

# Behavioral Health Partnership



The COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our society in unprecedented ways. We are connecting with each other differently, we are caring for our health and wellbeing in new ways, and we are adjusting to our own set of unique circumstances the best we can. While we know that change is uncomfortable, there are many steps we can all take to ensure we are caring for our mental wellbeing.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our economy can - and already has- created or exacerbated unfortunate behavioral health consequences for many of us and our loved ones; anxiety, depression, loneliness, sleep disturbances, increased substance use, and trauma are all likely during this stressful and uncertain time. It is more important than ever that we be intentional about taking care of ourselves and to do what we can to check in on family, friends, and neighbors in safe and healthy ways.

1. **Maintain social closeness.** It's unfortunate that we settled so quickly on the term "social distancing," which is the exact opposite of what's best for our mental health right now. What we need is social closeness, solidarity, and support. So yes, be sure to keep your physical distance, but take time every day to eliminate social distance by using technology to get closer to someone. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
2. **Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories.** This includes social media. Remember that there are many positive things happening throughout the world every day. Search out these media stories instead. [The Good News Network](#) is a great place to find positive stories. Use this time to seek activities that provide inspiration and that you usually don't have time to do, like art, music, singing out loud, reading, religious events, and volunteering when safe to do so.
3. **Take small steps to build a healthy mind.** Science has taught us a lot about wellbeing. A healthy mind helps us handle adversity, enhance our work performance, and live longer, more fulfilling lives. A healthy mind is created by simple things we can do every day. In fact, positive psychology research tells us that we can actually reprogram our brain through simple daily exercises such as: being more attentive to the natural

world; writing down three things you are grateful for each morning to train your brain to search for the positive; meditating daily to practice awareness of what is present; reading at least ten pages of a good book every day; exercising for 15 minutes daily; and performing a random act of kindness. Many other types of activities could be part of this list. *You don't have to do all of these at once, and the actions don't have to be big.* For example, your random act of kindness can be a simple text message to encourage a co-worker. Your meditation could be focusing on deep breathing for two minutes or practicing on the guitar. And your exercise could be a brisk walk. Even starting with just one of these exercises, if you repeat it until it becomes a habit, you will build a healthier mind in a matter of weeks. If you can build a number of these exercises into a daily routine, so much the better.

4. **Take care of your body.** Take deep breaths, stretch, or [meditate](#). There are many free classes for yoga, stretching, and meditation that you can find online right now. These types of exercises help center our thoughts and can calm our emotions. [Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals](#). While that pint of ice cream in the freezer may be calling your name, it is important to try and incorporate fresh, healthy foods into your diet. Making a healthy meal for you and your family can also be a source of connection. [Exercise regularly](#). This may seem difficult and overwhelming right now, but there are still ways that we can move our bodies which can ultimately make us feel better. Even something as simple as a 15-minute walk allows us to get up, get outside, and get some Vitamin D. [Get plenty of sleep](#). While many of our schedules have changed, it is still important to maintain a healthy sleep schedule. Try to set a time to go to bed and also a time to wake up. [Here](#) are some tips from the CDC on keeping kids physically and mentally healthy during this time.
5. **Know that your feelings are valid.** Feeling unproductive, confused, angry, guilty, and even grief are all common as we navigate our new normal. When certain feelings such as these arise, work to recognize them for what they are and allow yourself to be okay with them. We all have worries and fears right now so know that you are not alone as you experience unpleasant thoughts and emotions. Acknowledge what you have lost during this time and allow yourself the space to grieve. Change is hard, especially change that is not within our control. Also acknowledge what you are grateful for. Allow yourself to feel both grief and gratitude.
6. **Be of service to others.** Being of service to others is one of the best mental health medicines. We all have an opportunity now to pause and reflect—alone and together—about how much we value our lives and each other, and about how much we depend on our communities to sustain us and help us thrive. Help someone who may feel alone. Offer to run an errand for someone who is at higher risk of getting sick. Take this time to call a longtime friend, chat outside with your neighbors, or send a care package. We know that how we feel directly impacts those around us, and research has demonstrated that while poor wellbeing can be contagious, so can good mental health. Taking care of yourself will have a direct impact on the loved ones in your life and will make you better equipped to listen to and support your family, friends, and neighbors who are struggling. You can also learn how to do your part and support your community on <https://helpcoloradonow.org/>.
7. **Be conscious of your use of potentially harmful substances.** Colorado has the highest rate of binge drinking in the United States. Across the country, alcohol sales increased by 55% in March. Although drugs and alcohol have been a part of our landscape throughout history, they have the potential to be

harmful to physical and mental health. Therefore, substances must be used (if at all) with caution and moderation to minimize risks.

We must be on guard and ready to turn to social support, because these times of high stress and isolation leave us more vulnerable than ever to the potential harm of drugs and alcohol. Substance use disorders are exacerbated by loneliness and feelings of despair. If you or a loved one are at risk, please know there are resources and support out there to help you. Besides telehealth treatment, many 12-step and other support groups have gone virtual. For more information on substance use disorder services at the local level, check

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdhs/find-behavioral-health-help>

<https://www.coprovidersassociation.org/>

8. **Get involved in mental health advocacy.** Mental health should be everyone's priority. From before birth and well into old age, mental health is key if we are to thrive. With many of us experiencing more down time, now is the time to get involved with mental health advocacy and to be a voice for healthier minds across the lifespan. There are two things you can do right now. First, join Mental Health Colorado's statewide network of grassroots advocates—called the Brain Wave. You will directly influence policy changes, raise awareness, and help end shame and discrimination. (Join [here!](#)) Next, you can help others by sharing your personal story about mental health through Mental Health Colorado's [story bank](#).
9. **Build a team of supporters.** Many of us are reluctant to rely on others for help, but everyone needs a team of supporters. If you're feeling stressed or if you are feeling overwhelmed and would like to receive some professional help, please call the Colorado Crisis Services Hot Line at **1-844-493-TALK (8255) or text TALK to 38255 to speak to a trained professional. The crisis line provides free, confidential, professional and immediate support for any mental health, substance use or emotional concerns, 24/7.**
10. **Even when this crisis passes, don't lose sight of prioritizing mental health.** We need to be increasingly understanding and compassionate with ourselves and others when it comes to our mental health. The shame of talking about mental health has taken a notable shift during this pandemic. It's not as uncommon now to ask a coworker about their mental health or to FaceTime someone just to admit you're feeling lonely or anxious. These are behaviors we should continue long after this crisis passes. Creating healthier minds is a cultural shift and an ongoing work in progress. And everybody can do it.

Know that your local community mental health center is open, accepting new patients, and is here to help if you or your loved one is struggling with concerning behavioral health symptoms. To find a community mental health center in your area, visit [www.cbhc.org/help](http://www.cbhc.org/help).

You can also learn more about taking care of your mental health during the pandemic at [www.mentalhealthcolorado.org/free-resources/](http://www.mentalhealthcolorado.org/free-resources/)

and at <https://www.coloradopsychiatric.org/coronavirus> (resources for the public curated by Colorado psychiatrists).

For peer support and resources check with the Colorado Mental Wellness Network: [cmwn.org](http://cmwn.org)

For more information on covid related mental health services: <https://naswco.socialworkers.org/>

For Family Support : <http://www.namicolorado.org/EDUCATIONSUPPORTPROGRAMS/tabid/99/Default.aspx>

<https://www.ffcmh.org>

### [National Family Voice, Children's Mental Health, Family Peer Support](https://www.ffcmh.org)

A nationwide advocacy organization with families as it's sole focus, we support a network of Family Run Organizations that serve families of children with mental health needs across the country. We advocate at the national level to improve supports and services and provide resources for individuals and organizations.

[www.ffcmh.org](http://www.ffcmh.org)

For Support regarding Substance use Disorders:

<https://advocatesforrecovery.org/about-advocates-for-recovery-colorado/>