

# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

## Supporting Child and Youth Mental Health

Children, by nature, are social beings. Children learn through social relationships, play, and other opportunities to practice and develop their skills and receive feedback.

It's important that as parents, caregivers and educators, we recognize and understand that typical development may have been slowed during the pandemic due to the social distancing, reduced time in classroom and reduced opportunities to learn and practice new skills. In the home or classroom that may look like behavioral outbursts or tantrums, difficulty following direction, or difficulty with peers. These may be distressed behaviors versus misbehavior.

Fortunately, with caring connected support, many of these children can gain those skills and get back on track developmentally. For youth who were already struggling with mental health challenges before the pandemic, the impacts of the pandemic may have exacerbated those concerns. We know treatment is effective and can return prolonged distress to more normal levels of functioning.

As the U.S. Surgeon General noted in his recently released advisory on youth mental health, "Supporting the mental health of children and youth will require a whole-of-society effort". It's all of us, as family members and community members looking at how we create environments of connection and support. We all need to care for our mental health as a component of our overall health. There are actions we can take for ourselves and our loved ones; and there are effective treatments and interventions.

### Recommendations From the U.S. Surgeon General's Report

- Recognize, manage, and learn from difficult emotions
- Ask for help
- Find ways to serve and be a source of support for others
- Be intentional about your use of social media, video games, and other technologies
- Review your practices around Sleep, Nutrition, Social connections

## Social Media and Youth Mental Health

Childhood and adolescence are periods of tremendous growth and development, including socially. Children and youth learn through social relationships and need to learn skills for navigating the ups and downs of relationships. During the pandemic, and especially when physically distancing from others in order to keep ourselves and others safe, many youth may have turned to virtual methods of connection. (Some reports suggest that around 80% of teens have at least one social media account.) Parents, caregivers, and others may wonder what impact social media may have on children's mental health.

While systematic reviews of the literature suggest there is a relationship between social media use and mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety and psychological distress, it is not clear that the one causes the other, simply that there is a connection. Caregivers and youth can attend to how a time spent on social media and the quality of that use may be impacting other aspects of the youth's life. For example, use of social media may impact sleep, contribute to sedentary behavior, may distort the youth's self-concept and confidence if comparing themselves to others; or contribute to feelings of missing out. But social media also may be a "safe" place for some youth to connect with others, to find social support without stigma; although the quality of that social support may vary.

Some helpful resources for families to learn more about social media use among youth can be found below.

- How can we build a world where we have healthy relationships with technology?
  - ◆ [For Students, Parents, and Educators \(humanetech.com\)](https://www.humanetech.com/resources/for-students-parents-and-educators)
  - ◆ [Youth Toolkit \(humanetech.com\)](https://www.humanetech.com/resources/youth-toolkit)
  - ◆ [Take Control of Your Social Media Use for Well-being \(humanetech.com\)](https://www.humanetech.com/resources/take-control-of-your-social-media-use)
- Podcast on the power technology has over our lives.
  - ◆ [Your Undivided Attention Podcast – Center for Humane Technology](https://www.centerforhumane.com/podcast/your-undivided-attention)
- <https://www.indieflix.com/like/resources> – a list of resources about social media, includes short videos and clips with experts.
- [Social media can hurt. Here are 6 ways to reduce its harms \(fastcompany.com\)](https://www.fastcompany.com/9048846/social-media-can-hurt): tips from a mental health expert.
- [Social Media Effects on Teens | Impact of Social Media on Self-Esteem \(childmind.org\)](https://www.childmind.org/article/social-media-effects-on-teens)
- Age-based ratings for entertainment and books worth reading:
  - ◆ [Common Sense Media: Age-Based Media Reviews for Families | Common Sense Media](https://www.commonsensemedia.org/age-based-media-reviews)
- Podcast on social media and teens, from American Psychological Association <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/social-media-teens>

## Culture is a Protective Factor

For the Abenaki youth, creating a wampum belt, performing a ceremonial dance, or listening to traditional stories is not just a part of their culture, it is part of their wellness. These activities connect youth to their heritage, community, and ancestors. The feeling of belonging and that they matter can give them the strength to cope in the face of adversity. To learn more, please take a look at the following resources.

The Vermont Indigenous Heritage Center – Culture is Connection

<https://www.alnobaiwi.org/blog/culture-is-connection>

Center for Parent and Teen Communication – Cultural Practices Within Indigenous Communities That Help Teens Thrive

<https://parentandteen.com/cultural-practices-in-indigenous-communities-that-help-teens/>

SAMHSA Native Connections – Culture is Prevention

[https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cultureisprevention\\_final\\_2019-01-08.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/cultureisprevention_final_2019-01-08.pdf)



Abenaki Wampum Belt

## May is Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) can occur any time during pregnancy or the first year after childbirth, making it the leading complication of childbearing. Both common and treatable, as many as 1 in 5 pregnant or postpartum Vermonters suffer from symptoms of depression and/or anxiety during the perinatal period. Early national data suggests these rates have increased to at least 1 in 3 since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is evidence that fathers, partners, foster/adoptive parents, and other caregivers are similarly at risk from the stress of welcoming a baby.

It's not just postpartum and it's not just depression; there is a wide spectrum of emotional distress that can present with PMADs.

Symptoms include feeling overwhelmed, irritable, weepy, empty, loss of interest, exhausted but unable to sleep, having scary or unwanted thoughts, and/or just not feeling like yourself. Left untreated, PMADs can have a profound and lasting impact on entire families. Universal screening for PMADs is a critical step in identifying individuals in need of treatment.

In 2018, VT was awarded a 5 year cooperative agreement by HRSA to address perinatal mental health. The Screening, Treatment & Access to Mothers and Perinatal Partners (STAMPP) program was developed to improve the mental health and well-being of pregnant and postpartum people, their children and families,

by developing and sustaining a coordinated system of mental health supports. STAMPP recently launched a new brand and communications campaign, [Support Delivered](https://supportdeliveredvt.com), to raise awareness around the prevalence of PMADs and bridge connections between expecting and new parents and statewide perinatal mental health resources. Support Delivered is an umbrella of supports and services available, encompassing an array of Vermont-based perinatal mental health resources that includes,

- Mental health clinicians with training and/or specialized expertise in perinatal mental health
- Clinical support groups
- Parenting support groups
- Information on perinatal wellness and stress reduction
- Other offerings (both in-person and virtual)

For more info and resources, please visit- [supportdeliveredvt.com](https://supportdeliveredvt.com)





Vermont Department of Mental Health

# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

Week Two 2022

## Connections and Community are a Recipe for Wellbeing!

### What is social connection?

Social connection is the experience of **feeling closeness and belonging** through supportive relationships with those around us. Human beings have a natural need for social connection — a need to feel valued, cared for and supported by others. We thrive by connecting with others. We feel stronger and nourished after engaging with each other.

Social connections include our family, friends, colleagues, and community members. It can include anyone who is available to listen and give support when needed; someone we can confide in and who understands our problems.

### What are the benefits of good social connections?

Numerous studies demonstrate both the importance of human connection to our overall wellbeing and the risks of social isolation and loneliness to our mental health. Supportive social ties have a positive impact on mood and stress levels and may lessen existing symptoms of mental illness.

#### People who feel connected to others have


- Improved mood with lower rates of depression and anxiety
- Reduced stress
- Higher self-esteem
- Greater empathy for others
- Lower rates of suicide and suicidal behavior

A 2018 study by researchers with the American Cancer Society (ACS) looked at data from more than 1/2 million adults and found that social isolation can contribute to depression, insomnia, and cognitive decline. **Research has shown that the risk of dementia is lower in those with good friends and family relationships.**

#### Connectedness also improves physical well-being and longevity

Supportive social ties can reduce blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones. Social isolation has been shown to increase chances of death (mortality) by at least 50%. **A lack of human connection was found to be more detrimental to longevity than obesity or smoking.** One study linked social isolation with up to 39% increased chance of stroke and heart disease. Another study found that social isolation may also be associated with a lowered immune system, increasing vulnerability to viruses and other diseases.

Being part of a community has a positive effect on mental health and emotional wellbeing. Community involvement provides



a sense of belonging and social connectedness. It can offer meaning and purpose to everyday life as people pursue common goals and activities.

Social connection is key to being resilient. Socially connected communities and their members respond better to crisis and disaster, and they rebound better afterwards.

## Create connections to support your mental health

**It is never too late to engage in human connection.** There are many activities that can increase our sense of connectedness and belonging. The connections we make through relationships and social activities will build a safety net for our mental health.

Social connection can look different for different people. For example, introverts and extroverts may connect in very different ways. Try cultivating social activities and connections that feel comfortable for you. Consider connecting with others in activities that relate to your spirituality or cultural heritage. These connections can be a source of comfort and meaning as you face challenges in your life.

### Additional suggestions for connecting with others.

- Chat over coffee with a friend.
- Schedule regular walks or other outside activities with one or more friends.
- Plan to connect with at least 2 people per day. Phone calls, video calls, and other digital technologies offer excellent opportunities for connecting when physical contacts are not possible.
- Consider volunteering at a nonprofit near you. Helping others is a rewarding way to build friendships and connect with others.
- Join a local interest group like a book club or hiking group that meets regularly. Routine interaction is a great way to get comfortable with socializing. Common interests are a great way to bond and form relationships.
- Visit local community centers, libraries, fitness centers.
- Attend town meetings or school board meetings.
- Participate in social justice activities.

### Tips for improving social connections

- **Listen:** When engaging in conversation, actively listen. This demonstrates interest and appreciation of the other person.
- **Offer mutual support:** This strengthens social bonds. It says that we are here to support and help each other.
- **Practice gratitude:** Expressing gratitude dramatically improves social connections and increases happiness.
- **Engage with vulnerability:** Showing vulnerability by asking for help creates an opportunity for stronger social connections. This requires a culture of trust and safety.
- **Offer kindness and being generous:** A profound and simple way of increasing a sense of social connection is to be kind. Practicing generosity makes others feel cared for and increases their happiness and ours.
- **Be hospitable:** We are social creatures. Cooking, eating, (and cleaning up) together increases social connection.
- **Avoid canceling:** Doing this repeatedly delays connecting and engagement with others.



## Get help if you are having difficulties making social connections

If you are experiencing a mental health condition, you may want to avoid connecting with others. But isolating could make it harder to cope and recover.

If thinking about joining a group or starting a conversation with a stranger gives you extreme anxiety, consider reaching out to a **mental health professional**. They can work with you on strategies to help manage your anxiety and stress.

**Support groups** can also be helpful. Knowing you are not alone, that others have similar concerns and have been able to form social connections, can improve your hopefulness about forming your own connections. Support groups are a great way to learn coping strategies and gather suggestions about different ways to connect with others. Support groups are offered by both mental health professionals and peer support programs. See the Vermont Department of Mental Health's [peer services section](#) for more information.

### References:

- ◆ [Study: Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors](#)
- ◆ [Study: Perceived social isolation, evolutionary fitness and health outcomes](#)
- ◆ [Study: Social Isolation and Mortality](#)
- ◆ [Resource: Connecting with community](#)
- ◆ [Resource: 7 Practices to Increase Social Connection](#)

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## VERMONT PROGRAMS Supporting Social and Community Connections.

There are many examples of Vermont programs that promote wellness through improved social functioning and community connections. These mental health service agencies have a strong focus on building connections as a pathway to wellness.

### The Counseling Center of Addison County (CSAC)



Has a program called [Ok. you've got this](#) that focuses on building resiliency in children and their families. The project grew after local community agencies noticed low resiliency scores on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). Using a public health approach, CSAC began engaging in numerous activities including parent groups and library campaigns around stories of resilience. Activities focus on connections: making sure that children know they are truly heard (listening), working to strengthen family ties, and widening the circle of connections outside the nuclear family.

CSAC is working to promote community interconnectedness for adults served in their mental health programs through their Community Bridges Project. This program supports engagement in community events through volunteer efforts focused on addressing community needs. Past projects, which involved collaboration between community members, staff, and others, included a community mural project, music and games events for seniors at a local apartment complex, and preparing community meals. During the pandemic the project participants held an online book group and peer support gatherings. Some local musicians generated a series of Friday night online gatherings with live music. The ongoing intention of this project is to operate separately from treatment systems and settings and to hold spaces open to all in the community.



## The United Counseling Service of Bennington County (UCS) UCS UNITED COUNSELING SERVICE

Utilizes a collaborative network approach to work with individuals and families when they first present for help. Their [Find Access to Service and Treatment \(FAST\)](#) program brings together a meeting of the individual, their chosen friends and family members, and UCS staff to listen to and understand the immediate needs and concerns, identify possible solutions, and provide support. This approach recognizes the importance of an individual's existing social network to support their recovery and wellbeing.

There are **two community drop-in centers** that are staffed by people who have experienced mental health challenges and have trained in peer-to-peer support: [Another Way](#) in Montpelier [Pathways Community Center](#) in Burlington. These centers provide peer support to adults who are seeking community, support, and connection around mental health experiences. The centers offer a safe and friendly place to share community, network and learn from each other. Everyone is welcome.

## The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI Vermont) NAMI National Alliance on Mental Illness

Works with communities, families and individuals affected by mental health conditions to build better lives. Their programs include free online support groups and educational classes. The [Family-to-Family](#) 8-week course helps families and friends of individuals with a mental health condition understand and support their loved one while maintaining their own well-being, while providing families with a network of individuals who've been there. Other Resources include online peer-led support groups for families and individuals affected by mental illness which bring communities together to support one another and share resources.

NAMI's sponsors [In Our Own Voice](#) presentations for community groups. The presenters share stories about their lived experiences and journeys to hope and healing. Listeners at the presentations have the opportunity to ask questions, learn more about mental health, and challenge misconceptions.

## The Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery Copeland Center FOR WELLNESS AND RECOVERY

Promotes wellness, recovery, community inclusion and peer support through training, technical assistance and advocacy. The Copeland Center focuses on community and creating social connections by setting the stage with what's working and supporting our wellness rather than coming together as a group through disability and what is wrong with us. Soon after the pandemic hit, Copeland developed a guide: Being Connected, Staying Connected, and Choosing Connection. Direct Link to Connections Guide: [Being Connected, Staying Connected, and Choosing Connection](#) This simple guide takes you through thinking about connections with yourself and others. For many of us, focusing on simple, safe things we enjoy which are easily accessible gives us a way to then reach out to others in our community and share in activities that create natural friendships. The Copeland Center offers programs to Vermonters on Creating Connections, Wellness Engagement, Wellness Support Groups, and the [Wellness Recovery Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#).



Vermont Department of Mental Health  
**MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH**

Week Three 2022

## Purpose is a Key Component of Wellness

Having a purposeful life is associated with mental and physical wellbeing, including but not limited to less stress, more happiness, and a [longer lifespan](#). It's never too late to increase your sense of purpose

**According to psychologist Dr. Simon Goldberg, there are three key factors to purpose:**



## Social Connections are Especially Critical to Older Vermonters

Last week's [newsletter](#) centered around the importance of social connections. As we age, having meaning and purpose becomes more critical to reducing risk of social isolation and increasing life expectancy. The [2021 Senior Health Rankings Report](#) identified that there was an 11% increase (from 71% to 79%) in Vermonters' access to high-speed internet between 2016 and 2019 for households with an older adult. Other key findings of the 2021 Senior Health Rankings Report identified strengths and challenges for Vermonters:

Strengths	Challenges
Low Poverty Rate	High Prevalence of Falls
low prevalence of multiple chronic conditions	Low Percentage Of Hospice Care Use
high prevalence of exercise	High Prevalence of Severe Housing Problems



The way that we talk about aging matters. Below is a reminder from our partners at the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living about terms to use and avoid.

Engourage These Words/Phrases	Avoid These Words/Phrases
Older Vermonter/Older Person or People	Elderly/Senior/Senior Citizen
We/All Of Us (Inclusive)	They/Them (Othering)
Accumulation of Wisdom/Knowledge/ Experience	Decline/Deterioration/Loss
Problem Solving (Sense of Ingenuity)	Nothing Can be Done (Sense of Fatalism)
Changing Demographics	Silver Tsunami
Building Momentum	Getting Old/Battling Aging

## Happening Now!



May 16th is Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day. The National Council on Aging will be hosting the [5th Annual Older Adult Mental Health Awareness Day Symposium](#). This free event will include a range of topics and speakers related to mental health, substance use, and suicide prevention.



Vermont residents 60+ now have free access to [GetSetUp's live interactive classes](#) taught by older adults for older adults to make digital learning, connection, and exploration a reality. There are a wide variety of classes which include everything from fitness workouts and cooking classes to courses which explain iPhone basics and how to host Zoom meetings.

### Resources that we encourage you to explore on the topic of aging:

- ◆ [Depression is Not a Normal Part of Growing Older](#)
- ◆ [Reframing Aging](#)
- ◆ [Aging and Medication](#)
- ◆ [Senior Report from America's Health Rankings](#)
- ◆ [Aging and Alcohol](#)

## Employment Can Give Us Purpose and Improve Our Mental Health

Not everyone may associate working with having a purpose. More often, work is associated with paying the bills.

How many times have you heard someone else, or even yourself, mention that work is stressful or standing in the way of more important activities? We often neglect to see how [work actually contributes to our well-being](#). Working, even in a stressful job, is more beneficial for our mental and physical health, than not working. [Being unemployed is harmful to our health](#). Employment provides us with connection to others, structure in our days, income, and enhanced self-esteem. Employment also gives us purpose.

The connection between employment and mental health is becoming a more prominent topic. We know that [50% of us will experience a mental health challenge](#) in our lifetime. Employers are learning that they need to support their employees' whole health, including mental health, or [risk losing them](#). Ways to offer support include raising awareness, providing education and training, supporting wellness, and creating a culture of acceptance. Employee conversations about mental health are leading to increased opportunities for support. Employment can even save lives and [when working in the right job](#), people can move from surviving to thriving.





**For more information on ways to support mental health, either your own or your employees, consider these resources:**

- ◆ [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- ◆ [What Can I Do to Promote Mental Health at Work?](#)
- ◆ [John Hopkins Total Worker Health Center](#)
- ◆ [Employee Assistance Program](#)
- ◆ [Workplace Mental Health Promotion](#)
- ◆ [Supporting MH at Work](#)

Vermont's Department of Mental Health recognizes the importance of employment for all people and continues to support the efforts of the community mental health centers to provide an employment practice called [Evidence-Based Supported Employment](#) to help adults with a mental health disorder, and the [JOBS program](#) to help youth with obtaining meaningful employment of their choice. If you or someone you know is interested in pursuing education, employment, or a career change, there are [additional services and supports](#) available.

## 5 Ways To Create A Culture Of Openness At Work Around Mental Health



**1**

**Awareness Is  
The First Step**



**2**

**Demonstrate  
Vulnerability To  
Help Create A  
Culture Of Trust**



**3**

**Be Comfortable  
Discussing Mental  
Health At Work**



**4**

**Don't Make  
Assumptions**



**5**

**Provide  
Reasonable Job  
Accommodations**

## Selfless Acts Matter, No Matter How Small They May Be

*"Kindness has been shown to increase self-esteem, empathy and compassion, and improve mood. It can decrease blood pressure and cortisol, a stress hormone, which directly impacts stress levels. People who give of themselves in a balanced way also tend to be healthier and live longer... Physiologically, kindness can positively change your brain. Being kind boosts serotonin and dopamine, which are neurotransmitters in the brain that give you feelings of satisfaction and well-being, and cause the pleasure/reward centers in your brain to light up. Endorphins, which are your body's natural pain killer, also can be released."*

Steve Siegle

### Suggestions on ways to make kindness a regular practice in your life:

- Send someone a handwritten thank you note
- Have a conversation with a colleague you don't normally talk to
- Praise a colleague for something they have done well
- On Social Media, acknowledge and validate someone's story – if they are having a difficult time you don't have to have all the answers, sometimes a like or a brief 'I'm sorry to hear this, is there something I can do?' is enough to make them feel heard
- Tell your family how much you love and appreciate them
- Volunteer for a local community organization
- Check in with yourself about your limits and abilities- after all, you can't pour from an empty cup

For more suggestions and information, check out [The Art of Kindness](#).
















## DMH Standing Committees Offer the Opportunity to Give Back to the System of Care and Build Social Connections.

The State Program Standing Committees on Mental Health are advisory committees to the Department of Mental Health (DMH) appointed by the Governor. These committees evaluate and make recommendations to the DMH Commissioner and leadership team on a variety of topics related to mental health including access to services, wait times in Emergency Departments, housing, and respite services.

The committees also conduct redesignation reviews of each of the twelve designated and specialized service mental health agencies across Vermont. DMH gives the committee regular updates regarding a broad spectrum of mental health related issues to keep members informed. If you are interested in attending or joining the Adult or Youth & Family committee, please contact Eva Dayon at [Eva.Dayon@vermont.gov](mailto:Eva.Dayon@vermont.gov). More information on [State Standing Committees](#) is available here.

### Adult Mental Health State Program Standing Committee Top Ten Priorities 2021

-  **1. Housing**
-  **2. Reducing Emergency Departments as mental health “parking lots”**
-  **3. Law enforcement response during a mental health crisis**
-  **4. Suicide Prevention**
-  **5. Crisis / drop in centers**
-  **6. Normalize recovery, reduce stigma/discrimination**
-  **7. Normalize and expand peer work**
-  **8. Expand Soteria model**
-  **9. Reduce isolation and increase health relationships**
- 10. Other crisis interventions:**
  -  Expand VT support line hours
  -  Increase crisis intervention trainings

*“The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss, and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, a sensitivity, and an understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness, and a deep loving concern. Beautiful people do not just happen.”*

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross



# Vermont Department of Mental Health **MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH**

Week Three 2022

## Prevention and Progress

### Expanding Suicide Prevention Efforts

Recent efforts to address the ongoing issue of deaths by suicide are expanding across the state. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) is partnering with the Department of Health (VDH), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and various partners across the state to create and implement suicide prevention initiatives.

### Happening Now



Various grant funded initiatives are working to confront the issue of suicide in Vermont from multiple angles. A grant from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) is building supportive infrastructure across the state, assessing current practices, bolstering programs, and [creating new data products](#). While DMH has assisted with this project, VDH has led the way in this public health approach to prevention.

Vermont has also joined the [Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families](#). This collaboration

between multiple departments in the state and the VA is working to create supports tailored to this community.



Suicide Prevention Center

In addition to the above programs, the [Vermont Suicide Prevention Center](#) is offering newly developed [Suicide and Awareness Support Trainings](#) which they write, "are available to help Vermont organizations improve their ability to identify and support people who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts."

### Prevention Through Building Community

Alongside broader public health and prevention initiatives are those taking a different approach. [The Men's Shed Program](#) is coming to Vermont thanks to funding from the Vermont Community Foundation's VT COVID19 Response Fund, and the coordination work of [Support and Services at Home](#) (SASH).



Program lead, April Mentzer, writes, "Sheds are a place for men to gather for socialization and to work together on completing projects. The first Shed was built in Tongala, Victoria, Australia in 1998 and they have since spread internationally and throughout the United States. Sheds are a community center for men to share a cup of coffee, support each other through life's ups and downs, and to share their skills and talents with each other." If you or someone you know is interested in starting or joining a Shed, you can contact April Mentzer [here](#).



## Where We Go from Here

Preventing suicide in Vermont is an ongoing task. Workgroups made up of organizations, advocates, and individuals with lived experience continue to meet regularly to ensure that progress continues and that the work done is impactful for all Vermonters.

Each September we recognize Suicide Awareness Month. This year's Vermont Suicide Prevention Symposium takes place on September 29, 2022. The theme is: From Hope to Prevention to Connection. This annual event is being facilitated by the [Center for Health and Learning](#) (CHL).



CHL writes that, "The event will look upstream preventatively and ensure our systems are compassionate and effective and offer hope to those struggling with suicidality," The VT Suicide Prevention Center is currently accepting proposals for workshop presentations for the Symposium. To submit a proposal, [please fill out the online application](#). The deadline to submit is **June 10, 2022**.

If you or someone you know is struggling, [help is available 24/7](#) at the resources listed below. More information and resources are listed at the [Department of Mental Health](#).

# You Are Not Alone

Help is Available, 24/7

COVIDSupportVT.org, call 2-1-1, or visit Facebook, Instagram or Twitter for free, anonymous help

If you need help, text VT to 741741

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255

Vermont Peer Support Line – Call or text 833-888-2557

## Compassion and Self-Care

How we perceive our experiences, whether they are challenging or positive, informs how we respond to them. These stories we tell ourselves impact our wellbeing. Using the lens of compassion can improve how we respond to life. "Another way to say this is that self-compassion means recognizing and accepting our own humanness—which means, by definition, that we are not perfect." said Dr. Kristin Neff, a leader in the field of self-compassion research, when speaking to [Psychology Today](#).

### Ways of practicing self-care can include:



Journaling

Exercise



Meditation



Talking to a friend, relative, or other members of your community



Setting aside time to be creative



There are also [many other ways to engage in the practice of self-care](#).

A selection of coloring pages, meant for all ages, were kindly made available for all to use by Alister Kai, owner of [The Crafty Queer](#). Examples like the ones below, along with more designs, are also [available for anyone to download](#) and print at home.



## Four-Legged Friends

There are all sorts of alternative ways to get the help we need. United Counseling Services (UCS) based out of Bennington, utilizes horses when working with the community. As UCS explains, the “Equine Assisted Therapy program is based on the precept that experiencing, building, and maintaining healthy relationships is the foundation of mental illness and trauma healing and recovery.”

“Horses are highly sensitive to the energy and actions of their herd mates and in their immediate environment. Their non-verbal responses provide a visible canvas upon which human clients can witness their own internal energy, mood, and behavioral characteristics.”

Learn more about how to participate in [UCS’ Equine Assisted Therapy](#) and read about how it has [helped to encourage healing](#).

