



## Make Your Mental Health a Priority During the Holidays

As concerns about staying safe and healthy continue, we enter a holiday season like none other. Beloved traditions of gathering with family and friends may not be possible, yet this year may present an opportunity to adjust expectations and embrace new ways to celebrate and connect with loved ones.

According to Mark O'Brien, Erie County Commissioner of Mental Health, the COVID pandemic has shaken the foundations of many, resulting in increased rates of anxiety and depression. The people and activities that we take for granted have either been suspended or deemed risky. Thus, routines and means of diverting stress have been taken away or called into question. Human beings are, by and large, social creatures. To varying degrees we thrive on interactions with others.

O'Brien shares his perspective on how to take care of our mental health during the holidays.

*"The first thing to celebrate is the gift of life. We are now seeing that it can be a fragile gift and must be nurtured and protected. It is a time to renew friendships and connections to loved ones, even if done remotely. O'Brien said. "It is a time to realize that despite our differences, it is life itself that unites us in this common struggle. In adversity, we have rediscovered the resiliency of the human spirit."*

### Maintaining mental health during the holidays

It is important to recognize that the holiday season can be difficult in a typical year, and this year is far from typical. Traditions, spending time with family, and the hectic pace of the holidays can bring us joy and can also increase our stress.

"Since this season is so different, I would encourage people to consider embracing the difference. Maybe this is the



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December that you decide to volunteer, or give to an organization or family that is struggling,” Melinda C. DuBois, executive director, Mental Health Advocates of WNY, said.

“Maybe this is the year you connect with your friends and family in a new way. Maybe this is the year you decide not to shop and instead give yourself a break and rest. Or maybe during this holiday season, you decide to give thanks and be grateful for the little joys in life. Since this season is so different, let’s make it special.”

DuBois shares that it is important to feel and identify your feelings if you are struggling.

“How are you really feeling? Are you feeling lonely? Sad? Are you afraid?” she said. “It is so important to find help if you are struggling, even if you have considered reaching out for help and have been putting it off. You can always call the MHA at 886-1242 to find a mental health provider, or if you are in crisis, call Crisis Services at 834-3131,” she said.

With the entire society struggling together, DuBois has seen an enormous increase in online resources, articles on mental health, and social media posts.

### She offers the following ideas:

- Investigate meditation apps and online courses such as Insight Timer or Headspace.
- Explore moving your body in new ways through yoga, walking, hiking in nature.
- Access mental health providers by telemedicine.
- Take an online course or simply read a book you’ve been wanting to read.
- Join a support group.
- Start a neighborhood check in.

“Since the winter season is a time when we tend to turn inward, now is the time to consider journaling, starting a morning gratitude practice, or reflecting on your goals for 2021. Even with the uncertainty, fear, and anxiety, there is opportunity.”

*As Leonard Cohen so eloquently wrote, “Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” This holiday season is far from perfect. Commit to finding joy and finding new ways of taking care of yourself. Find some light in the darkness. DuBois said.*

For additional resources, visit [www.letstalkstigma.org](http://www.letstalkstigma.org). ■

## The Mayo Clinic offers the following self-care strategies for mental and physical health during the holiday season

### TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

- Get enough sleep.
- Participate in regular physical activity.
- Eat healthy.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol and drugs.
- Limit screen time.
- Relax and recharge.

### TAKE CARE OF YOUR MIND

- Keep your regular routine.
- Limit exposure to news media.
- Stay busy.
- Focus on positive thoughts.
- Use your moral compass or spiritual life for support.
- Set priorities.



## A Q&A with the Community Mental Health Committee of St. Joseph University Parish

This month, we learn more about the Mental Health Committee of St. Joseph's University Parish. St. Joseph University Parish is a Catholic community that fosters an atmosphere of welcome to all. Attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and nourished by vibrant liturgy, the parish is committed to providing a home and a haven to all, both visitors and permanent members of the community.

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

*St. Joseph's University Parish formed our Mental Health Committee during the summer of 1999 in response to a parish survey which identified that we were not doing anything to welcome people with mental illness, reduce stigma, or offer resources to caregivers. The Committee is rooted in our belief in the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is the foundation of all the principals of our social teaching. The human person is the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human accomplishment or quality. We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.*

*The Anti-Stigma coalition shares in the mission of our committee to create an environment of hope, understanding, welcome and compassion to increase the acceptance of all individuals and families affected by mental health concerns. We work to reduce the stigma of mental illness, educate about services available in the community, provide an alternative prayer service, and advocate for changes in legislation. Our committee is comprised of people that work in organizations that support mental health, have family members or have personally been impacted by a mental health issue. The diverse perspective in our committee allows us to consider all the different facets of mental health to help guide our efforts to provide support to both our Parish and surrounding community.*

*To learn more: [stjosephbuffalo.org/university-parish/dignity-of-the-human-person/](http://stjosephbuffalo.org/university-parish/dignity-of-the-human-person/)*

### How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

*One of our fundamental challenges is creating awareness in the community about services and resources available to help individuals and families. Unlike when you face other medical conditions like cancer or heart disease, people facing mental health challenges, and their families often have a hard time openly discussing their problems, seeking advice on doctors or resources available. It can be very isolating and intimidating trying to navigate that journey alone.*

### What impact is the Campaign having in the community?

*The campaign touches on so many of our shared goals. To talk more openly, we hope to create an environment of change, acceptance and support. We have partnered with The Anti-Stigma Coalition and other local organizations who are often members of the Coalition, by hosting speakers through community events and sharing materials with our Parish community. We also leverage our St. Joseph's University Parish social media platforms which reach up to 1,200 people in the community. ■*

**BECOME A MEMBER  
OF THE ERIE COUNTY  
ANTI-STIGMA COALITION**

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at [letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge](http://letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge).

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact Karl Shallowhorn, Chairperson, at [kshallowhorn@chcb.net](mailto:kshallowhorn@chcb.net).

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

**ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS:**



# December Events

**DECEMBER 7**

Nurturing Fathers Groups  
*Nurturing Fathers of WNY*

**DECEMBER 10**

Transitions for Families  
*Parent Network of WNY*

**DECEMBER 15**

Headway's Virtual Support Groups  
*Headway of WNY, Inc.*

**DECEMBER 19**

Buffalo Urban League Gala  
*Buffalo Urban League*

During these unpredictable times, visit our events page at

[LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS](http://LETSTALKSTIGMA.ORG/EVENTS)

For information about mental wellness, stigma and self-care.