



## Coping with COVID 19

Hidden among statistics of COVID 19 deaths and infection rates is an alarming story of a mental health crisis that threatens the lives and hopes of millions of Americans. All of us share the strain of this pandemic: the social isolation, the disruption to the many routines that we have always taken for granted, the fear that a sneeze or a cough could portend something serious. Added to the unrelenting uncertainty as to when this may end, it is not surprising that depression, anxiety and other indicators of emotional distress are increasing.

But how bad is it? This June the Center for Disease Control (CDC) surveyed 5400 Americans and asked how they were coping. 41% reported that they were experiencing a significant mental health problem. 31% reported depression or anxiety while another 26% described symptoms of trauma or stress-related disorders. 13% admitted that they had started or increased substance use to cope. All of this from just four months of limited quarantine and uncertainty.

Most alarming is the data on suicide. 11% of the respondents said that they had seriously considered suicide in the last month. Among young adults age 18 to 24, this number skyrocketed to 25%. One in four young adults are telling us that they have seriously considered suicide in the past month. Prior to the pandemic suicide rates already were increasing, especially among adolescents and young adults. Especially tragic is an increase in suicides among healthcare providers and those who are on the front line of the COVID 19 battle. Experts are now saying that this mental health crisis is likely to get worse in the months to come.

Deaths from suicide are not part of the COVID 19 mortality statistics, but they should be. Moreover, in the coming months many others will suffer the crushing darkness of depression, or the piercing fear of anxiety as they struggle to cope with a world that has turned upside down. Children are especially vulnerable to changes in daily routines, the loss of social connections and

from the distress they see in their parents and others. Like our doctors and nurses, mental health workers are becoming a crucial part of the battle to save lives and heal the sick.

The CDC has offered some important tips on how to cope with emotional stress during the pandemic. Start by taking a break from news or social media. Constantly bombarding your brain with horrifying or discouraging stories takes a toll. Stay connected with friends and family. Call them on the phone or, better yet, connect through Video-Conferencing. Avoid using drugs or alcohol to cope. They may provide short-term relief, but in the long run they will make you feel worse. Get busy doing something new or constructive. This may be the perfect time to learn how to play the electric guitar or how to make a quilt. Spend more time outdoors. Go hiking or take a drive to the beach. Experience the life around you as you walk through the woods. Listen to the birds and join with the beautiful balance of nature. Find spiritual strength through prayer, meditation or worship. Focus on your health by exercising and improving your diet. If you are one of the many who have lost a job or a business during the pandemic, focus on rebuilding rather than on loss.

If your distress persists, consider finding a therapist. Having a caring, safe place to express your feelings can make a world of difference. If you feel suicidal, there are many ways to call for help including calling your community mental health center, the Samaritans emergency hot line, or the emergency room at your local hospital. There are people out there who know how to help you through the toughest times if you just let them.

Above all, remember that you are not alone. As the CDC survey shows, nearly half of the people around you are also struggling. Many have considered giving up. They, like you, will appreciate an opportunity to share their pain with someone who can relate. All of us are strongest when we are connected to people who understand and care. Together, we are stronger than this pandemic.



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## New Leadership at Maps

After 14 years at the helm, Dr. Gary Barnes is stepping down as the Executive Director of Maps. His retirement marks the end of a period of considerable growth for the agency, capped off by the construction of the new mental health clinic on Central Square in Keene in 2018. Our new Executive Director, Bethann Clauss, LICSW is the former Clinical Director and a seven-year clinician with Maps. Her experience ensures that the Maps' mission of ensuring

care for all in need, and our dedication to sustaining a spiritual framework for the service we provide, will be sustained and strengthened in the years to come. We wish Gary all the best with his retirement, and welcome Bethann with hope and eager anticipation of wonderful things to come.

