a member because we have a lot to offer, especially when dealing with Veterans. People who suffer from mental health issues are too often looked at as scary or very different from others. This forces them to hide what is going on with them for fear of losing their circle of friends or loved ones. Many people fear what they don't understand. People can see a broken bone and don't perceive it as a personal weakness or character flaw. The same can't always be said of people's judgment of those living mental health issues that can't be seen, and might be harder to relate to. It is the job of everyone in our community to change that. Only through education and self-awareness can a change for the better begin to happen. With our programs, we strive to change the stigma of PTSD. What is PTSD? Many people look at it as being crazy or out of your mind. In actuality, PTSD is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. To go one further, we strive to drop the "D" (Disorder) What makes PTS a disorder? The trauma an individual experiences doesn't always make it a disorder.

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.
Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County
Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care • Patrick P. Lee Foundation
Preventionfocus, Inc. • Telesco Creative Group • The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

WNYHeroes, Inc.
Supporting Western New York Veterans



"Support, Service, & Strength"

What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

The impact the campaign is having in our community is significant. We feel our community is starting to take a different approach with those who are impacted by mental illness. We must keep in mind that not only those with the actual illness are affected, but the family and friends of those around them are also affected. Here at WNYHeroes we combat those same challenges, making a difference through our Peer to Peer & Pawsitive for Heroes service dog program when dealing with Veterans.

How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

Stigma is going to be a constant challenge. Take the homeless Veteran, the second you hear homeless and Veteran together, people think of the individual pushing a shopping cart full of garbage, long grown out hair & beard. This stereotype leads to stigma. What does a person with mental health truly look like? They look no different than you or me. If mental health was black and white, it would be easily identified. There are so many different mental health illnesses, each with its' own unique characteristics. For many, a given mental health illness begins to show signs around the age of 12-14 years.