



Partners for Healthy Lives

# Cultivating Belonging in the Era of COVID-19

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# Learning Objectives

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Define the impact of COVID-19 to our mental health, as well as our need to belong

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Discuss the short/long-term consequences of social distancing

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Provide key strategies for maintaining a culture of belonging in the virtual environment



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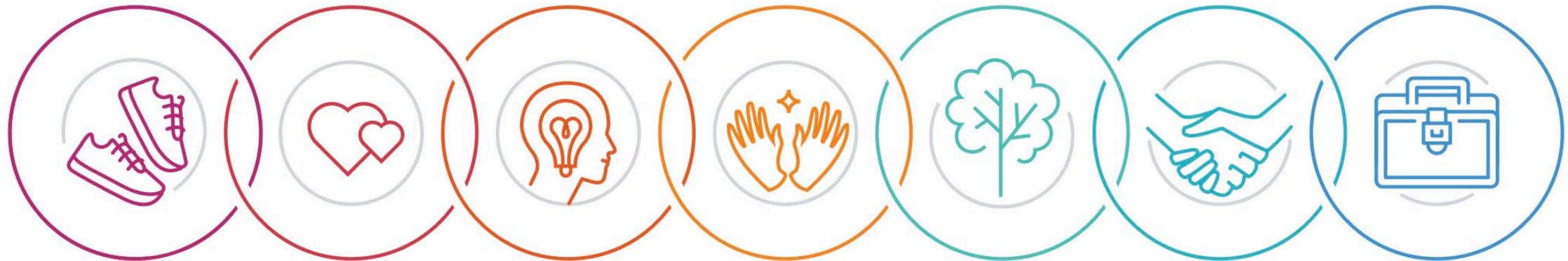
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How are  
you feeling



# Wellbeing model



Physical

Emotional

Intellectual

Spiritual

Environmental

Social

Occupational



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# What is belonging?

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Belonging is the feeling of connectedness to a group or community. It's the sense that you're part of something bigger than yourself.

Belonging is a fundamental part of being human. We need social interaction, and this need is hardwired into our brains.



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We tend to focus much of our attention on social support, but research found that a low sense of belonging was a much stronger predictor of depression than social support.<sup>12</sup>

A study at the University of Michigan found when people lack a sense of belonging, it is a strong predictor of depression<sup>15</sup>. In fact, it is an even stronger predictor than feelings of loneliness or a lack of social support.



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# The effects of Covid-19 on Mental Health

Several surveys, including those collected by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), have shown substantial increases in self-reported behavioral health symptoms.

A current CDC report, which surveyed adults across the U.S. in late June of 2020, reported the following data:<sup>8</sup>

- 31% reported an increase in symptoms of anxiety or depression
- 13% reported having started or increased substance use
- 26% reported stress-related symptoms
- 11% reported having serious thoughts of suicide in the past 30 days



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# Stress during a pandemic

Stress during a pandemic may cause:

- Fear and worry about your own health, the health of your loved ones, your financial situation, your job, or loss of support services you rely on.
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns.
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating.
- Worsening of chronic health problems.
- Worsening of mental health conditions.
- Increased use of tobacco, alcohol, and/or other substances.



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# Importance of connection

- Social distancing and self-isolation are contributing to increasing anxiety and depression among many in an already stressful time.<sup>1</sup>
- Despite the importance behind social distancing and self-isolation, humans are wired for connection and social inclusion, and crave a sense of belonging.<sup>1</sup>
- We need connection not only to survive, but to thrive.
- A sense of connection contributes to our practical and emotional needs, enhances our mental well-being, helps us navigate the challenges of life, and reinforces healthy behaviors.



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# Shifting from survival to resilience



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# Resiliency

- Resilience refers to positive adaptation to adversity.
- Resilience is not something we're born with. It's built over time as the experiences we have interact with our unique, individual genetic makeup. That's why we all respond to stress and adversity, like that from the COVID-19 pandemic, differently.
- Being resilient means being able to adapt or get back to center.
- As individuals, we depend on many other systems for our resilience.

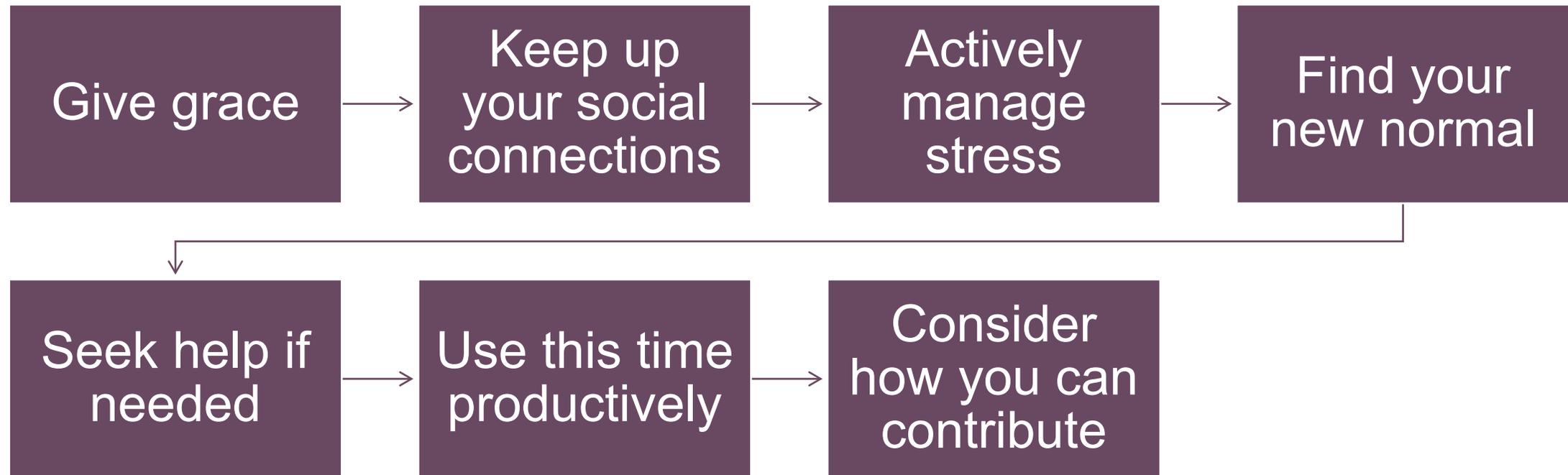


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# How to build resiliency during Covid-19 pandemic



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# Maintain meaningful connections during this time of social distancing

## Maintain a home routine

- Cook for your family or teach someone else in the home how to prepare a favorite meal
- Hold family meetings where each person sets a goal for the day and supports each other in reaching them
- Exercise together
- Make home-oriented activities fun, like organizing clothes in the closet by putting on a fashion show
- Teach each other your hobbies, such as crocheting, drawing, video games – any interest is worth sharing

## Home-based community services

- Write letters or draw pictures and mail them to others who cannot receive visitors because of the crisis, such as nursing home residents or individuals in hospitals
- Find 3 things in each room that can be donated to those in need

## Virtually connections to others

- Search for free online concerts, spiritual services, book clubs, etc. Whatever the interest, there is an online forum available to bring people together, perhaps now more than ever
- Share meals with extended family using video chat apps



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# Creating Belonging



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# Belonging

- A sense of belonging is a major contributor to our mental health, and it is the most significant need we have as human beings.
- There are two categories for belonging. These are:
  1. Belonging to self
  2. Belonging to others



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# *True Belonging*

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True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing in and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness.

True belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.

**Brené Brown**



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I want to challenge you this week to ask yourself these questions about belonging in your own life:

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- *When do you feel the strongest sense of belonging to yourself?*
  - *What challenges your sense of belonging?*
  - *What group of people do you feel the safest with?*



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# Creating belonging



Embrace your group



Be authentic



Signal acceptance



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# Ways to connect and preserve a culture of belonging

01

Cultivate trust

02

Exercise patience

03

Use technology

04

Express concern and gratitude

05

Prioritize intimacy

06

Laugh together

07

Use employee resources

08

Be kind



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# Why Is Community Important To Mental Health

We're social beings, and we are not meant to live in isolation. Community is critical for us to thrive, especially for someone with mental illness who is already experiencing common symptoms of loneliness and isolation.

Community provides many elements that are critical to mental health. Here are three of the most beneficial aspects:

## **Belonging**

Community provides a sense of belonging; a group you identify as being a part of.

## **Support**

Who do you turn to when you need something?

Having people you can call when you need to talk or need help can aid you through difficult situations that might feel insurmountable alone. Knowing there are people who support you can help you feel cared for and safe.

## **Purpose**

In community, people fill different roles. These roles can give you a sense of purpose through bettering the lives of others. Having purpose, and helping others, helps give meaning to life.



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# How to find community:

When looking for a stronger sense of connection, it's important to do some self-reflection. Being aware of what's important to you can help you find ways to connect with other like-minded people.

## **Interests**

What do you like to do?

Perhaps you enjoy reading and could try joining a book club. Or maybe you've always wanted to try soccer and could try joining a team. The possibilities are endless, and you might find it easier to connect with others while doing activities you enjoy.

## **Values**

What are your values?

This category could include charities or volunteer work. Being of service is rewarding, and you can connect with others who have similar values or care about the same causes as you. A big part of building your community is giving back to each other and finding volunteer work is a great way to start.

## **Beliefs**

What do you believe in?

If you connect with a spiritual practice or religion, try going to a speaking engagement, introductory class, or service. If a political cause speaks to you, you can join a group that works toward a goal that's meaningful to you. Connecting with something bigger than you is another helpful way to broaden your community.



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# How to take care of yourself while practicing social distancing

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Eat healthfully

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Exercise

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Practice relaxation therapy

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Let light in

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Be kind to yourself

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Stay connected

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Monitor media consumption



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# Maintaining Hope



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# Staying hopeful

- Staying hopeful can take a bit of practice, but it is an important component of resilience
- Listen to your body and take time for yourself
- Practice self-compassion
- It's OK to not be OK
- Focus on what is working
- Take life one day at a time and give yourself some grace



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# Resources

- **Findtreatment.gov**
- **Michigan peer-run warmline**
  - (888) PEER-753 ((888) 733-7753).
  - It's available every day from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m.
- **National Helpline:** Treatment, referral, and information 24/7
  - <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline/>
  - 1800-662-Help (4357)
- **National Institute of Health**
  - Social wellness toolkit
  - <https://www.nih.gov/health-information/social-wellness-toolkit>



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# Resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
  - [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
  - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Crisis Text Line**
  - [www.crisistextline.org](http://www.crisistextline.org)
  - Text “START” to 741-741
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness**
  - <https://www.nami.org>
- **Cultivating Belonging in the Era of COVID-19**
  - [Cultivating Belonging Handout – Partners for Healthy Living](#)



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# Additional Resources

- Great Lakes MHTTC Suicide Prevention Resource Guide
- States in HHS 5: IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, and WI
- Great Lakes MHTTC Products and Resources

<https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/great-lakes-mhttc/product/great-lakes-mhttc-suicide-prevention-guide>



# Stay in Touch

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# Questions



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