

Vermonters Are With You

Small Businesses and the Challenges of COVID



The pandemic has hit small businesses hard. In addition to the mental health supports available via 2-1-1, option #2, through the COVIDSupportVT.Org website and social media channels, there are many business-specific resources available.

Help for the Restaurant Industry

Owners, managers and staff can find support through the [National Restaurant Association](#). There are free mental and medical health resources available.

<https://restaurant.org/articles/news/tap-into-free-mental-and-medical-health-resources>

Small Business Owners

There are videos, tip sheets and more for small business owners of all kind available at [Small Biz Ahead](#), The Hartford <https://sba.thehartford.com/business-management/small-biz-owner/mental-health/>

Here's a sample of some of their materials.

7 Ways Small Business Owners Can Take Care of Their Mental Health

No matter how your business is faring during the pandemic, now is a good time to re-evaluate your personal and work habits to stay mentally healthy, both during and after the coronavirus outbreak. David Howell, a 20-year micro business owner, says that "Paying attention to your mental health is just as vital as finding your next customer or client."

- 1. Create and abide by work-life boundaries.** Boundaries are essential to avoid burnout, especially now when so many of us are working from home and potentially finding it more difficult to achieve balance. Choose a specific range of hours in which you commit to work, when that time ends, and then turn off your work phone or email notifications and switch off whatever communication channels you use for business. Then use your off-time in whatever ways that help you decompress.
- 2. Exercise in a way you enjoy every day.** You will not only be taking care of your physical health, but also your mental health. Whether jogging, practicing yoga or playing pickleball, nearly any form of exercise helps relieve stress, since exercise boosts endorphin levels. And when your brain's "feel-good neurotransmitters" kick into gear, it helps reduce your tension and improve your mood.
- 3. Keep a journal.** Writing down your thoughts and feelings, even just for five minutes a day, can help you become more aware of your emotions. This will help you look for patterns related to how you react to various situations. Those who struggle with anxiety, stress or depression can especially benefit from this practice. According to the University of Rochester Medical Center, keeping a journal improves your mental health by helping you understand and gain control of your emotions.
- 4. If you look for a sense of community in online networks,** resist the temptation to "compare and despair," as Penny Power, founder of one of the earliest online business communities, puts it. "In a study [that] I carried out on Facebook, 83% of self-employed people said they were lonely despite using social media throughout their day," she said. "They looked online at the lives of their peers and felt desperate about their own." Keep in mind that most people's social media presence is a curated highlight reel, not their full reality.

Vermonters Are With You

Small Businesses and the Challenges of COVID



- 5. Take a walk in a natural setting.** In addition to general exercise, there are specific benefits that come from enjoying the natural world. Spending time in natural settings, even urban parks, can lower stress levels. “There’s a real sense of peace and composure you get from being outside and away from everything,” says Aaron L. Baggish, PhD., associate director of the Cardiovascular Performance Program at Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts General Hospital.
- 6. Spend time with good friends and family.** Whether you choose to vent your worries with your closest friends and family, or you enjoy spending time in their company without any talk of business, just being with them regularly (even virtually) can improve your mental health. Why? Having strong social support in your life helps you cope with stress, says Sheldon Cohen, PhD. and psychology professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. “People with social support have fewer cardiovascular problems and immune problems, and lower levels of cortisol—a stress hormone,” Tasha R. Howe, PhD, associate professor of psychology at Humboldt State University, explains.
- 7. Find ways to stay productive.** Ticking items off your to-do list can give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment—even lifting weight off your shoulders that’s been there too long. If your business activity is experiencing a serious downturn and you find yourself with little to do, look for ways in which you can use this time productively. Take care of any administrative tasks that may have fallen behind. Learn a new business-related skill, like social media marketing, that can boost your business, or tackle that project you’ve been meaning to do.

Each of us has our own way of dealing with the uncertainty of hard times, so be patient with yourself as you find what works best for you. Even if you’ve been feeling fairly optimistic, don’t underestimate the importance of caring for your mental health. “The reality is [that] self-employed business owners cannot take a day off. They keep going until being busy becomes mental exhaustion, being anxious becomes anxiety and the low mood turns into depression. Rebuilding yourself is a big job. Prevention is the cure,” Power says.

Some other pointers from business-focused mental health experts

Take control where you can

Rework budget forecasts and create incremental, month-by-month plans to restore a sense of order and control.

Be transparent

Teams look to their leaders for guidance and support in a crisis. But they also want to know they’re not alone in how they feel. When leaders are open with their teams about their own struggles and concerns, it helps build trust and loyalty.

Vermonters Are With You.

**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

