

Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit

MAY 2024

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. While mental health is important to address year-round, Mental Health Awareness Month provides a dedicated time for people, organizations, and communities to join their voices to broadcast the message that mental health matters.

Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit has been designed for people, organizations, and communities. We encourage you to edit the content to best suit your community.

How to use the Mental Health Awareness Month Toolkit

This year's toolkit includes ideas and resources on what you can do throughout the month to raise awareness around mental health and suicide prevention. It includes key messages that can be used for emails, newsletter content, social media posts, images, as well as additional resources that can be used to supplement what you currently use. [Safe Messaging Around Mental Health and Suicide](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/documents/suicidemessaging.pdf) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/documents/suicidemessaging.pdf>) provides guidance on how to safely talk about mental health and suicide.

Below are key messages that can be used for each week:

- **Week 1:** Let's talk about mental health
- **Week 2:** Connecting with yourself
- **Week 3:** Connecting with others
- **Week 4:** Connecting with nature
- **Week 5:** Connecting to resources and support

How to use the toolkits weekly content:

- Use the key messages to develop content for emails, newsletters, or to share with those you keep in touch with, including friends, work colleagues, faith community, schools, and other groups.
- Use the key messages in daily conversation. This can be with friends, family, in meetings, community events, etc.
- Share the social media posts each week. These can be shared on Facebook, X, Instagram, Snapchat, or an employee intranet site to name a few. Feel free to edit the posts to best

suite your community! Add #YouMatterMN to your posts so others can learn from what you are doing.

- Use the graphics created [at Mental Health Awareness Month Shareables \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/shareables.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/shareables.html). You can also find graphics from the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline Partner Toolkit \(https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit/social-media-shareables\)](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/988/partner-toolkit/social-media-shareables).
- Review the ideas for action and learning opportunities and get more involved. Help to spread these ideas and learning opportunities through emails, newsletters, social media posts or with those you are engaged with.
- Encourage organizations, individuals, and communities to seek out what is happening in their community.

The toolkit is a starting point and individuals, organizations, and communities can tailor these messages for their communities and add their own images and graphics to boost the visibility and engagement.

Week 1: Let's talk about mental health

Key message

We all have mental health. Mental health is our ability to engage with our emotions, thoughts, interactions with others, and the world around us.

- Mental health affects how we think, feel, and act every day. The best way to protect mental health is to pay attention to it even when you're feeling ok or even good. Just like with our physical health, we can do things that make us mentally healthier and happier.

Creating positive habits is a great way to support your mental health.

- Mental health plays a big role in overall well-being. When you feel mentally well, you're more able to enjoy life and the people in it, feel better about yourself, keep up with fulfilling relationships, and manage stress.

Experiencing poor mental health is not the same as having a mental health condition. A mental health condition, or mental illness, refers to a set of symptoms that have been identified by a health provider.

- We all have tough days and weeks, and everyone manages their mental health every day. People with mental health conditions experience change in emotions, thinking, and/or behavior. For some, this means extreme and unexpected changes in mood, like feeling more sad or worried than usual. For others, it means not thinking clearly, pulling away from friends and activities you used to enjoy, or hearing voices that others do not. Mental illness is treatable; it is not always a permanent state of being.

The opportunities and resources we have available in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and communities impact our mental health just like they impact our physical health.

- Mental health is not just about what we do as individuals. For example, when organization and policies support belonging and connectedness, they promote mental health.

Social media posts

- We all have mental health every day. Achieving or maintaining mental wellness takes work, and research has found several ways that you can keep yourself healthy. Check out these [Keys to Mental Well-being from Berkely University Greater Good Magazine \(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/key\)](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/key). #YouMatterMN
- Every individual, family, organization, and community can promote mental health and well-being. For example, practicing gratitude and savoring are two individual exercises that can enhance our positive experiences in life. See [Harvard's Human Flourishing Program: How to Flourish \(https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/how-to-flourish\)](https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/how-to-flourish) for practical ideas help you flourish. #YouMatterMN
- Mental health is all around us but is often misunderstood. The [Roadmap to Mental Health \(https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/mhcs-roadmap-to-mental-health/\)](https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/mhcs-roadmap-to-mental-health/), by the Mental Health Coalition, can explain what we mean when we say, “mental health.” #YouMatterMN
- There are many harmful attitudes and misunderstandings around mental health conditions and mental illness. This can make people ignore their mental health, fuel stigma, and make it harder to reach out for help. Take the [Mental Health Quiz \(https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/quiz/index.htm\)](https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/quiz/index.htm) developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and see if you can separate the myths from the facts. #YouMatterMN
- Everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. [Mental Health American Tools 2 Thrive \(https://mhanational.org/tools-2-thrive\)](https://mhanational.org/tools-2-thrive), provides information, tips, and practical tools for situations that we all deal with. These tools, if used can be used to improve your mental health and increase your resiliency. #YouMatterMN

Week 2: Connecting with yourself

Key message

Self-connection, or self-care, is about finding practices that help you thrive, and it can include a range of things. It takes purposeful effort, but it can help you maintain or improve your daily mental well-being. It can be helpful to think of it as taking time to connect with yourself and care for yourself as you would others.

Prioritizing time to connect to yourself doesn't have to be time consuming or expensive, and it is important for you to find out what works best for you. Below are a few different ways to engage in self-care from to the Mental Health Coalition:

- **Physical:** Notice and address the stress that shows up in your body. Notice what physical activities reduce or alleviate physical pain, tension and mental stress for you. Some common activities are massages, hugging loved ones with their consent, fitness, dance, aromatherapy, rest, and boundary setting.
- **Emotional:** Involves tending to your own internal emotional world – especially your mood and feelings. Ways to tend to your emotional self can include connecting with others, naming and acknowledging your emotions, psychotherapy, journaling or creative writing, art, and setting boundaries for your emotional well-being.
- **Cognitive:** Engages in activities that are intellectually rewarding and/or stimulating. This can include reading, writing, listening to books or podcasts, watching films, psychotherapy.
- **Spiritual:** This can take many different forms and does not have to be tied to formal religion. It means getting in touch with the less tangible aspects of yourself and the world around you. This can include meditation, breathwork, prayer, connecting with a spiritual or religious community, mantras.

Identify a few ways you'd like to prioritize your own well-being. Set aside the time you need to do it, give yourself permission to embrace it if it is hard for you to prioritize yourself, and work towards adding these moments regularly into your life. Know that what taking care of yourself may look like can change over time, and it is okay to adapt to what activities you engage in to fit your needs.

Social media posts

- Just like you do things to take care of your body, there are things you can do regularly to tend to your mental well-being. This can and will look different for everyone, [The JED Foundation \(https://jedfoundation.org/practice-self-care/\)](https://jedfoundation.org/practice-self-care/) has a variety of resources to help find ideas to add to your self-care practice. #YouMatterMN
- Learning to recognize and name your emotions and know how they show up for you mentally and physically will help you navigate life when your emotions are strong. The Mental Health Coalition has tools for identifying and [dealing with feelings \(https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/how-to-deal-with-emotions/\)](https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/how-to-deal-with-emotions/). #YouMatterMN
- Being well connected to other people promotes positive mental health and physical health and gives life meaning. Connecting with others is one of the [10 tools for resiliency \(https://mhanational.org/ten-tools\)](https://mhanational.org/ten-tools) that Mental Health America has put together to help you feel stronger and more hopeful. #YouMatterMN
- Finding movement that's a good match for you physically and mentally can help you thrive. Be kind with yourself and your body in the process in learning to move! Explore these videos from the [University of Minnesota's Move + Thrive Project](#)

(https://www.youtube.com/@umn_moveandthrive) that features diverse bodies and a variety of movement and meditative practices.

Week 3: Connecting with others

Key messages

Social connection is a building block for mental health. People thrive when feeling socially connected to other people. Both casual connections, like waving to a neighbor, and close intimate relationships help us thrive and feel connected to others and our community.

Having a healthy social life is incredibly important to maintain both mental and physical health. Studies show that [social ties boost survival by over 50%](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/relationships-boost-survival/) (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/relationships-boost-survival/>). But finding social connection can be challenging for many. Reaching out to connect to your neighbors and friends can not only help you but can also help others in your community thrive.

We can all help promote belonging and support connection from individual actions to organizations and policies. Creating more welcoming communities and environments for everyone will support mental health and well-being.

Here are some ways to build your social connection muscle:

- **Small acts of kindness.** Find ways to connect with people you see in your community. Ask neighbors about their plans for the weekend, thank the grocery store cashier, ask a customer about their child's soccer game, say hello to the people you pass on the way to the bus stop.
- **Prioritize connection in real life.** Building friendships will help your mental health thrive. Host a gathering, meet for coffee, send a handwritten note, or call someone – connection reduces stress and promotes mental well-being for both of you.
- **Volunteer.** Helping others creates opportunity for connection and sense of purpose. Volunteering as a family is also a great tradition.
- **Create a culture of appreciation at work.** Businesses that create a culture of appreciation, where employees feel valued and recognized for their contributions, have employees who are more engaged, productive and experience less burnout. Make it a priority to contribute to a culture of connection within your workplace.
- **Get involved in community design, policies, and actions to influence social connections.** For example, communities can prioritize creating walking and gathering spaces, and shared-use spaces to promote social connection.

Social Media Posts

- Take the Surgeon General's 5-for-5 Connection Challenge to strengthen relationships and connections. Simple actions can help you feel more connected than ever. Download the

Connection Postcard and Connect Card Deck for inspiration. [Surgeon General's 5-for-5 Connection Challenge](https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/challenge/index.html)
(<https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/challenge/index.html>)

- Helping others creates opportunity for connection and sense of purpose. Volunteering doesn't just support a cause; it can help support your mental well-being. Find a volunteer opportunity that is meaningful to you as a way to support your mental health. Search for volunteer matching websites, check with your local community center, or your faith community to find a volunteer opportunity that is right for you. #YouMatter
- Check in on your friends and family. Offering support is one of the best things that we can do to get them through difficult times. However, it can sometimes feel uncomfortable, daunting, or just plain awkward. [The Roadmap to Friends Supporting Friends](https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/friends-supporting-friends-visible/) (<https://www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/friends-supporting-friends-visible/>) gives ideas on what support can look like, how to offer support, and where to begin. #YouMatterMN
- Community design, policies, and actions to influence social connections, are key building blocks for supporting mental well-being. See the action guide for building Socially Connected Communities to help you host a community conversation [Action Guide for Building Socially Connected Communities - Action Guide for Building Socially Connected Communities](https://www.action4connection.org/) ([action4connection.org](https://www.action4connection.org/)).

Week 4: Connecting with nature

Key message

Nature is a natural stress buffer. Supporting connection to nature for individuals, families, and communities can support:

- Physical health – reduced blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones.
- Emotional regulation and reduction in behavior problems.
- Social connectedness and belonging.
- Spiritual development.
- Education outcomes – improved attention, problem solving, curiosity, imagination, and engagement.
- Reduced rates of violence.

Connection to nature can help **mitigate the impact of trauma**. For example, we use more of our senses when in nature, which helps us be alert and present in the moment, rather than focused on day-to-day stressors and trauma.

A little goes a long way. We don't have to walk in the forest daily to get the benefits of nature. Noticing nature while in your neighborhood, spending time in your local park, or even viewing nature from inside can help access the many benefits of nature.

Social media posts

- Being in nature, or even viewing scenes of nature, can give your mood a boost. Take a little time this week to get outside to support your mental well-being. Can't make it outdoors? Try bringing the outdoors in through a [virtual calming room](https://virtualcalmingroom.net/) (<https://virtualcalmingroom.net/>). #YouMatterMN
- Got a lot on your mind? Mindful walking or sitting in nature can help calm your mind and induce good feelings. Get outside and notice what do you see, hear, smell, taste, and feel in your surroundings. For more tips visit [The Art of Mindful Walking: Slow down, Breath & Relax - Thrive Global](#) #YouMatterMN.
- Have you heard of forest bathing? Forest bathing is more than a hike in the woods, it's a deliberate effort to take in nature using all your senses. It's proven to improve your mental and physical health. And it turns out Minnesota is a great place to practice forest bathing. With 65 state parks, and 17.7 million acres of forest land, Minnesota has plenty of places to soak up nature. Learn more about [Why Minnesota is the Perfect Place to Practice Forest Bathing](https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/why-minnesota-is-perfect-place-forest-bathing) (<https://www.exploreminnesota.com/article/why-minnesota-is-perfect-place-forest-bathing>). #YouMatterMN.
- Incorporating nature into your family time can give you a two-for-one mental health boost by connecting with your loved ones and connecting with nature. This week, try creating art with elements from nature, skipping rocks, or watching the clouds together. Check out these educator and family resources from the Minnesota DNR [Natural resources education | Minnesota DNR](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/education/index.html) (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/education/index.html>) #YouMatterMN.

Week 5 Connecting to resources and supports

Key message

When your mental health is off, it is important to find the help that is right for you. Where you go for help will depend on what is happening within your life. Often the best place to start is to talk with those that you already have connections with, including your friends and family, your primary care doctor, spiritual advisor, or local mental health organizations.

Help can be found across many places and depends on what type of support that you may need. It can start with participating in some self-care, or engage with friends, family, or someone else to talk to help you process, find a distraction or problem solve. If the problems in your life are stopping you from functioning well or feeling good, professional help can make a big difference. Even if you're not sure that you'd benefit from help, it can't hurt to explore the possibility.

Engaging in formal services can help you:

- Develop plans for solving problems.
- Feel stronger in the face of challenges.
- Change behaviors that hold you back.

- Look at ways of thinking that affect how you feel.
- Heal pains from your past.
- Think about your goals.
- Build self-confidence.

Social Media Posts

- Friends and family can be a great support system, but sometimes it is hard to ask for help. It is OK to not be OK. Reach out to family, friends, neighbors, a warm line, or an emergency emotional support line, like the 988 Lifeline, if you want to talk. Know that you are not alone, help is available, and healing can happen. #YouMatterMN
- Sometimes it is hard to know when you need extra help with your mental health. This infographic from the [National Institute of Mental Health](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/my-mental-health-do-i-need-help) (<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/my-mental-health-do-i-need-help>) may help guide you if you don't know where to start. #YouMatterMN
- Warm lines and peer support can be helpful for those who are managing stress. Anyone seeking support may call the Minnesota Warm Line for Peer Support connection at 844-739-0369, from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. For more information, visit: [Wellness in the Wood: Transforming Wellness into Reality \(mnwitw.org\)](http://mnwitw.org).

Mental Health Minnesota also offers a warmline, their services are available Monday - Saturday, noon to 10 p.m. Call 1-877-404-3190 or text Support to 85511. [Minnesota Warmline – Mental Health Minnesota \(mentalhealthmn.org\)](http://mentalhealthmn.org). #YouMatterMN
- Talking with someone about your thoughts and feelings can save your life. The 988 Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential emotional support for people who need it. If you or someone you know needs support now, call or text 988 or chat 988Lifeline.org. 988 connects you with a trained counselor who can help. #YouMatterMN

Mental health awareness ideas for action

Individuals

- Share the Mental Health Awareness Toolkit with friends, family, personal, and professional contacts to share the weekly resources within their area of influence through emails, newsletters, and social media.
- Register for a more in-depth trainings on what to look for in people that have life challenges or suicidal experiences. To see a list of trainings to search for, visit [Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Training \(health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/communities/preventsuicidetrainings.html\)](http://health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/communities/preventsuicidetrainings.html).
- Initiate and spark conversations on your social media pages regarding mental health using the prompts below:

Mental health moments.

Help spread what you do throughout moments in your day to take care of yourself. This can be taking a walk, playing with your pet, journaling, taking a nap, connecting with a friend. Let's collectively promote these self-connection moments by sharing and using the hashtag #YouMatterMN.

Behind the picture.

Picture after picture is posted to social media every single day, but often we don't know the entire story behind the picture. The purpose of this project is to normalize that we are all dealing with life behind the perfect pictures that we post on social media. Start by posting a picture of yourself and share more about what was really happening behind that picture. Let's collectively promote that life is not always as perfect as it seems by sharing and using the hashtag #YouMatterMN.

Organizations and communities

- Use the Mental Health Awareness Toolkit by spreading the key messages through emails, newsletters, and social media.
- Collaborate with local partners to light up bridges and/or buildings with the mental health awareness month color of green during May. Take a picture of the building lit up in green, share it on your social media and use the hashtag #YouMatterMN.
- Consider hosting a mental health awareness day for youth, adults, and the community.
- Promote other programs within the community that encourage positive healthy activities and places for connection.
- Attend an upcoming [Suicide Prevention Learning Opportunity](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/communities/communityconv.html) (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/communities/communityconv.html>) with a mental health awareness month focus.

Show support for Mental Health by turning lights green

Green is the color for mental health awareness month. This month, consider swapping out your standard lights for green ones, for one day or all month long.

Reach out to local businesses, government, councils, and other community spaces and ask to turn their lights green during the month of May. Some communities may have forms, receive emails, or phone numbers to call.

Adapt the text below, or explain in your own words, why it is important to participate in mental health awareness activities in your community. Be sure to include specific requests, like lighting up specific buildings or landmarks.

Share this event throughout your community through social media, message boards, neighborhood associations or others.

Provide statewide or local resources, training opportunities, and other messaging with local community leaders. By turning your lights green, you are demonstrating the importance of mental health.

Minnesota's Mental Health Awareness efforts are rooted in the belief that help is available and healing is possible. Visit [Minnesota Department of Health Mental Health Awareness \(https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/index.html\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/index.html) to learn more about Mental Health Awareness in Minnesota and other Mental Health Awareness resources.

We want to hear from you

We will reach out in June to gather information and feedback about your outreach and impact using this toolkit. We ask you to keep track of the following: what content you used from the toolkit, where you shared the content, who you shared the content with, how you share the material and what platforms you used. Your feedback will be instrumental in the development in future toolkits.

If you would like to submit immediately, please feel free to send your feedback by filling [out this survey \(https://survey.vovici.com/se/56206EE3706DA052\)](https://survey.vovici.com/se/56206EE3706DA052).

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5400