



## Transcript:

# Staying Connected with Students and Youth during COVID-19 Part 4: Cultivating Belonging in the Era of COVID-19

Presenter: Angela Begres  
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ANN SCHENSKY: Good afternoon, everyone. We're going to give people a minute or so to get in and then we will get started.

All right, we'll get started. I know there's still a couple of people probably on their way in but welcome everyone to our webinar today, cultivating belonging in the era of COVID-19. This is the fourth of these staying connected with students and youth during COVID-19 webinars. If you have not had a chance to attend the other three or if you just want to listen to them again, you can find them in the product section of our website, the MHTTC website.

This webinar today is brought to you by the Great Lakes image and SAMHSA. The Great Lakes ATTC, MHC, and PTTC are funded by SAMHSA under the following cooperative agreements.

The opinions expressed in this webinar are the views of the speaker and do not necessarily reflect the official position of DHHS or SAMHSA. The MHC network believes that words matter, and we use affirming, respectful, recovery-oriented language in all of our activities.

Just some housekeeping details quickly. If you are having technical issues, please individually message Stephanie Behlman in the chat section at the bottom of your screen, and she'll be happy to help you.

If you have questions for the speaker, please put them in the Q&A section also located at the bottom of your screen. Our chat section moves pretty fast, so if you put a question in chat, we might accidentally miss it.

A copy of the PowerPoint slides as well as the recording and hand out will be available on the MHTTC website, and that takes us about a week or so. You will be directed to a link at the end of this presentation for a very short survey. We would really appreciate it if you could fill it out. It takes about three minutes, and it's how we report back to SAMHSA.

We will be using automated captioning during the presentation today. And finally, certificates of attendance will be sent out to all who attend the full



session. And they will be sent via email. Again, these can take seven to 10 days.

If you would like to see what else we're up to, please follow us on social media.

Again, we are lucky enough to have Angela Begres as our speaker today. Angela is a licensed clinical social worker who did her training at the University of Chicago, where she obtained her MSW. She's an experienced trainer and presenter, contracted both independently through various nonprofits in the Chicago area Michigan and other areas. She has experience integrating mental health education programs into the curriculum for students and staff within the Chicago and West Cook County Public Schools. And again, we are excited to have Angela back. And I'm going to turn it over to you.

ANGELA BEGRES: Thank you so much.

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today. I'm Angela Begres. I am located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. And for all of you who have attended the last three presentations, thank you for coming back. Today, we're going to be talking about cultivating belonging in the era of COVID-19.

Before we get started, if you can share in the chat where are you connecting from and maybe what are your roles in your organization.

Going to go over some of the learning objectives for today. I'm going to be defining the impact of COVID-19 to our mental health as well as our needs to belong. I'll be discussing the short and long term consequences of social distancing. And lastly, I will be providing some key strategies for maintaining a culture of belonging in the virtual environment.

So feeling connected is a key factor that impacts our well-being, productivity, engagement, and our ability to reduce internal stress. So belonging is really, really important for us in our daily lives.

But as usual before I get started with this presentation, I always like to give us a few minutes to check in with ourselves. So when you do, find a comfortable space, a comfortable position in your chair, you can do a quick body check. How are you feeling? Where are you holding your tension? Maybe, how is your Monday going so far. And if you can maybe take one breath in, one breath out. This is just the way to bring us to the moment, to the present, and hopefully to get us centered and being able to participate in this presentation. I see someone calling from Oregon, so I'm guessing it's a lot earlier there. So please tell us what's going to happen in our near future because that would be helpful. Grand Rapids, Michigan, love that place. Well thank you, everyone who is sharing their location, I appreciate that.



Can anyone share how are they feeling today, what are some feelings you are currently having about your day, your Monday. How are you all feeling? I would love to hear that from all of you.

Feeling relaxed, that's good, Lauren. Thank you for sharing that. It's going well, good. That's nice, a lot of positive messages coming through. That's really good. I'm glad to hear that from everyone. Hey, maybe it's the weather, getting warmer, or maybe just we're all used to our current routine. So I'm really glad to hear everyone's feeling well.

All right, so let's talk about our well-being. So, many people think about wellness in terms of physical health only but wellness, however, is much more than physical health. Wellness is a full integration of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. It is a complex interaction that leads to quality of life. It is important to look at wellness as more than just physical health through exercise, and see the multiple dimensions that continue to contribute to our health and that helps us live an active, healthy life.

So I wanted to just start with showing you all the wellness model and putting us in the mindset that our goal usually is to have a wellness, a well-being life. I want to feel like our life is healthy and that we're having a good, healthy quality of life. And often times when we do that, we tend to focus mostly on physical, right. What do I need to eat, so I can maybe look a certain way or weigh a certain weight. So we tend to always think about our physical symptoms when it comes to well-being, but just wanted to point out that there are a lot of different aspects of our well-being.

We have the emotional side, how we connect to others, how we feel, how we belong, how we shift from our emotions, from being happy, sad, or anger. So emotions are part of the well-being model.

As well as intellectual, how are we learning, and changing, and contributing to our intellect. And we tend to sometimes connect that to education or connect that to our places of work.

Our spirituality involves seeking purpose and meaning in our lives, our environment, so feeling connected to our environment by having different habits. Many of us have adopted this need to protect the environment. So many of us are trying to help the environment be healthy, so that we and every other generation after us continues to have an environment that is healthy.

Well-being also means being able to have social connections and being able to maintain relationships.

And lastly, our occupation, right so occupation also plays a role in our well-being.



And so I want to put this into perspective as we move forward in the concept of belonging because I think it connects very well to this idea of how belonging impacts our life and also how COVID-19 has impacted our wellness in the last year.

So let me give you a brief definition of belonging. So belonging is more than just being part of a group. Belonging is also critically tied to social identity, a set of shared beliefs or ideas. To truly feel a sense of belonging, you must feel unity and a common sense of character with and among members of your group.

And I think it's important to remember that belonging is a fundamental part of being a human. We need social interaction, and this need is hardwired into our brain. We know that it is part of our being to feel connected to others, to communities. And that's why it is so important to continue to think about how do we connect during social distancing, or how do we connect post pandemic and as we try to come back to a new sense of normal.

So here's some stories that I found around connection.

So we tend to focus most of our attention on social support, but research has found that low sense of belonging has a much stronger prediction of depression than social support. And a study at the University of Michigan found that when people lack a sense of belonging, it is a stronger predictor of depression. In fact, it is an even stronger prediction than feeling of loneliness or a lack of social support.

So again this need of feeling belonging is really important. They provided some examples that people who generally say or use statements such as I generally feel that people accept me have a higher sense of belonging. So feeling accepted by people, feeling accepted by your community increases our sense of belonging as well.

And as you think about the past year, the sense of connection has decreased because we're no longer face to face with coworkers, face to face in school with our teachers, and that has definitely impacted our sense of connection as well as our sense of belonging.

So I'm going to give you some information around COVID-19.

So there's been several studies that have collected data around the impact on behavioral health symptoms. And one recent study by the Center for Disease Control, that was collected in late June 2020, they found the following information, they found that 31% of people who responded to a survey reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, 13 reported having started, having responded, sorry, 13% reported having started or increased substance use, 26% reported stress-related symptoms, and 11 reported having a serious



thought of suicide in the past 30 days. It's important to note here that these numbers are nearly double the rate we would have expected before the pandemic.

So again, we know that COVID-19 has affected many different aspects of our lives but it has had a severe impact on mental health in adults and youth. And I just wanted to put this information out there for us, so we recognize the importance of supporting each other through this time. Not only supporting each other, but many of you who are here work for many different mental health organizations, so recognizing the need for those services in our communities.

We also know the pandemic has increased stress. I am a mental health [INAUDIBLE], I'm a mental health therapist, and a lot of the clients that I have seen in the last year have noted increase of stress. And so we know that this pandemic has increased our fear and worry about our health and the health of our loved ones. It has increased our fear on our financial situations, our job security. And we've also lost a lot of supporting services that we used to rely on, things like daycares being closed, that was the supportive services, things like our youth being able to go to school, participate in after school activities. Those services have were closed for a while, and so those created a lot of stress.

Along with that, we noticed a big change in sleep pattern, a sleep and eating patterns. You can imagine being home all the time increased our appetite, difficulty sleeping or concentrating, worsening of chronic health problems, worsening of mental health conditions, and there was an increased use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. And so these are all things that have come out of this last year.

So individuals who have low sense of belonging tend to have higher levels of stress. And so I think it's important to remember when we're thinking about systems, and supporting individuals, and supporting ourselves, we want to make sure that we keep in mind or note to ourselves how are we feeling connected, how do we feel about our belonging, our ability to accept ourselves, and how people perceive us.

So let's talk about how important it is to feel connected. So social distancing and self isolation are contributing to increasing anxiety and depression among many in an already stressful time. Despite the importance behind social distancing and social isolation, humans are wired for connection and social inclusion, and crave a sense of belonging. 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 our healthy behaviors. If we're connected to others, we're able to talk about some of our challenges out loud. We're able to brainstorm ideas together. So feeling connected is really, really important.





This is also a really important aspect. So feeling belonging is critical during the pandemic and beyond. As social distancing in economic aftermaths continue, connecting is a key factor that impacts our well-being, productivity, engagement, and reduces stress levels. It's important to have a sense of belonging and connection, not only to our loved ones but with our community. Later on today, I'm going to be talking about how we can navigate our sense of belonging to our communities. One thing I'm sure you've all heard a lot during the past year is the concept of resiliency. And what I found in research is that those individuals who have a higher sense of belonging were more likely to be resilient through difficult times. They were able to believe that they could overcome those difficult times. So having high sense of belonging increases our ability to be resilient. Again, as we work with individuals and we're helping our youth, we want to enhance the sense of connection, so that we can enhance other aspects of their well-being.

One thing that we found out through COVID-19 is that resiliency does not only include one person. Resiliency and being resilient is part of a system. We have learned that we tend to be very interdependent. And we are dependent on things like health systems and many other emergency systems in our communities. And the more we felt confident with our health systems, in our emergency systems, the more likely we were able to build resiliency because we knew that even if something was going to happen, there was the resources available for us. In areas where those resources weren't as available, resiliency tends to decrease.

Resiliency refers to the positive adaptation to adversity. And we're not born with resiliency, it is built over time, and it is based on our own genetic makeup and also the way we perceive the different things that happens to us with different stressors that happens to us, such as COVID-19. Being resilient means being able to adapt or get back to center.

Often times, we like to define resilience just like if you get a rubber band and you push it all as far as far as you go, right, and then you let it go, it comes back to its normal shape. That's the concept of resilience.

We know that, as humans, we tend to be really resilient. Sometimes, there are situations in our life that pushes us as far as the rubber band. It tends to push you way on the opposite direction. But once we get through those difficult times, we tend to be able to come back and regain our same level of strength. And so resiliency is really important. If anything, we have seen a lot of resilience in communities, in individuals, in youth. But again, the level of feeling connected and belonging plays a big role on the way that we perceive resiliency.

So how do we build resiliency during these times?



The one thing I know I've been adopting through my whole year, and as I teach programs and as I provide therapies, I always encourage people to give grace. Give yourself grace.

Stress uses up a lot of energy. You may feel unfocused, and unproductive, and used, and unsure of how to navigate working, attending school virtually. Allow yourself to dial down your expectations of yourself and others a bit. It's OK and normal to waiver around as you try to adapt to a new circumstance. We have adapted through the past year. And now we're adapting to kind of this like hybrid situation where we are trying to go back to normal but we recognize that things won't come back 100% to normal. So we want to give ourselves grace. That means if, so for example, for me I used to go in person to give these courses, and then I had to be virtual and learn some skills and learn how to present without connecting with people in person. And in that process, we have to give ourselves grace to maybe make mistakes, to maybe not do it as effective as we used to do it when things weren't virtual.

So next time you're having a hard time learning a new skill because of the parameters of COVID or next time you're having a hard time because your kids are now trying to learn how to go to school in a hybrid world, give yourself grades and also help others understand the concept of grace.

It's also important to keep your social connections. And I'm sure by now everyone has become an expert in this right. Making sure that we send messages to our loved ones, and our friends, and our co-workers. Making sure that we leave time and space to connect virtually, or maybe now we can meet each other in a park. So making sure that we're still giving time for our social connections.

Actively managing stress. One thing that is useful and could be helpful is to notice when you're stressed to name it and to acknowledge it. Just doing that helps us to start to relax. So if we're stressed about something, we can be stressed about all of the work we have this week. Let's just acknowledge it. This week is going to be a difficult week. There's been, I have to do a lot of work this week. I'm going to need some grace in that process. So the more we're able to say some of these things out loud, the more likely we can, kind of, let it go from inside and from our thought processes.

Find the new normal, and please know that your new normal may shift on a monthly basis, on a weekly basis but that's OK. We are resilient, and we're adaptable. And so as long as we try to find a normal that includes a routine, that helps us feel productive, that's all that matters.

Don't be afraid to seek help. If you need support, if you need physical support, if you need emotional support, there are many resources right. Now I'll give you some resources around mental health at the end of this presentation. Use this time productively. If your days have shifted, maybe you are working more from home, and then you have a little bit more time, right. So maybe



during the week you do your laundry because you're working from home and you have more time in the weekends. So think about how can we become more productive.

And then consider how you can contribute. How do we contribute to our community? How do we contribute to others? That can mean volunteering, writing thank you cards to health care providers, first responders, donating blood, envisioning your best possible self. So again, this time has made us where we see it because it has given us time to stop, re-adjust, and think about what's important to us, but I want you to all know that this is a process. And the more we practice it, the more resilient we can become.

So we can also maintain our connections during the time of social distancing. And I feel like for many of you this could be a routine, sorry a reminder, since we've been in this life, we've been kind of in this time for almost a year of social distancing and we might almost be at the end of social distancing, crossing fingers hopefully at some point. But if you haven't, it's important to make sure that you're maintaining meaningful connections during this time. So how do we do that? If you are at home, make sure that you maintain a home routine. That does not mean you have to plan minute by minute of your day. In fact, if you do that, it can be unhealthy, right. Because then we fail sometimes and that creates a lot more anxiety. But do have some level of routine, that could be I'm going to cook for my family today. We're going to hold family meetings. We're going to exercise together. I'm going to maybe reorganize my home. I'm going to teach someone in my house a new hobby. So think about how do we maintain a routine that enhances connection. One thing you do every day that is just focused on making sure that we're building connections with someone at home.

Home-based community services. We can also maintain connections with our community services, right. Write letters or draw pictures and mail them to others who cannot receive visitors. Find three things in each room that you can donate to those who need it. And then as you know, it's also helpful to connect virtually. So, so many new concerts have been available during this time. Spiritual services, book clubs, so many other ways that we can tour different museums in different countries, share meals with extended families using video chat.

I have to share that one of my favorite memories during this pandemic has been my dad's birthday last year. We did this, my family, my whole family decided to create this basically music video to a song that my dad loves. And we all dressed up, and recorded ourselves singing one verse of each song, and then one of my nephews put it all together. And we shared it with him virtually on his birthday. And we laughed, and it was just the best time. And it was all done virtually.

So becoming creative is really important, right. How do we connect and do things virtually? I have seen so many birthdays, and gender reveals, and baby





showers, and weddings happening virtually. So it is really, really important that we continue to feel those connections.

So I'm going to ask you all now, how do you create belonging. I'm going to give you a few minutes to think about this and please share with me how have you created belonging in the last year, or in the last month, or in the last week. What are some things that you do for belonging or to maintain belonging? And if you can share that, write it down in the chat, that would be really helpful. Again, I like to do this because so many of us can learn from each other, and this could be a really good resource to learn with other people are developing or creating belonging.

Right, I see tweet seeking input, that's awesome.

I do more video chats with my family members, absolutely.

I have been calling my elderly mother daily, that's amazing. Think about that, right, calling your elderly mother daily. Not only how you feel connected during those calls, but how, not only how your mother feels connected but how you feel connected, right, and that's really significant.

All right, thank you all for sharing. Facebook Live with family, absolutely. Checking on, checking in on co-workers through teams, yeah.

Web video chat with family and friends in faraway places, in faraway places plus sharing photos were possible with co-workers, yeah.

FaceTime with grandchildren, virtual game nights, I have heard so many different virtual game nights that families do and that's such an amazing way, right. We've become more creative in how we do, how we create belonging. Oh I like that. Each night my 14-year old niece and I pool an information card from a deck, take a picture of it, and share with each other, yeah.

Doing more outdoor activities, absolutely. Helping community members connect to their family members via Zoom, that's amazing.

Communicating and setting up Zooms for families to join. That's really nice, we see a lot of us have been using technology to connect and see each other. And that's really important.

All right, so let's talk a little bit more about belonging. Like I said before, a sense of belonging is, it's a major contributor to our mental health. It is the most significant need we have as human beings.

There are two categories for belonging, and those are belonging to self. So belonging to self means accepting who you are and that you are different than other people. It's being confident and emotionally secure in many situations, not feeling like you need to change who you are to be OK with yourself.



And then we have belonging to others, which is knowing that you are wanted, invited, and accepted by a group of people. When you feel like you have to change yourself to belong, you're actually shifting from belonging towards fitting in. And Brene Brown discusses the difference between fitting in and belonging in one of my favorite quotes, and I put that one here. If you haven't heard of Brene Brown, she's actually a mental health professional who has wrote a lot of different books around vulnerability and belonging. She has a podcast. She's an amazing person. If you don't know her, please research her. But this is her quote on true belonging, "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." And this is really, I think it's a really powerful statement.

And when I was preparing for this presentation, I thought about it for a while, and I thought about the different communities who maybe have a harder time in belonging because of who they are. And so I want you all to think about this and how we provide acceptance to people and how we invite people into our communities. Some of you talked about co-workers, how we build belonging at work, how we build belonging at school, and how we build belonging within ourselves because this can be a lifelong goal.

And many of us suffer from this split between who we are and who we present to the world in order to be accepted. So I want to challenge you all this week to ask yourself the following questions about belonging in your own lives. What do you, when do you feel the strongest sense of belonging to yourself? What changes your sense of belonging? What group of people do you feel the safest with? Because being able to fully belong requires feeling safe. Otherwise, we're very vulnerable to others.

So how do we create belonging?

Well the first thing we want to do is make sure that we embrace your group. So building your friendships with individuals, but also consider joining personal or professional groups with which you feel a common sense of purpose and solidarity. Remind yourself of the identity you share with co-workers, and consider joining or creating additional groups with your co-worker colleagues. Join the running club at your company or start reading group with others who work for your organization. Being part of something and that coherence and alignment between your goals and the group's purpose will help you feel a greater sense of belonging. So belonging can be in many different areas of our lives, right, how we feel, how we build our friendships, but also how do we join other groups that enhance our professional goals. And also being mindful of if we are not feeling connected, if we're not feeling like we're belonging, where can we find that, what do we



enjoy, do we enjoy book clubs, do we enjoy sports, do we want to focus more on spirituality, and embracing those groups.

Another way we create belonging is by being authentic. According to experts, trust is built when you are authentic, empathetic, and perceived as competent. You can create the conditions for belonging when you are open and vulnerable as well as when you are empathetic towards others. So again, we want to make sure that we're being authentic to ourselves, and that will help others feel comfortable sharing and being authentic with ourselves.

And that goes on to the third part here, signaling acceptance. People can signal acceptance and help ensure that people around them feel safe by asking questions, listening, and demonstrating focused attention, right. So we know that when someone is interested in what we have to say, they do signal acceptance, right. They listen. They maybe ask further questions. Maybe they share some of their experience with us. So we want to make sure that we also signal that acceptance by listening and paying attention to others.

Like I mentioned before, community is a big part of developing belonging, but also community is important to our mental health. We are social beings, and we're not meant to live in isolation. Community is critical for us to thrive, especially for someone with mental illness who's already experiencing common symptoms of loneliness and isolation.

Community provides many elements that are critical to mental health. Here are the three most beneficial aspects. So being part of a community enhances our belonging. Community provides a sense of belonging, a group you identify as being part of. It also provides support. Being part of a community helps us consider or turn, or understand that there are people around us that are willing to help us and support us. So 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. So I feel like you might be noticing this pattern here of feeling belonging tied up to or, tied up to the concept of feeling safe. And then also purpose, right, being able to be part of a community helps us understand and really think about having a purpose. In a community, people fill diff, fill in different roles. These roles can give you a sense of purpose to better, to bettering the lives of others. Having purpose and helping others helps give meaning to life. So when we're part of a community, we play different roles. We might play the role that bakes. So whenever something's happening in our community, our peers, our friends call to us to bring in baked goods. We might be the friend that listens. So people in our community will call us to get help and support. And those filling the feeling of purpose for, of purpose helps us feel connected to our community.

Know that communities that is big, general thing. Community can be your work community, can be your school community, can be your neighborhood



community. So there are different communities that we can build that can improve our mental health and enhance our belonging.

And this kind of leads us to this slide, right. So how do we find community? I believe that it was during this pandemic that we have really lost our sense of community because we have basically isolated ourselves, or maybe our family, our families who we live with into this bubble. And now that things are starting to feel more normal, we are all trying to really look and think for how do we start connecting to our communities or how do we start to regain our feelings of belonging. Where does it feel safe to do those things.

I also want to talk a little bit about finding community in the sense of people of color and how that sometimes can feel dangerous or scary. And those communities have a much harder time in feeling of, feelings of belonging. And so let's think about, how do we do this in a way that's safe for everyone. So when looking for a strong sense of community, it is important to do some self reflection. Being aware of what's important to you can help you find ways to connect with others like other like minded people. So when you start to think about how do I build my community or what is my community, think about your interests. What do you like to do. I've talked a lot about maybe a book club. I think the book clubs have become really popular during the last year. But there's a lot of other things that maybe we could be interested in, right, things like sports, things like music, or dance, things like joining exercise, an exercising app where there is a community of people that are exercising with you. All of those things can be really helpful.

Think about what are your values, right. What are some values that you have that you would like to share with others or you would like to build or grow on. And these can include things like charities or volunteer work. Being of service is rewarding, and you can connect with others who are having similar, 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. So again when we think about volunteering, we think about well, maybe, we don't have enough time or so many organizations already have enough volunteers. Know that this doesn't have to be an every week thing or an every month thing. We can volunteer maybe during certain holidays. We can volunteer only certain times a week or seven times a month. But there are different spaces that can definitely benefit from volunteers. And so we can always find a place where we can give back to our community and share our values.

And another place that we can find community is by our, through our beliefs, what do we believe in. Whether that is spiritual practices or religion, try going to some speaking engagements, introductory classes, or service. So thinking about those areas can help you identify where can I find community, where would I fit in my community, and how can I give back to my community as well



because giving back is a big part of feeling connected and feeling belong, feeling like we belong somewhere.

So we also want to make sure, and I think we talk a lot about this, that we are taking care of ourselves because belonging is belonging to self and belonging to others, and this will fall into that belonging to ourselves. So we want to make sure that we're eating healthy or healthy, healthfully to keep your body in top working order.

Exercise reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, whether you're working out at home or taking a solo jog around the neighborhood. Practice relaxation therapy. Focusing on tension and relaxing muscle groups can help you relax voluntarily when feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious. So relaxation therapy really can be done at any point. I, oftentimes, like to do it when I have long presentations, right before and right after, where you, kind of, tighten all of your muscles, and then start to loosen them one by one. That can be really helpful. It doesn't take too long and it's even a type of mindfulness practice.

Let light in. For some people, increased exposure to light can improve symptoms of depression. If you can open the shades and let more sunlight in, that can be really helpful. I love light. I grew up in Miami, so sun is my thing. And it's clear, for many people in the Midwest, that when there's not enough sunlight we all, our mental health tends to struggle.

Be kind to yourself. Treat yourself with the same compassion you would a friend. And then it is really important, I always talk about this, being kind to yourself and being compassionate to ourselves. We tend to do so much negative talking to ourselves, even in the smallest things, right, oh, I could have done that better, or I never could do everything right, we just do a lot of negative talk to ourselves. And I want and, I want to encourage you all to think about how can we talk to ourselves with compassion. How can we talk to ourselves like we would be talking to our best friend. We would never tell our friend, you could have done that better. I would say, like, maybe things can take a little bit more practice, next time you can do a better, or we can say you did a really well, right. So just being mindful when you are talking to yourself to use kind words to yourself.

Stay connected. And we, it appears that many of you have been utilizing that, right, even if you can't get together face to face, you can stay connected to friends, family, and neighbors with phone calls, text messages video chats, and social media. If you're feeling lonely, sad, or anxious, reach out to your social support. You know that sometimes when we're feeling, when our mental health is not doing so well, we tend to withdraw, right. So it's really important that we catch ourselves when we are feeling wary, or stressed, or sad, and we connect with others because a simple conversation can really help us feel better. We tend to oftentimes make things in our mind so much bigger than they tend to be in reality, and so if we can say it out loud, it helps





us recognize that maybe the situation that's making us stressed is not as severe as we thought it would be.

And monitor media consumption. While you may want to stay up to the minute with COVID-19 news, too much exposure can be overwhelming. Balance media consumption with other activities you enjoy, such as reading, cooking, or listening to a podcast or a book or music. So again, we know a lot of fans have increased our media consumption, even our youth have increased our media consumption. I had a youth tell me the other day, I don't understand why does my mom think it's OK for me to be in school virtually on my computer for eight hours but she gets really mad if I play a game for more than an hour. And I was like, yeah that's a good point, but sometimes, we have to do school and we have to all go to school. So that's kind of what things are now.

Recognize that we are all spending so much more time in our computers. So we need, we need a media break. I heard a presenter a couple of years back say that, one, if we reduce our media consumption by an hour a day, it can severely improve our mental health. So that means turning off electronics for an hour because it really improve our mental health. So if you're up for the challenge, try doing that. That can be really helpful.

The last thing I want to talk about is maintaining hope, right. We have all had a very challenging year. Many of us have lost a loved one. Many of us have been impacted either by the pandemic or by all of the other social justice challenges that we have faced in the past year. So I want to leave you all kind of with the message of hope, reminding you all that we are all very resilient, and that it is important for us to stay hopeful.

So some things to remember is staying hopeful can take a bit of practice, but it is an important component of resiliency. Definitely, when I think about this statement that I just make, I think we've been practicing for a very long time to stay hopeful, but just remind yourself that this is a really important part of resiliency. Listen to your body and take time for yourself. If you are feeling overwhelmed, if you are feeling maybe like your mental health needs a break, take that time for yourself, right. You will call work sick if you had a cough or if you, if you had a stomach virus. Don't be afraid to take a mental health day, and that goes for every adult that's here for every youth, right. Youth also deserves a mental health break. So if your youth are also struggling, let's be kind and gentle with them and allow them some of that time.

Practice self compassion, and I've talked I've talked about this. If you haven't heard a lot about self compassion, write this down and read about it because it is so important. If we are compassionate to ourselves and compassionate to others, I truly believe we can change the world. We can see things in a more kinder form. We can respond to other people more kindly. And I think self compassion can be a really important aspect of our lives and of building a healthier community.



It's OK not to be OK. Some days, we are just not OK, and that's OK. Mental health and physical health, it all come in a spectrum, right. If you think about the spectrums of our well-being, it ebbs and flows. There are days that we're feeling great, we're feeling energized, we're feeling hopeful, we're feeling like we can conquer our to do list, and there's other days where we are struggling. And it's the only days, it could be, there may be some weeks that we're very productive and active and feeling very well, and there's some weeks that we might not have the same level and that's OK. It's OK to tell your loved ones that it's OK not to be OK, that you're not OK right now. The goal here is that to find solutions but just acknowledge that that's a thing that we can experience. And you might not feel great, but it's not a bad thing.

Focus on what is working, right. We tend to be, as human beings, we tend to focus on what's not working. Well this is not working, we need to change. This is not how it's supposed to be. It should be this way. We're always trying to focus on what is not working. So we forget to notice all of those things in our lives that are working. So remember to focus on those things that are working. And then take life one day at a time and give yourself grace. If you had a bad day today, don't carry that day onto the next day. Just let it go and start a brand new day. I'm always amazed at how toddlers can do this behavior. You know, toddlers have one day and they're like tantruming, and screaming, and yelling, and upset, and you know. And then the next day, you get a completely different toddler who is happy, is graceful, is joyous, joyful, and doesn't even carry one ounce of what happened to them the day before. And I wonder when do we lose that, right, when did we lose the concept of like, OK well that was a day, today is a brand new day. So I encourage you to take that perspective and take a day at a time. If you had a hard day, if things didn't go your way, maybe a project didn't show up the way it needed to show up, give yourself grace and try again the next day.

So there are some helpful resources I have here on this slide for you. If you are struggling with your mental health and would like to talk to a professional, you can find, you can use the website [findtreatment.gov](http://findtreatment.gov). There's also Psychology Today that come, which is not here but it's another resource if you need some professionals. For all of you who are in Michigan, Michigan has developed these peer-run warmline. So for people who just need some support, their peer support specialists that are available to support individuals, and this is not like for crisis but maybe you're having a tough day, maybe you just need to talk to someone, maybe your mental health is struggling, it is a really helpful resource. As always, there's the National hotline. And the National Institute of Health has developed this social wellness toolkit that I have attached here, that I have provided a link here, which is really just a helpful tool to have and review.

As always the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, the crisis text line, and if you need any other resources, don't be afraid to go to the National Alliance of Mental Illness to use. Great Lakes MHTTC resources as well because they



also have some really helpful information in their website. We have a handout that we have attached here cultivating belonging in the time of in the era of COVID-19, And this I developed for all of you with some of the information we talked about here. And there's some additional resources regarding Great Lakes MHTTC.

I have also linked all of my resources, but if you guys want to stay in touch with me, my email, my Instagram page is here if you want to follow. It was a pleasure to talk to you all today, and I am open for any questions that anyone might have.

ANN SCHENSKY: | don't see any questions in the Q&A or in the chat. So thank you, Angela.

This, again, has been wonderful information, really practical. People in the chat have been saying you know it's very helpful. So all of those things as we continue to move through COVID and all of its parts, so yeah it will keep changing and so will we, I guess.

So just a quick note for everyone, the recording and the slides will all be available on the Great Lakes MHTCC website. It takes us about a week to get all of the things assembled and up on the website. So keep a lookout for it there.

And again, if you have any questions, you can either let us know or you can try and contact Angela.

ANGELA BEGRES: Thank you everyone. Have a lovely afternoon.

ANN SCHENSKY: Thanks everyone for your time.