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Taking Care of Mental Health During COVID-19

By Seth Yoder

Seth Yoder from the System Office Wellness Committee recently sat down with Bethany Bilyeu to discuss the importance of mental health during COVID-19. Bethany was hired as Director of the Counseling Center at the University of Illinois Springfield in October of 2018. In December of 2019 she transitioned into the role of Executive Director of the Counseling Center and Health Services, a role that supports the Office of Disability Services, Health Services and the Counseling Center.

Q. The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 has forced people to alter their lives suddenly and in some cases drastically. Are there certain stress indicators that we should be looking for that we may not be noticing?

A. We are all feeling a little out of sorts these days, but it is important to pay attention to when you are not feeling yourself because these are often the first signs of increased levels of stress. What types of factors could be contributing to your increased levels of stress? Are you not as active as you once were, are you not connecting with family, friends, and colleagues as you once were? Do you not have any personal time? These are all perfectly normal questions to ask yourself given what we are all currently having to endure. Recognizing atypical behavior is the first step in treating the stress you may be dealing with.

Q. During this pandemic many people are feeling a great deal of stress, anxiety, fear, and loneliness. It is important that everyone does a better job of taking care of themselves during this challenging time. Do you have

any recommendations on self-care strategies for our minds and bodies?

Here are a few key areas we can all be tuning into on a regular basis that will help us cope with some of the effects of COVID-19.

- Practice mindfulness activities
- Stay active mentally and physically
- Don't be so hard on yourself
- Dig into some hobbies you may have lost touch with
- Stay in touch with family and friends you may not regularly speak with
- Do your best to create a schedule and try to stick to that schedule

Q. Supporting children through the challenges presented by COVID-19 can be difficult, do you have any recommendation on how to help children coping with the stress brought on by the pandemic?

A. It is important that parents model the behavior they wish their children to display. Examples of this can be creating time for mindfulness, exercise, and hobbies. By spending this time to model this behavior hopefully these behaviors will continue even after we return to normal life. Parents should also acknowledge the stress their children are going through. Children are experiencing this event in much the same way adults are. It is important that parents provide the support and structure needed to endure this crisis.

Q. What are some things that we can do in our communities to help support those struggling to cope with the stress associated with the pandemic?

In times like this it's the little things that make the difference. Things like checking on a neighbor to see if there's anything you can do to help. Putting artwork in front of your house or on the sidewalk so people who are taking walks around the neighborhood can appreciate it. There are also opportunities to donate and work at your local food banks. While all of these things may seem simple they could make all the difference in helping those in our communities make it through this challenging time.

Q. What type of resources are available to individuals or individuals we know who think they may need support?

One of the silver linings to this pandemic are all the resources that have come out of it. On our computers and smart devices, we are connected to so many different resources. There are apps for mindfulness, movement, stress, brain teaser games, and many more (see below for a list of recommended apps). We will put a link to helpful resources on the System HR website. We encourage all staff to share any resources you think might be beneficial to them during this time of need.

Mental Health Wellness App: Youper

Journaling App: Daylio

Mindfulness App: Headspace

Mood Tracker App: Moodpath

**All of these apps can be found in the Apple and Google app stores*