



MHA Message

There is **NO** health without Mental Health!

From The Executive Director



Since 1949, Mental Health Month has been observed in May to increase awareness of mental health and wellness. During this year's commemoration, I want to bring attention to the public health crisis affecting our youth.

While youth were struggling with their mental health long before the COVID-19 pandemic, we are starting to see the negative impact of the pandemic. Unfortunately, there are groups of youth who have been disproportionately impacted. Within this article, I will highlight some of those populations. I will focus on the unique challenges and the way our community can support our youth in the upcoming months.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2021 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, more than 40% of youth said that they'd felt so sad or hopeless within the past year that they were unable to do their regular activities for at least two weeks. Additionally, the CDC reports that suicide rates for ages 10-24 years increased 52.2% between 2000-2021.

For some local comparison, the 2020 – 2021 vs the 2016 – 2017 data from the Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey (OHYES!) survey reported that 31.77% (24.3% in 2016) of Licking County youth felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row during the past year and 15% (13% in 2016) seriously considered attempting suicide during the past year.

Some of the groups who are at increased risk for suicide include Black youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and cis teen girls (those assigned female at birth and who identify as such).

The suicide rate among Black youth has been increasing faster than any other racial/ethnic group. Based on a study regarding trends of suicidal behaviors between 1991–2017, self-reported suicide attempts increased by 73% for Black high school students, while injuries by attempt rose by 122% for Black adolescent boys.

Another population at increased risk for suicide are LGBTQ+ youth. According to the Trevor Project, more than 45% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth. Please note that LGBTQ+ youth are not inherently prone to suicide because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather placed at higher risk because of how they are mistreated and discriminated against in society.

The 2021 CDC report also found that cis teen girls are experiencing extreme sadness. Nearly three in five girls felt “persistently sad or hopeless.” And a staggering 30% said they had seriously considered dying by suicide – this percentage has risen nearly 60% over the past 10 years.

Reading this information can be disheartening and even make us feel powerless. I don't share this information to discourage anyone, but instead to spark a sense of urgency to act. I believe knowledge is power and early intervention is critical.

I know from first-hand experience the positive impacts of earlier intervention as I was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa and obsessive-compulsive disorder when I was 11 years old. I also struggled with suicidal thoughts. Luckily for me, my parents recognized the signs early and were able to get me the treatment that I needed. That is why I am so passionate about youth mental health. It's my mission to empower and educate parents, caregivers and other adults who interact with youth on how to recognize the warning signs of a mental health challenge and suicide and to intervene in an empathetic, caring and affirming manner.

Please join me in next month's editorial as I highlight the mental health crisis amongst LGBTQ+ youth and outline possible community solutions.

To your mental health,

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Executive Director

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MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

It's **MEMBERSHIP** time! Mail the enclosed form to us or go to www.mhalc.org to join today.
Thank you for your continued support!

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

HEALTHY HOME ENVIRONMENTS

Optimizing your space to improve your mental health is something that anyone can benefit from. For those living with mental health conditions, it is one tool of many that can be used to improve and support your mental well-being.



PRACTICE TIDINESS

Keeping your living space clean is shown to promote calmness and a sense of control over your day-to-day life. Your home environment doesn't need to be spotless, but clutter can be harmful to your mental state – contributing to depression, trouble focusing, confusion, and stress.¹ Not only can clutter be distracting, but it has been shown to actually make it harder for your brain to think clearly.² Neatness also provides predictability, which can cut down on brain fatigue and anxiety. Less time looking for lost items or getting distracted is always a good thing.

WHAT CAN I DO TO CREATE A TIDY SPACE?

Start small. If beginning to improve your space feels overwhelming, choose one area to start. Consider setting a timer each day to dedicate time toward improving your space.

Be mindful throughout your day. Instead of putting items down and adding to your clutter, get in the habit of putting them away. Small things, like putting clothes away right after they are washed, can help lessen the tasks when you go to clean later.

Practice mindfulness while cleaning. One study found that people who were mindful while washing dishes – taking time to smell the soap, feel the water, and absorb the experience – reported a 27% reduction in nervousness, along with a 25% improvement in mental inspiration.³

Once your space feels clean, think about organization. How can you maximize your space and be intentional about organizing to avoid future clutter and mess? Having a clean and organized space can help you feel in control and calm.⁴

Get rid of unneeded belongings. Periodically going through your place to find items to donate or get rid of can go a long way toward keeping your home minimally cluttered and clean. If you have so much clutter that you're embarrassed to have people in your home and getting rid of possessions is a major struggle for you, you might be experiencing signs of hoarding disorder.

MAKE YOUR BEDROOM SLEEP-FRIENDLY

For good mental health, it's particularly important to pay attention to your sleeping conditions. Poor sleep is known to sometimes trigger or worsen mental health challenges, while getting quality rest can protect your mental health. Your surroundings come into play with things like temperature, light, and noise.⁵

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE MY SLEEP?

Keep it cool. The ideal sleeping temperature is 60-67°F. Keep a fan around for warm nights, and blankets nearby for cold nights.⁶

Lessen excess noise. If you live with others or in a busy area, distracting sounds like traffic or neighbors might keep you up at night. You can use a noise machine, or find sleep music or white noise online to drown out annoying sounds. If no sound at all is what you need for a restful night's sleep, you could try using ear plugs.

Make your space dark. Try to limit the amount of light in your space, including electronics such as your phone or television, which create blue light that can disrupt your body's circadian rhythms.⁷ Use blinds or blackout curtains to keep outside light from getting in – especially if you work nightshift and need to sleep during the day.



MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

CREATE COMFORT

A big part of a mentally healthy living situation is feeling like your space gives you comfort, support, and calming energy. This could look like keeping comfort items around. Your favorite blanket, a meaningful gift, or a candle in your favorite scent can go a long way in helping you feel more at home. Your home can also impact your mental health based on colors, natural light, and set-up. Appropriate light, furnishing textures and patterns, and room organization can help reduce signs of anxiety and depression.⁸

WHAT CAN I DO TO CREATE COMFORT?

Notice how you feel in different parts of your home. What spaces feel the most comfortable and why? Consider how you can include those elements in other areas of your home that don't have the same energy.

Know that there's no one-size-fits-all ideal home environment. You might need to rework things a few times to find what's best for you.

Personalize your space. Put up photos of you and your loved ones, display your favorite belongings, and decorate with the intention of creating a specific feeling, like joy, creativity, or peace.

Don't let finances prevent you from changing your space. Being more comfortable in your space might be as simple as moving furniture around, swapping wall art between rooms, or opening up your blinds to let in more natural bright light.

CHECK AIR QUALITY

Good air quality can raise oxygen levels in your brain, boosting mood and focus.⁹ It's also associated with reducing the effect of stress hormones and promoting better sleep.¹⁰ While getting fresh air directly from outside is ideal (mostly because of the other benefits of nature), filtered air protects your well-being, too. You can also get a number of similar benefits from the way you breathe.

According to a 2022 literature review, 95% of studies on outdoor air pollution, mental health, and human/animal brains found that exposure to polluted air changes the brain. Of the studies, 73% reported that those exposed to above-average levels of air pollution showed more symptoms and behaviors associated with mental health challenges.¹¹

Many studies on different breath awareness and regulation techniques have found them to reduce symptoms of stress, depression, and PTSD.¹²

WHAT CAN I DO TO BREATHE BETTER?

Check the air quality. Go to airnow.gov to see the air quality in your ZIP code.

Open windows. Let air in as weather allows and if you live in an area with low levels of air pollution.

Use an air purifier. Better indoor air quality and flow can help you think more clearly.¹³

Do some breathing exercises. Try slowly breathing in through your nose for five seconds and out through your mouth for five seconds. The way you breathe has a strong impact on helping you regulate your emotions. Diaphragmatic breathing can improve attention and levels of cortisol (the stress hormone).¹⁴ Visit bit.ly/41PYLHP to find additional breathing exercises.

SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

When you're struggling with your mental health, just getting through the day can be hard, but there are things you can do to your space to help yourself be more productive and reach your goals. Ultimately, a healthy home environment will look different from one person to the next. It might take time, thoughtfulness, and multiple tries to get your space to meet your needs, but eventually it will help make your space feel right for you.

WHAT CAN I DO TO SET MYSELF UP FOR SUCCESS?

Remove barriers to healthy habits. Try putting your cleaning supplies or chore schedule in sight if you want to be better about keeping things neat, or place fresh fruit on your counter if you want to eat healthier.

Keep sensory or stim toys around the house. These types of toys can help channel your nervous energy into a healthy distraction so you're better able to focus on tasks that require a lot of brain power.

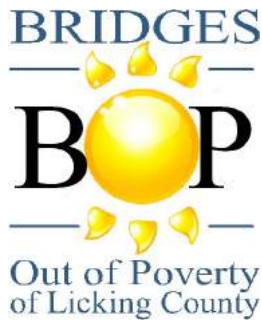
Prep! If starting the day is hard, lay out your clothes and pack your lunch the night before so you can grab them quickly when the morning comes.

Sources available by downloading the 2023 May is Mental Health Month Toolkit at mhanational.org/may.

If you're taking steps to improve your surroundings at home but are still struggling, you may be experiencing signs of a mental health condition. Take a free, private screening at mhascreening.org to help you figure out what is going on and determine next steps.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



The Bridges Out of Poverty (BOP) program strives toward reducing poverty in the Licking County community. Getting Ahead (GA) classes offered through BOP promote financial literacy and develop opportunities for job training and career advancement.

Program Coordinator Donna Wayt is continuing to offer these classes at the Justice Department, Spencer House, Courage House, Adult Felony Probation's Day Reporting, and The Main Place. She's also offering an advanced course in resilience called ACEs & PACEs which is structured around teaching tenacity to traumatized people. It will offer life skills, exercises in reflection, and logical decision-making to help promote self-motivation and reparenting from the perspective of those who have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) with an artistic twist. Participants will create a self portrait channeling personal reflections on recovery from trauma, thereby representing who they are as people in recovery.

@mhalcBridgesOutOfPoverty

The Compeer program's mission is to reduce isolation and stigma for individuals who live with severe and persistent mental illness and to improve their quality of life.



Mental Wellness Starts With Friendship

Compeers are gearing up for an adventurous spring and summer. Plans include heading to Zanesville for Glow Golf and having fun at the Colony Square Mall. Their daily coffee and gratitude group is thriving and their audiobook club is currently reading "Grimms' Fairy Tales" by the Brothers Grimm. Compeer Coordinator Donna Wayt continues to facilitate open art at The Main Place on Thursdays from 12-3 pm. The program also offers monthly lunch gatherings, exercise groups, walking groups, live art tutorials, potlucks, movie nights, yoga club, and so much more. This year they're focusing on raising the qualities of their lives with socialization and advocating for people in recovery.

Compeer's public Facebook group: Compeer Circle of Friends x2



YES Club has had a very exciting start to the spring! During spring break, not only did they explore Licking County but they also had the opportunity to tour Muskingum University. They learned all about their programs and the necessary steps to take for a traditional 4-year education. Members loved seeing the campus, enjoying a meal, and meeting the students.

The end of the school year is always a fun time at YES. They're looking forward to celebrating their members' achievements throughout the year. Those who have worked hard over the year and are registered in their homework point program will qualify for their end-of-the-school year lock-in – everyone can't wait to party! Members are also looking forward to field trips and swimming on Fridays this summer. Download the YES Club application packet for any middle and high schoolers you

think would enjoy spending time with them by visiting www.mhalc.org. @YESClub

Youth Self-Advocacy



Self-advocacy is speaking up for yourself, asking for what you need, negotiating for yourself, knowing your rights and responsibilities, and using resources that are available to you.

The Youth Self-Advocacy program is designed to help youth with developmental disabilities cultivate self-advocacy skills as they transition from high school into adulthood.

This school year has been a joy. Program Coordinator Christina Peña-Whittington looks forward to expanding into middle schools next year.

@MHALCYouthSelfAdvocacy



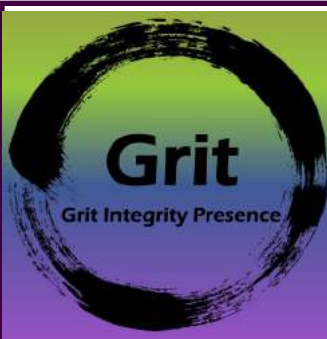
YES Club Members

Family Peer Mentoring Services

MHA's Family Peer Mentors are nationally certified by FREDLA (Family Run Executive Director Leadership Association), a national organization providing resource development, training and technical assistance on topics including parent peer support. Family Peer Mentors have lived experience navigating multiple child serving systems. They offer hope, guidance, advocacy and support for parents and caregivers of children receiving services for mental health, substance use disorders, juvenile justice, child welfare and other service systems.

Family Peer Mentors share their lived experience with families as parents who have navigated a variety of systems of care in and around Licking County. Family Peer Mentoring services are tailored to the specific strengths and needs of each family. This confidential, focused partnering with caregivers and their families is delivered with respect, determination, and hope. For more information, call 740-522-1341.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



The 2022-23 Grit Integrity Presence (Grit) program will be coming to a close soon. It has been a successful year with over 200 middle school students attending groups at Heritage and Wilson, Licking Valley, Licking Heights, Watkins, and Par Excellence. Grit also met at Newark High School for lunch touch-ins and class presentations. The second Grit camp in collaboration with Newark City Schools will take place in June.

Grit Manager Shari Johnston truly appreciates all of the community support as well as the collaboration and support of each school that has made Grit such an impactful and successful SEL focused program, meeting students where they are at. One of many recent comments from participants: "I like Grit because it helped with my social-anxiety and it helped me to not be suicidal."

@GirlsInProgress is the public Facebook page



Grit Participants

Parent Support

Positive Parenting Program

Is this for you?

Do you enjoy parenting, but wish you knew how to deal with specific problem behavior?

Triple P can help you

- . Encourage behavior you like
- . Deal with problem behavior
- . Become confident as a parent
- . Be realistic about parenting
- . Take care of yourself

For additional information on free classes being offered at various times and locations contact:

Mental Health America of Licking County
740-522-1341 mhalc.org

The Parent Support program continues to have exponential growth. Program Coordinators are certified and accredited to provide multiple levels of Triple P classes. The most recent accreditation includes "Positive Parenting with Teenagers". Individual and group sessions are offered to parents, grandparents, and caregivers to share evidence-based parenting strategies and solutions virtually and/or in-person. For more information, call 740-522-1341.

@MHALCParentSupport



The Suicide Prevention program is reaching out to educate youth and adults on the signs and symptoms of suicide in Licking County to help save lives. Whether it's teaching Signs of Suicide (SOS) in area middle and high schools or offering Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention training to adults, this critical program is working hard to improve the mental health of the community.

Suicide Prevention Program Coordinator Pam Dales is wrapping up facilitating SOS classes at the schools and she continues to post information and resources on Facebook. @mhalcSuicidePrevention

Consider attending a group with peers where you can talk about challenges and find encouragement for your journey. The Depression and Bipolar support group meetings are held every Tuesday at the MHA office from 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm. The Survivors After Suicide Loss (SASL) support group meets

on the second Tuesday of each month from 5:30 pm – 6:30 pm. Call 740-522-1341 by 3:00 pm the day of the SASL support group to register.



It's membership time at MHA!

More than a membership, it's a partnership. On the previous pages you read about all of the amazing things MHA is doing to impact the lives of the people in Licking County, but none of it would be possible without you! By renewing your membership or becoming a new member of MHA, you can help us reach thousands of your community's members by promoting and continually reinforcing mental health and wellness through education, prevention and advocacy, and eliminating the stigma of mental health issues.

See the enclosed membership form. For more information, call 740-522-1341 or visit www.mhalc.org.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." – Helen Keller

Save The Date

LOU MITCHELL MEMORIAL GOLF OUTING FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

**Denison Golf Club
555 Newark-Granville Road, Granville, Ohio**

Monday, July 24, 2023

Check in: Noon ~ Simultaneous Start: 1:00 pm ~ Dinner 6:00 pm

Register Online at www.mhalc.org



**Please contact Rhea Pierron at
rpierron@mhalc.org or 740-522-1341 for more
sponsorship information.**

Save The Date

MHA's Night of Hope fundraiser

March 9, 2024

Thirty One West

Stay tuned for details!

THANK YOU!

TO ALL OF OUR DONORS

Mental Health America of Licking County would like to recognize the following individuals and organizations for their support received from July 1, 2022 through December 31, 2022.

We make every effort to accurately acknowledge our donors.

Please call 740-522-1341 to report an error or omission, and please accept our apologies.

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*In Memory of Jacob Ellis
Ms. Wilma Hollander*

* Signifies MHALC member

“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.”

—James Allen

Thank you!

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TWO MORE WAYS TO HELP MHALC



HOW THE KROGER COMMUNITY REWARDS PROGRAM WORKS FOR ALL OF US!

Every time you use your Kroger Plus card, you will still receive fuel rewards and coupons and MHALC receives a portion of every dollar you spend. This is such an easy way to contribute to our programs.

Please follow the easy instructions below to become part of the MHALC community. If we can be of any assistance, please call our office.

- Go to www.kroger.com.
- Go to the Main Menu.
- Click on Savings.
- Click on Kroger Community Rewards.
- Click on the COLUMBUS Enroll Now button.
- Put in your information and Kroger card #.

Be sure to link your card to MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA OF LICKING COUNTY, Group # AX606.

Don't forget to buy gift cards at Kroger when you are going out to eat or shopping at stores such as Lowe's, Kohl's or Best Buy or when you start your holiday shopping. **BE SURE TO SCAN YOUR KROGER CARD WITH EVERY PURCHASE!**



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Through the AmazonSmile program, 0.5% of your purchase will be donated to the charity of your choice.

Sign-up is simple:

- Go to smile.amazon.com and sign into your existing Amazon account.
- Search and select Mental Health America of Licking County to make it your charity of choice.
- The purchasing process and products are exactly the same on AmazonSmile as they are on Amazon.

Donating has never been as quick and easy! Please share with your friends and family and help MHALC continue to provide our much needed services.

Thank you for your continued help and support!