MARCH 31, 2020

MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH

DURING COVID-19

SOME WAYS TO LOOK AFTER YOUR MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALTH:

- Seek information from legitimate sources and set limits around media exposure
- Take care of yourself (Airplane Rules: Put your own oxygen mask on before helping others)
- Safely reach out to others and support people around you (for best practices around dealing with social distancing, isolation and quarantine please see the following resource. https://store.samhsa.gov/system/files/sma14-4894.pdf)
- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking, read something good and uplifting
- Acknowledge your feelings, accept them and give them to God, talk with a trusted religious or spiritual leader, close friend, or loved one.
- Take time to talk with your children about Covid-19
- Ask for support,including professional support if needed. Asking for help is a sign of strength, none of us can do this alone.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

In the Bible, in the Book of Joshua it says "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

As news about coronavirus (COVID-19) dominate the headlines and public concern rises, we would like to remind everyone that taking care of your mental and spiritual health is as important as looking after your physical health, and offer some resources for doing so.

Good mental and spiritual health and positive wellbeing can help you better cope with COVID-19 and physical, social, and economic uncertainty it's creating. Many spiritual traditions are rooted in faith in a divine or a higher power to overcome fear. Share these powerful stories with your congregations and encourage people to find other stories in your Holy books to share.

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CARING FOR CHILDREN: BE OPEN, HONEST, AND AGE APPROPRIATE:

Children and adolescents may have different mental and spiritual health needs related to the current COVID-19 outbreak. As children and families are impacted, it is important to understand how to effectively listen and communicate with children and adolescents about what they are experiencing.

It is important to be able to discuss issues like coronavirus (COVID-19) with your children in an open and honest way. Your children have already heard and seen information about things that are happening. Try to limit what they see and hear (limit yourself as well) and have them check with you to help them understand myth from fact. When having conversations, it is necessary to find out what they know and what questions they may have. https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/fact-sheet/outbreak_factsheet_1.pdf

When speaking to children, be developmentally appropriate. Answer honestly and clearly and make sure your children know you are available to have ongoing conversations. When addressing mental health and stress, use language that makes sense for them and avoid making things too complex. Be sure to be open to any questions or thoughts your children may have. The work of children is play. Play with your children and look for themes of fear or danger where you can be reassuring, comforting, supportive and shift to positive outcomes. https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Helping_Homebound_Children_during_COVID19_Outbreak.pdf

"Regrets over yesterday and fear of tomorrow are twin thieves that rob us of today." Staying in the present moment in these times of uncertainty can be difficult. Being aware of where our thoughts are going and shifting them from the past or the future into the present can help us effectively cope. If you catch yourself dwelling in the past or the future find something positive to do from one of the lists below. The Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr offers wisdom about where we put our psychological and spiritual efforts. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference between the two." Putting things in the wrong box and trying to change what cannot be changed leads to anxiety, frustration and depression. Letting go and letting God, helps us to move on. Find positive distractions, strong positive music or things that engage multiple senses (e.g. relaxation breathing paired with a scent you enjoy). If you are still struggling spiritually after trying these suggestions call or text your religious or spiritual leader for additional guidance. If you are still struggling emotionally or mentally call a mental health professional or doctor.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Mental health and stress can show themselves in many ways for children. Often, children express how they are feeling through their behaviors. Younger children may express fear and worry by withdrawing or becoming clingy with a parent or caregiver. They may have stomach aches or changes in sleeping habits. For older children, they may argue with others, disengage from family and friends or engage in other behaviors that are not typical for them. More signs include:

BEHAVIORAL	PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	THINKING
Clingy	Headaches or other pain	Feeling anxious	Feeling confused
Increase in irritability or worrying	Changes in appetite or eating habits	Feeling angry	Trouble remembering
Acting out behaviors	Easily startled	Feeling sad or depressed	Difficulty concentrating
Having trouble relaxing or sleeping	Stomachaches	Not caring about anything	Difficulty with decision making

AS PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS, YOU MAY HELP CHILDREN BY:

- Pay attention, be a good listener, acknowledge worries
- Allow children to ask questions
- Read religious stories of overcoming fears or enemies, have them apply it to what we are going through today
- Limit news exposure
- Encourage positive coping activities
- Practice controlled breathing
- Try progressive muscle relaxation
- Set a timer for worries
- Use a journal or feelings tracker
- Focus on what we can change and practice letting go of what we can't
- Write or draw a story/picture about defeating personified worries
- Modeling and highlighting the importance of self-care
- Have them think of their friends who may be struggling and what they could do to help
- Keep routines and schedules, including creating school, homework and social time
- Schedule and have positive family time
- Remain calm and reassuring

WAYS TO MANAGE MENTAL HEALTH AND STRESS:

1. **Recognize Signs of Stress:**
(see table)

BEHAVIORAL	PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	THINKING
Having difficulty giving or accepting help	Headaches or other pain	Feeling anxious	Feeling confused
Increase in irritability or worrying	Changes in appetite	Feeling angry	Trouble remembering
Not wanting to talk or be with others	Easily startled	Feeling sad or depressed	Difficulty concentrating
Having trouble relaxing or sleeping	Stomachaches	Not caring about anything	Difficulty with decision making

2. Connect with Others

To ensure the safety of congregants, many churches and other places of worship have closed their doors and limited religious ceremonies. It is more important than ever to find ways to connect outside of our church walls. Reach out to your loved ones and your congregations through social media, email, video recordings, and online platforms to help each other find comfort, peace, and hope in these stressful times.

Reaching out to people you trust is one of the best ways to reduce anxiety, depression, loneliness, and boredom during social distancing, quarantine, and isolation. A well-known passage in the Jewish Talmud (Sanhedrin 27b) teaches, kol yisrael areivin ze ba-zeh, which means that we are all responsible for/to one another. Reach out to members of your congregation who build you up and reach out to those you think may be lonely or need a friend during this difficult time. You can:

- *Use the telephone, email, texting, and social media to connect with friends, family, and others.*
- *Talk "face to face" with friends and loved ones using Skype or FaceTime.*
- *Spend time with friends or loved ones in groups less than 10.*

3. Practical Ways to Cope

- Exercise and physical activity, daily if possible
- Relax your body often by doing things that work for you—take deep breaths, stretch, meditate, or engage in pleasurable hobbies
- Pray, meditate and count yourblessings
- Use time off to relax—eat a good meal, read, listen to music, take a bath, or talk to family
- Talk about your feelings to loved ones and friends often
- Listen to uplifting, spiritual music
- Learning and intellectual engagement—books, reading, limited internet
- Positive family time—working to counter negativity
- Alone time, outside if possible, but inside too; but remember, don't over-isolate
- Be discerning in exposure to news media; find your balance in being informed and stepping away
- When struggling with competing priorities and feeling pulled in all directions, build in brief pauses in your day to 1) de-stress; 2) collect thoughts; 3) let go of one task and prepare for the next; 4) savor life
- Have you and your child name 5 things you see, 4 things you hear, 3 things you smell, 2 things you can touch and 1 thing you can taste
- Use other grounding strategies

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- The Disaster Distress Helpline is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor

- If you are in crisis or experiencing suicidal thoughts call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255)

- Download and utilize the SafeUT app https://healthcare.utah.edu/uni/safe-ut/

- Crisis Chat and Tip Line from your smartphone by downloading the SafeUT app. Licensed clinicians and Crisis Workers are available 24/7 to help with immediate support and referral resources

- Call the Statewide Warm LIne at 801-587-1055 if you feel lonely or need support

- Download the MY3 app to set up a safety plan for times of developing crisis https://my3app.org/

- If you need to connect with someone because of an ongoing alcohol or drug problem, call 2-1-1 to find support meetings or resources near you

- If you need emergency child care you can contact 2-1-1 for resources or call your local Family Support Center to use their crisis nursery

- Help Me Grow Utah can help provide parents and caregivers resources to help their children.

- Utah Parent Center is available to help parents and caregivers find resources for any special need including mental health https://www.cstsonline.org/resources/resource-master-list/coronavirus-and-emerging-infectious-disease-outbreaks-response

- Employees negatively impacted by COVID-19 due to illness or otherwise unable to work due to the virus, should apply for unemployment insurance. See jobs.utah.gov/ui/home

- The Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health in the Department of Human Services is excited to announce a free 60 day trial to the myStrength app https://mystrength.com/mobile Utah Access Code: UDHSguest33

- COVID-19: Recommended Preventative Practices and FAQs for Faith-based and Community Leaders www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/3-27-2020-faith-and-community-based-covid-19-faq.pdf

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