



May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Everyone has “mental health.” It is how we think, feel, and act in our daily life. It is how we look at ourselves, our lives, and the people we know and care about. Mental health is part of our overall health, at every stage of life, and it can change throughout our life.

It is especially important now, as we have experienced a year of social distancing and living through a global pandemic, that we care for our mental health. We want to help our children and youth learn that caring for their mental health is a vital part of living a healthy, fulfilling life, and that experiencing mental health challenges during their lifetime is not uncommon (1 in 5 children or youth have mental health challenges) and that it is not just ok, but it is important, to ask for help when they do. Help can come from loved ones, friends, and other trusted adults such as primary care providers, teachers, coaches, school counselors, and mental health providers, to name a few.

It is important for each of us to offer acceptance, support and respect for others who have mental health challenges in their lives and communities. That’s part of what strengthens our communities. And it’s what will help us as we emerge from the pandemic.



May 1–5, 2021 is Vermont Abenaki Recognition and Heritage Week

“I have felt that my life was so small that it could fit inside an acorn and that I was as tenuous as the white breath of a rabbit in winter. That is when the stories told long ago in my faraway home came back to mind to restore my spirit.” This quote from the Abenaki story Sacred Houses by Tsonakwa and Yolaiklia speaks of the protective factors Abenaki find in their cultural traditions.



As this week is Vermont Abenaki Recognition and Heritage Week, we wanted to acknowledge the importance of heritage and culture in building resilience for indigenous youth.

School Mental Health Update

This past year filled with uncertainty and limited social engagement has taken a large toll on students’ mental health. It has equally impacted school staff as they have made heroic efforts to completely change their operations while constantly trying to reach their students. Skilled mental health supports are available in schools through our local designated mental health agencies. Accessing these supports improves readiness to learn, can identify family needs, and provide access to increased services. The Department of Mental Health and Agency of Education are coordinating efforts to strengthen social emotional learning, support inclusionary practices, and increase mental health resources to meet the needs of everyone in the school buildings as we all work to recover from this pandemic.

Resources:

[Vermont Family Network’s Puppets In Education](#) - created a [school program focused on anxiety](#) (now available virtually).

[Vermont Afterschool](#) - [has quality summer opportunities](#) available to youth in every Vermont community

[DMH School MH Services](#)

[Culture of Staff Wellness](#)

[Effective-School-Comm-Partnerships-to-support-SMH-Final.pdf](#) ([schoolmentalhealth.org](#))

[Additional resources from DMH](#)

May is Maternal Mental Health Awareness Month

Expecting & caring for a baby can be an exciting, life-changing time. It can also be really challenging. Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders (PMADs) can occur any time during pregnancy or the first year after childbirth, making it the leading complication of childbearing. Both common & treatable, as many as 1 in 5 women are affected by these conditions. There is evidence that fathers, partners, foster/adoptive parents, & other caregivers are similarly at risk from the stress of welcoming a baby.

It’s not just postpartum & 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, &/or just not feeling like yourself. Left untreated, PMADs can have a profound & 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 five-year cooperative agreement by HRSA to address perinatal mental health. The Screening, Treatment & Access to Mothers & Perinatal Partners (STAMPP) program was developed to improve the mental health & well-being of pregnant & postpartum women, their children & families, by developing & sustaining a coordinated system of mental health supports. For more info, please visit- Resources for Perinatal Mental Health During the Corona virus Outbreak | [Department of Mental Health \(vermont.gov\)](#).



Recovery/Resiliency/Action-Oriented Section

Just as it was a transition for us to adjust to social distancing and health practices in the early phases of the pandemic, it will also be a transition to return to more typical activities. As we start to change our habits, this can make us uncomfortable. This is a type of positive stress that can actually promote resilience for the child going forward.

Analogies can help kids understand taking incremental steps. For youth: like the deep-sea diver returning to the surface, we may benefit from taking small steps toward re-entry after social isolation. For a younger child: think about how you approach going into cold water, do you just jump in (and feel the shock), or do you dip a toe first, then go in up to your ankles, until eventually you adjust and swim. Explore what those steps might look like in reconnecting socially and getting re-engaged in activities. It will help children and youth to know that you believe in them and they have support to step out of their comfort zone. Taking small risks is healthy and okay now.

Activities

- For summer programming opportunities, check out Vermont Afterschool’s Summer Matters link: <https://www.vermontafterschool.org/summermatters/>
- Activities for Families (NFFCMH): <https://www.ffcmh.org/cmha-activites-for-youth>
- Summit: the annual event that brings more than 200 LGBTQ and allied youth <http://www.outrightvt.org/no-summit-not-summit/>

Resources

- USA Today: [Scaffold Parenting in a post-pandemic world](#)
- For young children: [What Comes Next: Back to Child Care Following Shelter-in-Place](#)
- The Atlantic: [How to get our kids back on track](#)
- Self Magazine: [What Is Resilience, and Can It Help Us Bounce Back From This?](#)

VT CRISIS TEXT LINE
In A Crisis? Text VT to 741741

Workforce Appreciation Spotlight

The Vermont Department of Mental Health (DMH) wants to extend our gratitude to Vermont’s child, youth, and family mental health providers. During this unprecedented time, you have provided vital in-person supports in the community and congregational care settings. Your service and dedication are immeasurable; DMH and Vermonters thank you!

