



Winter Wellness Toolkit

2025 - 2026



mental health
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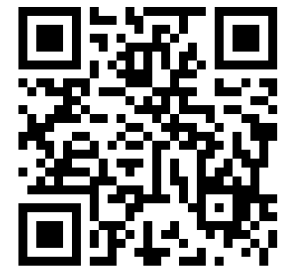


Winter Wellness Weekly Raffle

To celebrate Winter Wellness, MHC will host a raffle drawing every Friday for anyone who downloads the Winter Wellness Toolkit! Win exciting prizes like museum passes, theater tickets, craft workshops, and other cozy winter experiences!

To enter, scan the QR code below and complete the short survey. A winner will be selected at 12:00 PM every Friday, while supplies last. *Please note: individuals may only win once.*

Presented By:



**Scan the Code
and Enter to Win!**

Our Supporters Include:





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This toolkit is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.



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For many in our community, winter can bring its own set of challenges, from shorter days and colder weather to the added pressures that come with the holiday season.

This year, through our Winter Wellness Campaign, we're once again inviting you to reimagine winter as a season of possibility, comfort, and connection. Rather than simply getting through the cold months, let's create meaningful moments, notice what we can appreciate, and embrace the small joys the season offers. All season long, we'll share tips, reminders, and uplifting content to help you find moments of magic in winter.

At the heart of this campaign is our **Winter Wellness Toolkit presented by Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union**, and we're so excited to share it with you. We hope this toolkit brings comfort, inspiration, and support to you and those you care about. Thank you for joining us in creating a season rooted in wellness, warmth, and community.

Thank you to our Winter Wellness Supporters!

Presented By:



If you would like to contribute toward our Winter Wellness with MHC campaign, please [click here to make a donation](#), or create a fundraiser on behalf of MHC.

Please make checks payable to:
Mental Health Connecticut
76 Batterson Park Road, Suite 303
Farmington, CT 06032

thank you!

Tips for Financial Wellbeing

In partnership with Mental Health Connecticut, **Nutmeg State Financial Credit Union** is proud to share tips and resources focused on both mental and financial wellbeing.

Winter can bring added pressure, from heating costs and holiday debt to the emotional toll of shorter days. This guide can help you manage money, plan ahead and find balance.

1. Recovering from Holiday Spending & Planning Ahead

The holiday season often brings joy – and added expenses. As the new year begins, many people reflect on their spending and look for ways to regroup. This section shares ideas to ease post-holiday financial stress and start planning for next year's adventures.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Holiday Budgeting 101](#)
- [Financial Education Center](#)
- [Savings Accounts & Certificates](#)

2. Budgeting for Heat, Utilities & Winter Essentials

Staying warm during Connecticut winters can be expensive. Discover smart strategies to reduce heating costs, improve energy efficiency and budget for seasonal necessities.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools

& Services:

- [Winter Budgeting Resources](#)
- [Emergency Fund Calculator](#)
- [Working Wheels Program](#)

3. Navigating Financial Uncertainty During a Government Shutdown

Government shutdowns can disrupt SNAP benefits and other support programs, creating unexpected financial stress. This section provides

guidance on stretching limited resources and finding additional support.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Government Shutdown Explainer](#)
- [Member Support Services](#)
- [Budgeting & Debt Tools](#)

4. Accessing Emergency Financial Help During Winter

Unexpected expenses, from car repairs to high utility bills or medical needs, can stretch already tight budgets. Learn where to find emergency financial assistance in Connecticut and how to prepare for seasonal costs.

A Health Savings Account (HSA) offers a dedicated, tax-advantaged place to save for medical and mental health expenses, helping make care more affordable when life feels uncertain.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Emergency Funds Guide](#)
- [Health Savings Accounts](#)
- [Financial Calculators](#)

5. Managing Transportation and Clothing Costs

Winter essentials like coats, boots and reliable transportation can add up quickly. Explore ways to save on these expenses and connect with local programs designed to help.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Working Wheels Program](#)
- [Budgeting Tools](#)
- [Saving with a Purpose](#)



For All Life's Moments
YOU BELONG WITH US



NutmegStateFCU.org
860-513-5000

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NMLS #637816

6. Building an Emergency Fund & Planning for Seasonal Expenses

Preparing in advance can make winter more manageable. Learn simple ways to build your emergency fund and plan for heating costs, holiday spending and family activities.

Nutmeg's Kidz Club Account makes it easy to teach children about saving while setting money aside for unexpected costs.

Money-Saving Tips for Winter Meal Planning:

- Choose seasonal produce & store brand staples.
- Cook in batches & freeze leftovers to reduce waste.
- Use slow cookers for hearty, low-cost meals.
- Shop sales & use store apps for discounts.
- Incorporate affordable protein sources like beans, lentils & eggs.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Emergency Fund Calculator](#)
- [Kidz Club Accounts](#)
- [Financial Education Center](#)

7. Managing Irregular Income or Seasonal Employment

If your income changes with the seasons, budgeting can be tough but planning ahead can help. Explore tools that make it easier to smooth out income gaps and stay more financially stable year-round.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Out of Work Action Plan](#)
- [Jobs & Income Education](#)
- [Budget Calculator](#)

8. Setting Financial Goals for the New Year

A new year is a great time to refocus your financial priorities. Whether you want to save more, pay off debt or prepare for a big purchase, these resources can help you map out your goals and stay motivated.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [Financial Calculators & Planning Tools](#)
- [Financial Goal Setting](#)
- [Savings Products](#)

9. Financial Wellness for Mental Health Clients

Financial stress can take a toll on emotional wellbeing. This section offers supportive tools for those navigating both financial and mental health challenges.

With a Health Savings Account (HSA), members can set aside funds for qualified medical expenses to help make mental health care more affordable and accessible year-round.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [HOPE Program](#)
- [Working Wheels Program](#)
- [Health Savings Accounts](#)

10. Stretching Your Dollars: Everyday Savings Strategies

Small changes can have a big impact. Learn everyday strategies for managing your money more effectively, from smarter shopping to creative budgeting habits that make your paycheck go further.

Nutmeg State FCU Tools & Services:

- [The Upside of Frugality](#)
- [14 Ways to Cut Household Expenses](#)
- [Saving With a Purpose](#)
- [Envelope Budgeting](#)
- [Budget Calculator](#)



Technology

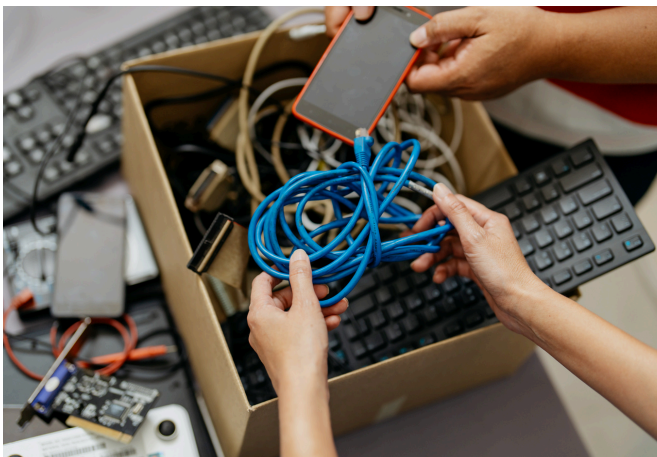
Technology & Well-Being

Our access to technology, and the rise of social media, has permanently reshaped our lives and society. The first smartphone debuted in 1992, and social media platforms soon followed, reaching mainstream use in the 2000s. Today, according to the Pew Research Center, 91% of people in the United States own a smartphone and 73% use at least one social media platform. In just 25 years, rapid and cascading innovations, e-readers, electric vehicles, mobile apps, private space exploration, artificial intelligence, and more, have transformed daily life.

For many years, social media and digital tools were adopted enthusiastically, with little attention to potential downsides or safeguards for users. Now, emerging research makes one point clear: how we use technology, and social media in particular, can significantly affect our mental health and well-being.

When examining technology's influence, the American Sociological Association cautions against technological determinism, the belief that technology itself creates good or bad outcomes. Instead, it is how people use these tools that shapes their impact. Research shows that the effects of technology depend on factors such as the type of use, timing, purpose, and function. The same is true for social media.

Together, we will explore the benefits and drawbacks of technology, its impact on adolescents, how it impacts our holiday season, and the steps we can take to support our mental health.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Pew Research Center:


- Teens use YouTube more than any other platform we asked about, but they also widely use TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat.
- More teens say using social media hurts rather than helps their sleep, productivity, grades and mental health.
- Majorities of teens say social media sites help them feel connected and creative.
- Just under half of teens (44%) say they've cut back on social media use.

Technology


Technology's Dual Impact

Technology has a dual impact on mental health during the holidays and winter season, particularly for those who are already struggling: it can either worsen feelings of sadness and inadequacy through social comparison or improve well-being by providing connection and access to mental health resources. The effect largely depends on how the technology is used and for how long.

Negative Impacts

- 
- **Social comparison:** Social media during the holidays often features a "highlight reel" of curated, "perfect" celebrations, elaborate gifts, and ideal family gatherings. This can intensify feelings of jealousy and low self-worth, making people feel their own lives don't measure up.
 - **Increased stress and anxiety:** The constant barrage of notifications and content can be overwhelming, leading to cognitive overload and burnout. The pressure to post your own perfectly curated holiday content can also create stress.
 - **Heightened loneliness:** For those isolated from family and friends, scrolling through social media can highlight their loneliness and magnify their sadness. The constant awareness of what others are doing can serve as a painful reminder of lost loved ones or difficult relationships.
 - **Fear of missing out (FOMO):** The flood of posts about festive events can trigger the fear that one is missing out, especially for those who are already struggling whether it is due to SAD, loneliness, holiday stress, grief, or another stressor.
 - **Reduced presence:** Constantly checking devices can prevent individuals from being present and enjoying real-life moments, even when surrounded by loved ones.

Positive Impacts

- 
- **Social connection:** For people who are geographically separated from family and friends, video calls, messaging, and other forms of technology can provide a vital way to connect and share experiences.
 - **Access to mental health resources:** Technology has made mental health services more accessible and convenient. Apps for meditation, mood tracking, and relaxation can help individuals manage stress and anxiety. Teletherapy allows people to connect with a therapist remotely, which is particularly helpful during the busy holiday season.
 - **Community support:** Online forums and virtual support groups offer a confidential space for people to find support from others facing similar challenges. This can be especially important for those who feel isolated or don't have access to in-person support.
 - **Creative outlet:** Extra time during the holidays can be used for creative self-expression through digital tools like video editing, music production, and graphic design.
 - **Positive reframing:** Technology can facilitate gratitude practices by using apps or online journals to reflect on positive aspects of one's life.

Technology

Technology & Youth

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued [an advisory](#) warning about the growing mental health risks of social media for children and adolescents. The report highlights evidence that frequent social media use may be linked to changes in brain regions involved in emotional processing and learning. It also notes impacts on impulse control, social behavior, emotional regulation, and sensitivity to social rewards and punishments.

Up to 95% of teens ages 13–17 use at least one social media platform, and more than one-third report using social media “almost constantly.” Although most platforms set 13 as the minimum age, nearly 40% of children ages 8–12 also use social media.

According to [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#), recent studies show that higher social media use is associated with increased symptoms of depression, though several factors may contribute to this link.

- **Reduced in-person connection:** Many young people spend less time engaging face-to-face with friends and family and rely on social media for connection, which can feel less meaningful and may heighten feelings of isolation or exclusion.
- **Fewer healthy activities:** Time spent online can displace activities that support mental health, such as physical activity and outdoor time—both of which boost endorphins, confidence, and overall well-being.
- **Poor sleep:** Social media use, especially at night, is a well-documented contributor to sleep disruption. Stressful content, prolonged scrolling, and blue-light exposure can all interfere with sleep, and chronic sleep deprivation is strongly linked to depression.

Research suggests that frequent social media use among adolescents (ages 10-19) may be linked to changes in the amygdala, responsible for emotional learning, and the prefrontal cortex, which governs impulse control, emotional regulation, and social behavior. These shifts may heighten sensitivity to social rewards and punishments. Studies also show that social media use predicts later decreases in life satisfaction for certain age groups, including girls ages 11–13 and boys ages 14–15.

Social media’s impact on adolescent mental health is influenced by multiple factors, including how much time young people spend online, the content they encounter, how they engage with others on these platforms, and whether social media use interferes with essential activities like sleep and physical activity. Children and adolescents are affected differently depending on their individual attributes.

Technology

How to Break the Cycle

Breaking the negative cycle of using too much technology requires intentional effort. Try these strategies to regain control and improve your mental health during the holidays, winter season, and beyond.



Limit screen time

- Turn off notifications: Disable alerts from news and social media apps that constantly pull you back to your phone.
- Set app limits: Use built-in smartphone features to automatically limit your time on social media and news apps.
- Use grayscale mode: Switching your phone's display to black and white can make it less visually stimulating and addictive.
- Take a digital detox: Consider deleting social media apps from your phone for a temporary or permanent break.



Consciously shift the focus

- Practice mindfulness: Be present in the moment and observe your scrolling habits without judgment. When you catch yourself doomscrolling, take a deep breath and redirect your attention.
- Curate your feed: Unfollow or mute accounts that trigger negative emotions. Seek out positive news sites or follow accounts that are uplifting or aligned with your interests.
- Limit exposure to a set time: Instead of checking news sporadically throughout the day, designate a short, specific time to check for important updates.



Cultivate positive and grounding habits

- Get outside: Even on cold or cloudy days, exposure to natural light can boost your mood, regulate your sleep cycle, and help with seasonal depression.
- Engage in screen-free activities: Actively pursue hobbies that don't involve a screen, such as reading a book, journaling, or exercising.
- Connect with others in real life: Reach out to friends and family for face-to-face connection, which is a powerful antidote to loneliness.
- Practice gratitude: Focus on the positive aspects of your life by writing in a gratitude journal. This helps counteract the negative thought patterns associated with doom scrolling.

Resources for Technology Use

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services advises the following.

What children and adolescents can do:

1. Reach out for help. If you or someone you know is being negatively affected by social media, reach out to a trusted friend or adult for help. If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis, call or text 988 for immediate help.
2. Create boundaries to help balance online and offline activities.
3. Develop protective strategies and healthy practices for your own social media use.
4. Be selective with what you post and share online and with whom, as it is often public and can be stored permanently.
5. Protect yourself and others from cyberbullying or other forms of online harassment and abuse:
 - a. If you or someone you know is the victim of cyberbullying or other forms of online harassment and abuse, don't keep it a secret.
 - b. Protect others by not taking part in online harassment or abuse. Avoid forwarding or sharing messages or images, tell others to stop, and report offensive content.

What parents and caregivers can do:

1. Create a family media plan to help establish healthy technology boundaries at home—including social media use. For information on creating a family media plan, visit www.healthychildren.org/English/fmp/Pages/MediaPlan.aspx.
2. Create tech-free zones and encourage children and adolescents to foster in-person friendships.
3. Model responsible social media behavior.
4. Teach children and adolescents about technology and empower them to be responsible online participants at the appropriate age.
5. Report cyberbullying and online abuse and exploitation.
6. Work with other parents to help establish shared norms and practices and to support programs and policies around healthy social media use.

What technology companies can do:

1. Conduct and facilitate transparent and independent assessments of the impact of social media products and services on children and adolescents.
2. Prioritize user health and safety in the design and development of social media products and services.
3. Design, develop, and evaluate platforms, products, and tools that foster safe and healthy online environments for youth.
4. Share data relevant to the health impact of platforms and strategies employed to ensure safety and well-being with independent researchers and the public in a manner that is timely and protects privacy.
5. Create effective and timely systems and processes to adjudicate requests and complaints from young people, families, educators, and others to address online abuse, harmful content and interactions, and other threats to children's and adolescents' health and safety.

What policymakers can do:

- Strengthen protections to ensure greater safety for children and adolescents interacting with all social media platforms, by:
 - Developing age-appropriate health and safety standards for technology platforms.
 - Require a higher standard of data privacy for children and adolescents.
 - Pursue policies that further limit access—in ways that minimize the risk of harm—to social media for all children and adolescents.
- Ensure technology companies share data relevant to the health impact of their platforms with independent researchers and the public in a manner that is timely, sufficiently detailed, and protects privacy.
- Support the development, implementation, and evaluation of digital and media literacy curricula in schools and within academic standards.
- Support increased funding for future research on the benefits and harms of social media use.
- Engage with international partners working to protect children and adolescents against online harm to their health and safety.

What researchers can do:

1. Establish the impact of social media on youth mental health as a research priority and develop a shared research agenda.
2. Develop and establish standardized definitions and measures for social media and mental health outcomes that are regularly evaluated and applied across research contexts.
3. Evaluate best practices for healthy social media use in collaboration with experts including healthcare providers, parents, and youth.
4. Enhance research coordination and collaboration.

Resources

Center of Excellence on Social Media and Youth Mental Health

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Center of Excellence (CoE) on Social Media and Youth Mental Health is dedicated to creating a healthy digital ecosystem for children and adolescents.

[Website](#)

Health Advisory on Social Media Use in Adolescence

Recommendations for educators, parents, policymakers, mental health and health practitioners, technology companies and youths themselves to help adolescents develop healthy social media practices.

[Website](#)

American Psychological Association's Family Media Plan

A customizable family media plan to help set media priorities and boundaries. The Family Media Plan includes a list of media priorities and practical tips to make the plan work.

[Website](#)

StopBullying.gov

Helpful tips on how to report cyberbullying.

[Website](#)

Take It Down

For support or to get private images that have been taken and shared online without permission removed.

[Website](#)

[Read: Concerns Around Using AI for Mental Health Support](#)

STOPPING STUPID THOUGHTS

"Of course, I messed this up. I always find a way to ruin things."

"He only complimented me to be polite. No one actually thinks that about me."

"She still hasn't replied to my message; she must be mad at me."

Thoughts like these are painful and can happen so quickly that you may never stop to question them. That's why we call them stupid thoughts. Known in psychology as "cognitive distortions," these inaccurate or exaggerated thoughts can damage self-esteem, mood, and relationships with others. They can be extreme and frequent, often contributing to anxiety and depression. It's hard to feel good when someone is saying mean things to you all the time, especially when that person is you!

Fortunately, with practice, you can address and change these thoughts. By noticing the negative things you say to yourself, you can choose nicer thoughts to replace them. Try this five step exercise using post-it notes or use the shapes below to create your own cut-outs.

Writing out your thoughts will help you to process and reinforce the thought change in a different way. Putting the words up where you need to see them helps provide visual reinforcement where and when you need it – especially when it's hard for your brain to do it. Overtime, hopefully the thoughts will become more automatic.

Materials:

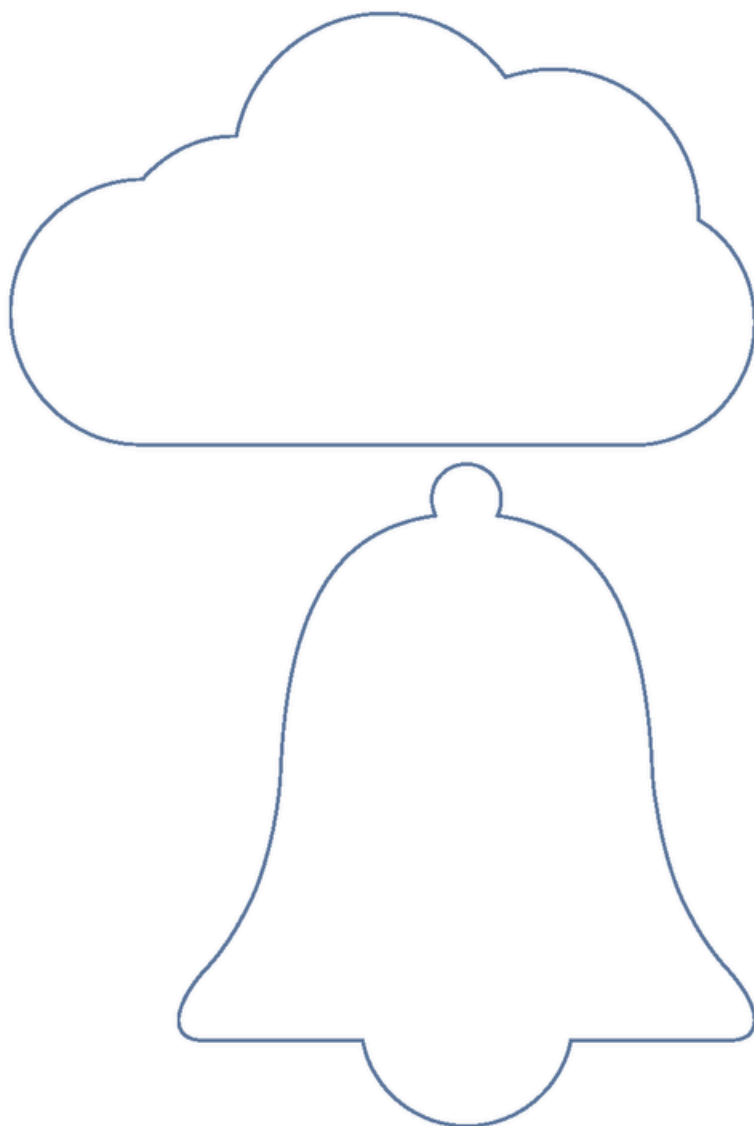
Post-it notes

OR

Construction paper, scissors, markers and tape.

Instructions:

1. Identify the stupid thought. Use the list on the back of this page to identify your most common stupid thoughts (cognitive distortions).
2. Use a post-it note, or cut out the shapes below on colorful construction paper. Write the thought on one side of the cut-out (or the sticky side of the post-it note).
3. Identify a corresponding compassionate thought. Maybe think of what you would say to a friend who was having the stupid thought.
4. Write the compassionate thought on the other side of the cut-out (or the non-sticky side of the post-it note).
5. Tape or stick the compassionate (reframed) thoughts where you need to see them most – by your bed, in the bathroom, on your desk, or in your car!



Stupid Thoughts*

1. All-or-nothing thinking: You see things black or white, good or bad, all or none. There is no gray area—just the extremes. It has to be perfect or else you're a failure. Example: *"I'm always a horrible mother." "I'm never going to get it together."*

2. Overgeneralization: Taking a single event and making sweeping conclusions. Example: *"My best friend is mad at me. I'm sure she doesn't want to be friends ever again."*

3. Negative mental filter: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it, ignoring all the positive or neutral things that might have happened. Example: *"It was such an important meeting. Why did I make that stupid statement? I'm such an idiot."*

4. Discounting the positive: You ignore when good things happen by insisting they "don't count" because there were other circumstances. This allows your brain to stay in a pattern of negative thinking. Example: *"No one will ever love me." "We love you." "No, you don't understand. No one will ever love me."*

5. Jumping to conclusions: You assume that something bad will happen or that someone will have negative feelings toward you, even though you don't have any evidence to support that thought. Example: *"My boss must be mad at me for being late. I'm not going to bother talking to him because he won't believe my excuse."*

Two subtypes of jumping to conclusions:

a. Mind reading: You assign negative thoughts and feelings to other people, even when there are other logical explanations for what happened. Example: *"My neighbor rushed by me and didn't even acknowledge me. I must have done something wrong."*

b. Fortune Telling: You assume that things are going to turn out badly and treat negative outcomes as eventualities, not possibilities. Example: *"I submitted my application, but I already know they won't call me back for an interview."*

6. Catastrophizing or Minimizing: Catastrophizing is when you exaggerate the importance of things that you do (like making a mistake at work) or that someone else does (that someone got a better office than you.), Minimizing is the opposite; it's when you discount the importance of something that's actually really important. Catastrophizing Example: *"Why did I use that word in that email? I'm sure I'm going to get fired."* Minimizing Example: *"Yeah I got a raise, but it's not big deal. I'm not even sure why they gave it to me."*

7. Emotional reasoning: You assume that just because you felt something, it's true; it's like relying too strongly on your gut instinct. Example: *"I feel like crap, so I'm probably a crappy person."*

8. Should statements: You focus on how things should have gone or should have been rather than how they actually are. When you direct should statements toward others, you can feel anger, frustration, and resentment. Examples: *"I should really exercise more. I'm so gross."* or *"My brother should have talked to me before he made any decisions about where our family is going. He's so inconsiderate."*

9. Labeling: This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. You take a situation (a one-time event, misunderstanding or accident) and you determine it must be about your character or their character. Examples: *"They didn't like me: I'm a huge nobody."* or *"That guy cut me off. He's obviously a jerk."*

10. Personalization: You take on responsibility for negative events, ignoring how other people or factors may have contributed. Example: *"Our relationship ended because I was a bad partner."*

11. Blaming: The opposite of personalization. You lay blame entirely on other people, without thinking about where you may have gone wrong or how you could have changed a situation. Example: *"Our project is slowed down because they never made a point to contact me. This is all their fault."*

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

.....➤ What is SAD?

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that is connected to a specific seasonal pattern. It is thought that changes in daylight hours are linked to a chemical change in the brain. Most people experience winter-pattern SAD or winter depression, where symptoms begin in the fall or early winter, continue through the winter months, and resolve during the spring and summer. The other type of SAD is summer-pattern SAD or summer depression, which is less common. Summer-pattern SAD triggers depression in the spring or early summer, which typically improves in the fall and winter.

Winter-pattern SAD is related to changes in daylight hours and shortened days. It is very different from mental health concerns that arise due to the calendar-year, meaning seasonal family events or visits, school or work schedules, or holidays.

Prevalence

Each year, approximately 5 percent of the U.S. population experiences seasonal depression, with women making up 80 percent of those affected. Although symptoms can appear earlier, the typical age of onset is between 20 and 30 years old. The prevalence of seasonal depression varies by region, ranging from 0 to 10 percent, and generally increases the farther one lives from the equator.

SAD should not be confused with the “winter blues.” “Winter blues is a general term, not a medical diagnosis. It’s fairly common, and it’s more mild than serious. It usually clears up on its own in a fairly short amount of time,” says Dr. Matthew Rudorfer, a mental health expert at NIH. The “winter blues” often stem from specific triggers.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Symptoms of SAD

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, symptoms include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood most of the day, nearly every day, for at least 2 weeks
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Feelings of irritability, frustration, or restlessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling slowed down
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Changes in sleep or appetite or unplanned weight changes
- Physical aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not have a clear physical cause and do not go away with treatment
- Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts

Winter-pattern SAD has the following additional symptoms:

- Oversleeping (hypersomnia)
- Overeating, particularly with a craving for carbohydrates, leading to weight gain
- Social withdrawal (feeling like “hibernating”)

Summer-pattern SAD has the following additional symptoms:

- Trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- Poor appetite, leading to weight loss
- Restlessness and agitation
- Anxiety
- Violent or aggressive behavior

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



Who is at risk? <.....

The risk of SAD increases with age, and it often starts in young adulthood. It is more common in women than men. Winter-pattern SAD, because it is triggered by less daylight hours, is more common in people living further from the equator such as in New England or Alaska, where the daylight hours are shorter in the winter. SAD sometimes runs in families and is more common in people with depression or bipolar disorder. People with SAD often have other mental health disorders, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, an eating disorder, anxiety disorder, or panic disorder.

Breaking Down the Causes of SAD

There is no clear cause of SAD, yet research shows that people with SAD experience a disruption in serotonin and melatonin levels, causing sleep, mood, and behavior changes. Serotonin is a chemical in the brain and body that impacts mood, sleep, digestion, nausea, wound healing, bone health, blood clotting, and sexual desire. Melatonin is a hormone produced by your brain in response to darkness, helping regulate your sleep-wake cycle and promoting restful sleep.

Individuals with SAD, particularly winter-pattern SAD, tend to have lower levels of serotonin. Sunlight influences the molecules that help regulate serotonin levels. During the shorter daylight hours of fall and winter, these molecules become less effective, resulting in reduced serotonin levels. Vitamin D, which is acquired through food and from exposure to sunlight, is also believed to promote serotonin activity. With reduced daylight hours and exposure to sunlight in the Fall and Winter, individuals can become deficient in Vitamin D, leading to less serotonin production.

Research has also found that melatonin plays a role in both winter-pattern and summer-pattern SAD. Those with winter-pattern SAD tend to produce excess melatonin, which can cause increased sleepiness and lead to oversleeping. People with summer-pattern SAD do not produce enough melatonin during the longer daylight hours of summer and experience sleep disruptions.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

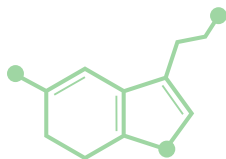
How to treat SAD

SAD can be diagnosed by a psychiatrist or other mental health provider through a careful mental health exam and health history. Treatments for depression, including **psychotherapy** and **antidepressant medication**, are used for SAD. Additionally, winter-pattern SAD is treated with **Vitamin D** and **light therapy**. There are no treatments specific to summer-pattern SAD.



Psychotherapy, also known as talk therapy, encompasses a range of treatments designed to help individuals identify and change distressing emotions, thoughts, and behaviors.

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one type of psychotherapy. CBT is a short-term treatment that usually involves 6-20 sessions and focuses on changing thoughts and behaviors. CBT-SAD is a specialized form of cognitive behavioral therapy tailored for individuals with SAD. It consists of two group sessions per week over six weeks, focusing on replacing negative, season-related thoughts with more positive ones. Additionally, it incorporates behavioral activation, helping participants identify and plan enjoyable activities to counter the loss of interest and motivation commonly associated with SAD.
- Researchers directly compared CBT-SAD and light therapy. Both were found to be equally effective in reducing symptoms; however, light therapy showed faster results and CBT-SAD had longer-lasting results.



Antidepressant medication is used to treat depression by increasing levels of neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and noradrenaline, in the brain. Because SAD is associated with changes in serotonin levels, antidepressant medications called serotonin reuptake inhibitors are sometimes used to treat symptoms. These medications can take 4-8 weeks to work, and for some people, it may take several tries to find the antidepressant that is right for you.

Vitamin D supplements can help improve winter-pattern SAD for people with a vitamin D deficiency. Research has found mixed results on the efficacy of vitamin D for reducing SAD symptoms.



Light therapy, a treatment used since the 1980s, involves sitting in front of a light box that emits 10,000 lux, which is about 20 times brighter than typical indoor lighting, for 30 to 45 minutes daily, usually in the morning. To use a lightbox, place it in front of you or to the side, and though you should keep your eyes open, do not look directly at the light. According to Harvard Health Publishing, a bright sunny day is about 50,000 lux, and a gray day is around 10,000 lux, so adding a walk to your morning routine can also help. This therapy can start to alleviate symptoms within a week, and side effects, such as eye strain or headaches, are rare and generally mild. Light boxes are not regulated so it is important to understand the specifications needed before purchasing one. The Center for Environmental Therapeutics, a nonprofit organization dedicated to researching light therapy and related treatments, offers expert guidance on [choosing the right light box](#) for effective therapy.

Due to its seasonal nature, starting treatment before symptoms typically emerge may help lessen their onset and reduce the severity of the symptoms.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Think You or Someone You Know May Have SAD?

- [Take a Mental Health Test](#). Determine if you are experiencing symptoms of depression.
- [Get help](#). See a healthcare provider as soon as possible.
- Be patient and positive. The negative thoughts will go away as your depression responds to treatment.
- Exercise and eat well. Both can impact how we feel physically and lead to an improved mood.
- Engage in activities that help you feel better. Go to a movie, ski, snowshoe, walk, meetup with friends.
- Delay big decisions. Sometimes it is hard to maintain an objective viewpoint while depressed.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs. They can worsen depression symptoms.
- Let friends and family help!

Community Tips & Stories of Living with SAD

Dr. Norman Rosenthal on Experiencing and Coining the Name, Seasonal Affective Disorder

When Dr. Norman Rosenthal moved to the U.S. from South Africa, he felt less energetic during the harsh winters. He noticed that other people felt the same way. "Just like the autumn leaves, they became depressed on schedule," says Rosenthal, a clinical professor of psychiatry at Georgetown University School of Medicine. "In spring, the condition reverses itself." He studied the problem, published the first research on the syndrome and coined its name: seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. [\[Keep Reading\]](#) [\[Watch the Interview\]](#)

Sharing SAD Experiences: The SAD Stories Exhibition

Over the winter of 2022-2023, researchers from the University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh led creative workshops with SAD-affected individuals to explore self-care and reconnect with the season. This exhibition showcases photos and personal stories from participants, offering insight into the lived experience of SAD. [\[Read More\]](#)

How I learned to cope with seasonal affective disorder in grad school

"I roll over in bed and reach for my phone to check the time. 'It's 8:30 a.m.!' I say to myself. 'How did that happen? I must have turned my alarm off and fallen back to sleep.' After some deep breaths, I manage to drag myself out of bed, get dressed, and make breakfast. At work I try to focus, but most of the day I just sit in a fog, struggling to stay awake. When I head home, I lack the motivation to go to the gym, do errands, or hang out with friends. Instead, I fall asleep on the couch shortly after dinner, only making it to bed after some gentle prodding from my dog." [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

Seasonal Affective Disorder: "I just wanted to hibernate"

For nine months of the year, Abigail is a bright and sociable woman that enjoys meeting friends and going to the theatre. But at the start of every year she feels different; lethargic and low. Abigail lives with what is known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

What Scandinavians Can Teach Us About Embracing Winter

Maybe it's the chance to light fires, even during the daytime. Maybe it's an opportunity to get absorbed in cooking, or reading, or art. Maybe it's the way the world goes quiet just after a fresh snowfall. Then, whatever it is, try to consciously focus on those things. [\[Read More\]](#)

How To Embrace Winter Like A Scandinavian

Lessons drawn from the world's happiest region could be key to keeping ourselves in good physical and mental health over the chilly, dark season to come. [\[Read More\]](#)

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) Resources

National Resources

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

NIMH provides an in-depth overview of SAD, including symptoms, causes, treatment options, and research. Their site offers valuable information for those seeking to understand and manage SAD.

[Website](#) | 1-866-615-6464

Mayo Clinic

The Mayo Clinic offers comprehensive resources on SAD, including diagnosis, treatments, and coping strategies. Their medical expertise can guide individuals dealing with SAD symptoms.

[Website](#) | 1-507-284-2511

American Psychiatric Association (APA)

APA provides trusted information on SAD, including risk factors, symptoms, and treatment recommendations. Their resources are based on clinical research and psychiatric expertise.

[Website](#) | 1-888-357-7924

Mental Health America (MHA)

MHA offers a variety of resources on SAD, including prevention strategies, treatments, and tips for managing symptoms. Their tools can help individuals better cope with seasonal depression.

[Website](#) | 1-800-969-6642

The Center for Environmental Therapeutics (CET)

CET focuses on treatments for SAD, particularly light therapy. They provide research-based advice on selecting and using light boxes, as well as other strategies for managing SAD.

[Website](#)

Psychology Today

Find a Therapist for SAD Psychology Today offers a directory of licensed therapists who specialize in treating SAD. Users can search by location, insurance, and specialty to find the right mental health professional.

[Website](#) | [SAD Test](#) | 1-800-273-8255 (*Suicide Hotline listed for emergencies*)

The Cleveland Clinic

The Cleveland Clinic provides resources on understanding and managing SAD, with detailed explanations on causes, symptoms, and treatment options like light therapy and medication.

[Website](#) | 1-800-223-2273

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)

ADAA provides educational content on SAD and other mood disorders, offering resources for those looking for support and treatment options, including self-help tools and professional guidance.

[Website](#) | 1-240-485-1001

Connecticut- Specific Resources

Mental Health Connecticut (MHC)

Mental Health Connecticut provides statewide resources for mental health, including support for those experiencing SAD. They offer educational materials, advocacy, and local services to support mental wellness.

[Website](#) | 1-860-529-1970

Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)

DMHAS offers a variety of mental health resources and services for Connecticut residents, including counseling and therapy services that can assist individuals experiencing SAD.

[Website](#) | 1-800-446-7348 (*24/7 Access Line*)

Wheeler Health

Behavioral Health Services Wheeler Health provides comprehensive behavioral health services throughout Connecticut, including treatment for depression and SAD. They offer both in-person and telehealth counseling.

[Website](#) | 1-888-793-3500

Hartford Healthcare Institute of Living

Hartford Healthcare's Institute of Living provides mental health services, including therapy and support for individuals with SAD. Their outpatient programs offer personalized treatment plans.

[Website](#) | 1-860-545-7200

Yale-New Haven Health Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Services

Yale-New Haven Health offers specialized mental health services, including treatments for SAD. They provide therapy, light therapy consultations, and medication management.

[Website](#) | 1-203-688-9907

Community Mental Health Affiliates (CMHA)

CMHA provides comprehensive behavioral health services in Connecticut, offering support for individuals experiencing symptoms of SAD, including therapy and case management.

[Website](#) | 1-860-224-8192

Connecticut Psychological Association

The Connecticut Psychological Association offers a therapist directory where individuals can find mental health professionals across the state who specialize in treating conditions like SAD.

[Website](#) | 1-860-404-0333

NAMI Connecticut (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

NAMI Connecticut provides support groups, educational programs, and resources for individuals living with mental health conditions like SAD, as well as for their families.

[Website](#) | 1-800-215-3021

Rushford – A Hartford Healthcare Partner

Rushford provides mental health and addiction services in Connecticut, including counseling and therapy for mood disorders like SAD. They offer both inpatient and outpatient care.

[Website](#) | 1-877-577-3233

Griffin Health – Behavioral Health Services

Griffin Health offers outpatient therapy services, including treatments for SAD, to help individuals manage symptoms and improve their mental well-being throughout the seasonal changes.

[Website](#) | 1-203-732-7541

WORKSHEET



Planning Your Cozy Winter

Winter is a time to embrace warmth, comfort, and joy. Use this worksheet to create a picture of your cozy winter. Imagine the sights, sounds, and feelings of the season that you love and plan activities to make it special.

Step 1: Imagine Your Cozy Winter

What Does It Look Like? Are there birds outside your window? Animal tracks in the snow? Twinkling lights? Dazzling stars in the night's sky? *(Draw or describe your surroundings)*

What Does It Feel Like? Are you wrapped in a warm blanket? Sipping hot tea or soup? Surrounded by loved ones? *(Draw or describe the textures, temperatures, and feelings)*

Step 2: Plan Your Cozy Winter Activities

What brings you joy? Will you bake cookies, watch movies, take snowy walks, ski, knit, play games, or read? Is there a local winter festival to attend? *(Draw or describe the activities you can look forward to)*

WORKSHEET



Planning Your Cozy Winter

Step 3: Identify Opportunities for Connection

Sometimes the winter brings with it, the urge to hibernate. How will you ensure opportunities for connection? Can you schedule weekly or monthly visits with friends or family? How about making a plan to shovel with a friend, family, or neighbor?

Step 4: Cozy Winter Goals

How will you make time for your goals and motivate yourself? What steps will you take to create space for the things you love? How will you create moments for appreciation? *(Describe your plan)*

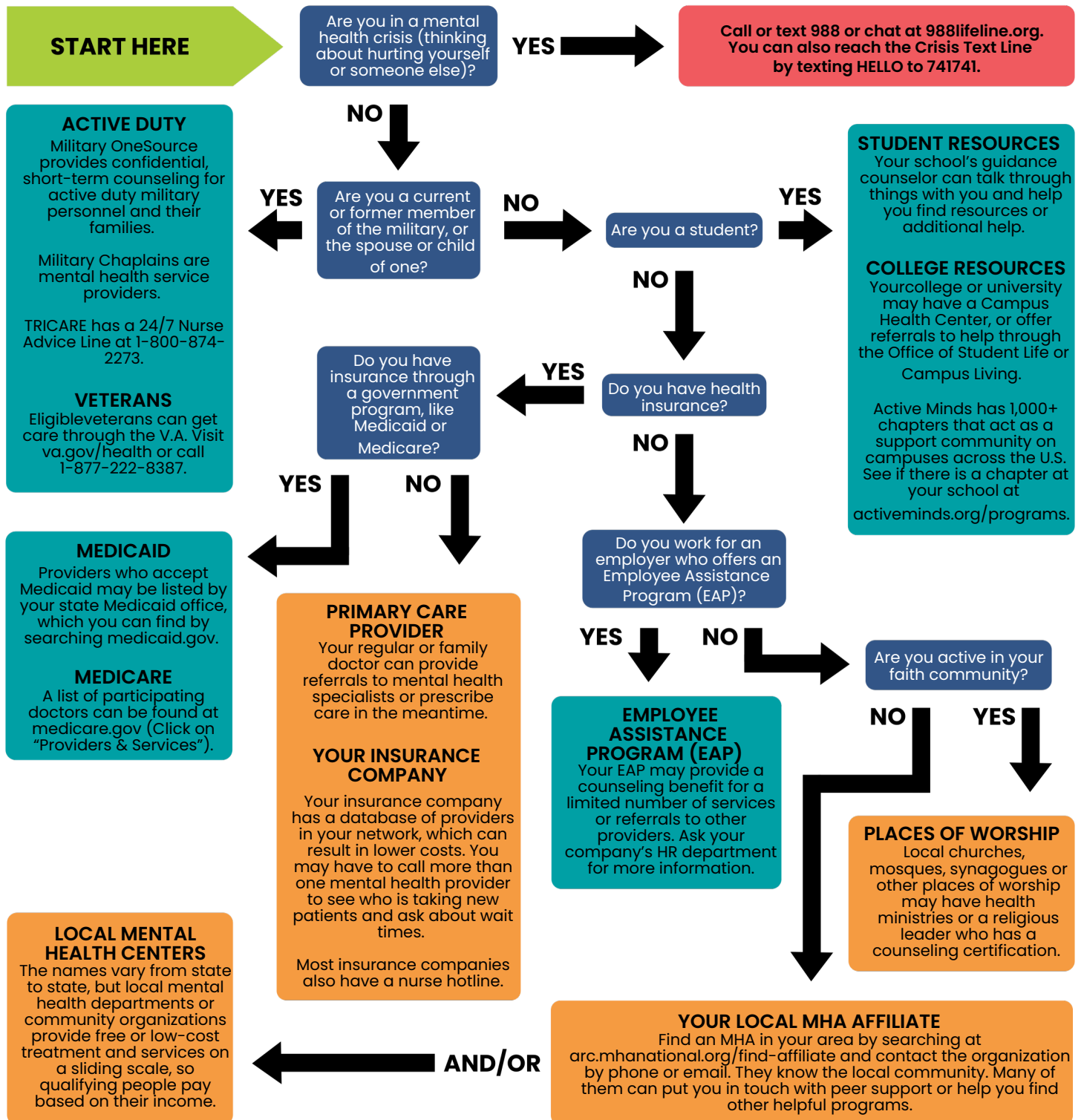
Bonus: Favorite Cozy Winter Story or Memory

Write or draw a favorite memory from past winters that inspires your cozy plans this year. *(Draw or write below)*

Save your responses and post them on your fridge, mirror, door, or wherever you will take notice of them and use them as a reminder of the things you love about winter.

DECISION MAP: WHERE TO GO

When you've decided to seek help, knowing what resources are available and where to start can be tricky. Use this decision map to help you figure out your options. If you don't find help where a path ends, try any of the resources in the gold boxes.

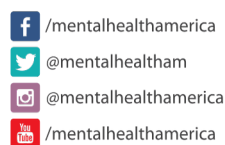




LIFE CAN BE INTENSE, AND SO CAN THE EMOTIONS THAT COME ALONG WITH IT.

IF YOU'RE CONSTANTLY OVERWHELMED BY ALL THE FEELS, YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING THE FIRST SIGNS OF A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION, LIKE DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY.

TAKE A FREE SCREENING AT [MHASCREENING.ORG](https://mhascreening.org) TO CHECK ON YOUR MENTAL HEALTH. IT'S FREE, CONFIDENTIAL, AND ANONYMOUS. ONCE YOU GET THE RESULTS, MHA WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH MORE INFORMATION AND HELP YOU TO FIGURE OUT NEXT STEPS.



IN CRISIS?

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting MHA to 741741.

Loneliness

In 2018, Cigna conducted a survey that revealed loneliness at “epidemic levels” in the U.S. Why is a health insurance company concerned with loneliness? It’s been proven that feelings of isolation, loneliness, and a lack of social connection impact our health and wellbeing.

Cigna’s survey on loneliness is chock full of stunning results, such as:

- Nearly half of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone (46 percent) or left out (47 percent).
- Only around half of Americans (53 percent) have meaningful in-person social interactions, such as having an extended conversation with a friend or spending quality time with family, on a daily basis.
- Generation Z (adults ages 18-22) is the loneliest generation and claims to be in worse health than older generations.

Further research has shown that more than 60% of Americans report feeling lonely, a growing public health crisis linked to a 26% increased risk of premature death. Research by Julianne Holt-Lunstad at Brigham Young University revealed that extended social isolation is as detrimental to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Unlike isolation, which refers to a lack of social connections, loneliness is a subjective feeling of disconnection, and it's associated with serious mental and physical health risks, including depression, anxiety, heart disease, and dementia. The federal government estimates that every three minutes, someone dies from conditions related to loneliness.

Over the past few decades, significant societal changes have contributed to a rise in loneliness. The number of people living alone has surged by over 30%, which, while reflecting greater independence, also reduces daily social interactions and support. Additionally, the rise of social media, despite its promise of connectivity, is now associated with increased feelings of loneliness and depression, as online interactions often lack the depth and fulfillment of in-person relationships. Together, these shifts highlight how modern living has, paradoxically, made meaningful social connection more challenging to maintain.

As we enter the winter months with shorter daylight hours and colder weather, it's quite common for people to feel isolated, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and detachment. The Campaign to End Loneliness shared two research studies which showed that being cold can heighten our sense of loneliness and recalling times of loneliness can lead to a drop in body temperature. Loneliness can also be exacerbated by the holiday season and setting unrealistic expectations, grief or depression, missing family members, or seasonal affective disorder.

Loneliness

Demographics



Loneliness can affect individuals at any stage of life. A study by Cigna found that young adults aged 18 to 22 are the loneliest age group. Excessive social media use has been linked to rising rates of depression and loneliness among teens. One study found that teenagers who spend over five hours per day on social media are 71% more likely to develop depression compared to those with lower usage. Gen Z experiences the highest rates of depressive episodes, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts compared to previous generations. Older adults aged 65 and over are also highly vulnerable to chronic loneliness due to factors like retirement, loss of social connections, and mobility challenges. Additionally, individuals with disabilities or chronic health conditions often face heightened loneliness due to social barriers and stigma. A whopping 72% of adults that need mobility devices have experienced at least one barrier that prevented their access to a particular place, leading to feelings of loneliness. LGBTQ+ individuals may be at greater risk due to experiences of discrimination and limited support networks.

Tips for Combatting Loneliness

Here are some tips from the [National Institute on Aging](#). By incorporating these strategies into your daily life, you can proactively combat loneliness and strengthen your social connections, ultimately enhancing your overall well-being.

- **Invest in Your Relationships:** Make time to connect meaningfully! Schedule time each day to stay in touch with family, friends, and neighbors. For long distance relationships, use video or phone calls to stay in touch. If you are not tech-savvy, consider taking a class at your local library or community center to learn how to use email or social media.
- **Stay Active:** Physical activity benefits both mental and physical health. Try group activities like joining a walking club or working out with a friend, aiming for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity per week.
- **Volunteer:** Volunteering not only supports your community but also offers a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Look for local opportunities to help others.
- **Explore Local Resources:** Check out programs and activities at community and senior centers, college student centers, social service agencies, or libraries. These centers often host events, classes, and groups where you can meet others with similar interests.
- **Seek Grief Support:** If you're dealing with the loss of a loved one, consider joining a grief support group to connect with others who understand what you're going through.
- **Adopt a Pet:** If you're able to care for one, a pet can provide companionship, reduce stress, and promote physical activity.
- **Limit Social Media Use:** Researchers found that people often turn to social media when feeling lonely, yet it can leave them feeling even more isolated. This effect is largely due to social comparison—the tendency to compare oneself to others. Limit the time you spend on social media, turn off push notifications, follow positive and uplifting accounts, and prioritize in-person connections.
- **Make New Connections:** Participating in groups based on shared interests, whether they're hobbies, fitness, or community service related, helps you meet new people and build a supportive network.

Loneliness



Stories of Support & Community

Rhyana's story: my feelings of loneliness worsened while I was studying, working and being a full-time mum

"My name's Rhyana and I work in the charity sector as well as volunteering with young people. I also host a radio show to raise awareness of Black mental health issues. I have felt lonely throughout my life. I've felt lonely at many points in my life. Even when I've been around people. Loneliness is different to isolation - that's important to understand. For me, loneliness feels like being in a bubble around people - like there's something in between us - and even when the bubble bursts I'm still unable to connect or be myself. The peak of my loneliness was when I was at university. I was working full-time, studying full-time and was a mum - also full-time! At the time, most of my friends didn't have children and so they just didn't understand my situation." [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

The Value of Support Systems: MHC's Community Center for Individuals with a Mental Health Condition

Karen, a participant at Mental Health Connecticut's Independence Center, shares how she values support systems: For Karen, Mental Health Connecticut's Independence Center serves as a crucial support system. She highlights the reciprocal nature of support, emphasizing the importance of both receiving and offering support within the community. Karen maintains that Mental Health Connecticut's Independence Center is a "very important part of my support system. If people are working on their recovery, they will understand that. The Independence Center not only supports me, but I support it. Supporting my support system." If you are an individual with one or more mental health conditions or a co-occurring substance use condition in the Waterbury area, consider joining [Mental Health Connecticut's Independence Center](#).

Finding the Right Group for You: MHC's Social Club for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

"Deaf Rec is the only opportunity that most of these Deaf folks have to make new friends. Full access to communication in a recreational setting is so rare for Deaf, so this opportunity is tremendously appreciated and valued by our members," Amelia Saunders, co-coordinator of Deaf Rec and Director of MHC's Robinson House."

Deaf Rec is a social club for adults of all ethnicities (age range is mid-20s to early 60s) who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing and living primarily in Greater Hartford. Being Deaf can be extremely isolating. The goal of Deaf Rec is to engage people who are deaf in community-based, recreational activities that promote community integration, the establishment of natural supports and friendships, and a degree of comfort with navigating the hearing world.

"We have new people showing up all the time now, so our regulars are meeting new people. What has worked well is providing a free monthly activity where Deaf can gather, for this population who could not, otherwise, afford the recreation activities. We were recently contacted by a Deaf man who is trying to reintegrate into the Deaf community after many years in a controlled environment. He was thrilled to learn about Deaf Rec and signed up for the year."

If you are an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider joining [Mental Health Connecticut's Deaf Rec Club](#).

Libby's story: overcoming my feelings of loneliness and finding my strength

"I know when I talk to people through my work, even if it's only for half an hour, I can have a big impact. We'll do a jigsaw together, or have a chat about something we've seen on the telly. Little things matter and something as simple as a conversation can make a big difference." [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

The Loneliness Project

"Stories have power—the power to heal both listener and teller, and show us that we aren't ever truly alone. Those shared here are deeply personal yet profoundly universal. They reveal something about being human."

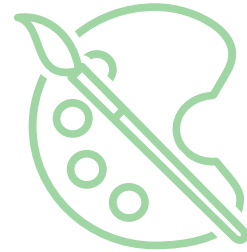
The project is no longer publishing weekly stories but it remains up as an archive for whoever needs it. This is a digital space to cultivate compassion—for others, but especially for ourselves. Though the site is no longer publishing submissions, the anonymous form has remained open. Share your story here and know that someone on the other side is listening.

Explore the site for stories about life, loneliness, and the parts of ourselves we hide from others." [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

Loneliness

Looking to make new connections in CT?

- Visit Mental Health Connecticut's [Free Art of Wellbeing Studio](#) in Hartford! We offer free: visual art, music, dance, and writing workshops and an open studio for exploring your unique creative ideas.



- Sign up for one of [For All Ages](#) events or programs located across CT! These programs improve the health and well-being of participants through meaningful social interactions that tackle loneliness, improve belongingness, provide purpose, and foster kindness.



- Check out the [CT Visit Events Calendar](#) for free, local events including board game clubs, yoga, dance classes, and more, and [Meet Up](#) to join outdoors, social, toastmasters, art, architecture, improv, business, games, exercise, pet, and book clubs!



Not sure if you are feeling lonely?

Take a survey to find out:

- [Verywellmind Loneliness Survey](#)
- [PsychCentral's Loneliness Quiz](#)

Loneliness Resources

National Resources

For All Ages

The organization connects the generations and inspires action to end loneliness, reduce ageism, and improve mental, physical, and social health for people of all ages.

[Website](#) | deb.bibbins@forallages.org

SilverSneakers – Social Engagement for Older Adults

SilverSneakers is a fitness and wellness program for older adults that provides group classes, both in-person and virtual, to help seniors stay active and socially engaged.

[Website](#) | 1-888-423-4632

Friendship Line – Institute on Aging

The Friendship Line is a 24/7 crisis intervention and support service specifically for seniors and adults with disabilities who feel lonely, isolated, or depressed.

[Website](#)

GriefShare – Support Groups for Loneliness After Loss

GriefShare offers support groups for those dealing with grief and loneliness after losing a loved one. The groups provide emotional support and help participants navigate the grieving process.

[Website](#) | 1-800-395-5755

Big & Mini – Intergenerational Connections

Big & Mini is a nonprofit that connects older adults ("Bigs") with younger individuals ("Minis") for virtual conversations and relationships, aimed at reducing loneliness and fostering connections across generations.

[Website](#)

Campaign to End Loneliness | [Website](#)

The Samaritans – Emotional Support for Loneliness

The Samaritans provide a confidential, non-judgmental emotional support line for individuals experiencing loneliness, distress, or despair. They offer a listening ear and compassionate guidance.

[Website](#) | 1-800-223-2273

Connecticut- Specific Resources

The CT Collaborative to End Loneliness

It was established in response to the need for leadership & coordination in Connecticut to address the public health crisis of loneliness and to educate and inform residents about the importance of social connectedness to their health.

[Website](#)

Connecticut Community Care – Loneliness and Social Isolation Services

Connecticut Community Care provides services to help older adults and individuals with disabilities combat loneliness and social isolation. They offer care coordination, wellness programs, and social engagement resources.

[Website](#) | 1-866-845-2224

AARP Connecticut – Social Connection Resources

AARP Connecticut provides resources and programs to help older adults build social connections and combat loneliness. They offer workshops, volunteering opportunities, and virtual events.

[Website](#) | 1-866-295-7279

NAMI Connecticut – Peer Support Groups

NAMI Connecticut offers peer-led support groups for individuals experiencing mental health challenges, including loneliness.

These groups provide a safe space to connect with others and share experiences.

[Website](#) | 1-800-215-3021

United Way of Connecticut – 211 Social Services

United Way's 211 hotline connects individuals to local services addressing loneliness, such as social support, counseling, and community engagement programs.

[Website](#) | 2-1-1

The Samaritans – Emotional Support for Loneliness

The Samaritans provide a confidential, non-judgmental emotional support line for individuals experiencing loneliness, distress, or despair. They offer a listening ear and compassionate guidance.

[Website](#) | 1-877-870-4673 (Connecticut office)

Take the For All Ages FLOURISH CHALLENGE

BECOME A SOCIAL HEALTH CHAMPION

 *Find a local coffee, lunch, or ice cream shop and mark a table for conversation.*

Download & print our 'Sit Here for Conversation' card, or make your own. Ask the owner to support social connection in your community.



 *Offer to help a neighbor and Uplift their spirit.*

Whether with a chore or a social visit, you are sure to make an impact.



 *Reach out for an Intergenerational conversation.*

Call or visit a family member of another generation for an engaging conversation. Talk about music, food, or reminisce together.

 *Sign up for our newsletter & follow us on social.*

Visit our website to sign up. Find us on FB and IG @forallagesorg.

 *Have fun with the Oreo stacking challenge and/or help advance our mission with a donation.*

Gather with family or friends and see how many Oreos you can stack. Share your attempt on social media with the hashtag #faaoreochallenge.



BUILDING YOUR COPING TOOLBOX

Everyone goes through periods of hardship and stress, and it's important to take care of yourself and have tools on standby to use when times get tough.

A coping toolbox is a collection of skills, techniques, items, and other suggestions that you can turn to as soon as you start to feel anxious or distressed. No one thing works for everyone, and it may take some trial and error, but building a coping toolbox is a great way to be prepared for those times when your mental well-being starts to slip – think of it as a safety net.

Creating your toolbox can be as simple as writing a list (on your phone or on paper) of what helps, like breathing exercises or going for a run – this way, when you start struggling with your mental health, you don't have to remember what to do or search for tips. You can also have a physical toolbox and fill it with things like a stress ball, written notes to yourself, and photos that make you happy. If you make a physical toolbox, it's a good idea to still include a list of (non-physical) coping skills that help.

IF YOU'RE STARTING FROM SCRATCH, HERE ARE SOME IDEAS:

Mood Boosters

- Read the story of someone you admire.
- Watch a funny YouTube video.
- Play with an animal.
- Watch a movie you loved when you were younger.
- Reorganize your room.
- Make a list of places you want to travel or things you want to see in your own town.
- Repeat affirmations. Saying an affirmation or statement with positive and personal meaning can bring calm. Pick something that speaks to you: I believe in myself. Fear doesn't control me. I let go of my sadness. I am safe.

Address Your Basic Needs

- Eat a healthy snack.
- Drink a glass of water.
- Take a shower or bath.
- Take a nap.
- Brush your teeth.

Process Feelings

- Draw how you're feeling.
- Make a [gratitude](#) list. Reflecting on things you are thankful for can help you change your mindset.
- Punch a pillow.
- Scream.
- Let yourself cry.
- Rip paper into small pieces.
- Vent. Venting is not the same as asking for help—it's taking an opportunity to share your feelings out loud. We do this naturally when we talk with someone we can trust about whatever is upsetting us. You can also vent by writing a letter to the person who upset you. Keep the letter a couple of days and then tear it up. Stick to pen and paper—using social media when you are highly emotional can be tempting, but you might say something you regret.

Volunteering/Acts of Kindness

- Do something nice for someone you know.
- Help a stranger.
- Volunteer your time.

Problem Solving

- Make a list of potential solutions to problems – it can help to brainstorm with a friend or family member.
- Make a list of your strengths. There are plenty of things about you that are awesome, no matter how down you are feeling at the moment.
- If a person has upset you, talk with them directly. Fill in the blanks to this sentence – “I feel _____ when (this happens) because _____. Next time, could you please _____.”
Example: “I feel left out when you make plans and don’t tell me until the last minute, because then I can’t join. Next time can you please invite me earlier?”

Hobbies/Stress Relievers

- Learn something new – there are tutorials for all kinds of hobbies online.
- Create – try a craft project, color, paint, or draw. Invite a friend to join you for added fun.
- Write – you could write a story, a poem, or an entry in a journal.
- Get active – dancing, running, or playing a sport are some good ways to get moving.
- Play a game or do a puzzle.
- Get a plant and start a garden.

Relaxation Exercises

- Practice belly breathing – put one hand on your stomach and start to inhale slowly. As you breathe in, imagine a balloon in your stomach filling up and continue to inhale until the balloon is very full. Put your other hand on your heart, feel your heartbeat, and hold your breath for 5 seconds. Now let your breath out slowly for 10 seconds – feel your belly flatten like a deflating balloon. Repeat this process 4 or 5 times and you should notice your heart beat slow down and your muscles relax.
- Try progressive muscle relaxation – clench your toes for a count of 5, then relax them for a count of 5, then move to your calves, then your thighs, then your abs, then your arms, then your neck.
- Play with a fidget toy.
- Go for a walk – feel the ground under your feet and the air on your skin. Focus on your senses.
- Find a [guided meditation](#) on YouTube.
- Do yoga – you can find videos on demand using your TV or online.
- Read a book.
- Listen to music, a podcast, or an audiobook.
- Unplug – turn off your phone, tablet, and/or computer for an hour or so.
- Use your five senses. Tuning into your sensory experiences can be comforting during intense moments.
 - Touch: stress ball, silly putty, a pet or stuffed animal, blanket
 - Hear: click a pen, pop bubble wrap, listen to a calming playlist
 - See: photos with loved ones, snow globe, affirmation/quote cards
 - Taste: sour candy, mints, tea
 - Smell: candle, scented lotion, essential oils

Ask for Help

- Text a friend.
- Ask someone to just sit with you.
- Call a family member.
- Call a friend you haven’t talked to recently.
- Call a warmline if you can’t think of anyone to reach out to.
- If you are in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK or text HELLO to 741741.

If you still feel sad, worried, or scared after trying to help yourself, you might be showing signs of anxiety or depression. Taking a mental health test at mhascreening.org can help you find out if you are at risk for a mental health condition.

If you are struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can also reach Crisis Text Line by texting HELLO to 741741.

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is a significant public health issue. Suicide deaths in the United States have risen year after year since 1999, and between 1999 and 2018, the rate rose by 35%. Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in Connecticut. For individuals ages 10-34, it is the 2nd leading cause of death. Contrary to public belief, suicide rates decrease around the holidays and spike in the Spring and Summer. This does not mean suicides do not occur in December, and it is important that we continue to check-in with friends and family year-round.

➤ Warning Signs According to the National Institute for Mental Health

If someone is at immediate risk for suicide, **call 911 or seek immediate help from a mental health provider**. Warning signs that someone may be at immediate risk for attempting suicide include:

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty or hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable emotional or physical pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Putting affairs in order, such as making a will
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast
- Talking or thinking about death often

If you witness any of the following symptoms, **contact a mental health professional or call 211 or 988**:

- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Making a plan or looking for ways to kill themselves, such as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling great guilt or shame
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Changing eating or sleeping habits
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge

Suicide Prevention

Interventions

There are effective, evidence-based interventions available to support individuals at risk of suicide.

- **Safety Planning:** Patients collaborate with a healthcare provider to create a plan that outlines strategies for reducing access to lethal means, such as firearms, medications, or poisons. The plan also includes coping techniques and a list of people and resources that can offer support during a crisis.
- **Follow-up Phone Calls:** Supportive phone calls include risk monitoring and encourage patients to engage in treatment and safe behaviors.
- **Psychotherapies:** Therapy, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), has been found to help individuals who have attempted suicide.
- **Medication:** Some individuals benefit from medication, which can be determined and prescribed by a healthcare provider.



Suicide Prevention

Stories of Hope & Recovery from 988 Lifeline

CONTENT WARNING: THE FOLLOWING VIDEO CLIPS AND STORIES CONTAIN SENSITIVE CONTENT, INCLUDING EXPERIENCES OF CHILD ABUSE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, NEGLECT, AND SUICIDE ATTEMPTS. PLEASE PRIORITIZE YOUR WELL-BEING AND FEEL FREE TO PAUSE OR STOP IF YOU NEED TO.

Halima Shegow of Sweden's Revolution Poetry on the words that make a difference for her.

"You don't need to be a doctor, or a psychologist, or a therapist to say the right words to someone. It can literally be one word, one sentence, and it just...it just clicks." [\[Watch Here\]](#)

Breaking My Silence as a Trans Man Who Attempted Suicide

"A huge percentage of transgender people (41 percent in the U.S.) attempt suicide, and suicidal thoughts dot the storyboards of many of our lives. We trans rights advocates talk often about how to end this epidemic, but nonetheless a certain shadowy silence prevails.

A cultural taboo about feeling the desire to die keeps many suicide survivors from ever discussing their experiences, much less doing so publicly. But I believe that for those of us who feel able and willing, telling the stories of our attempts can provide a segue into a conversation for healing -- for us survivors as well as the entire community." [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

Travis Young shares the story of his difficult youth, his ensuing depression and two suicide attempts —and how he reclaimed his own unique outlook on life through the lens of a camera.

"...Developing the film at home just kind of helped extend this idea that I was taking care of more than just pictures, I was taking care of my emotions..." [\[Watch Here\]](#)

Here's What I Learned From My Suicide Attempt

"When 9/11 happened, I joined the Marines. The Marines gave me a sense of being and purpose. When you're in the Marines, you are trained from the first day that death is creeping in. It's always creeping in. It has to be on top of your mind. That I might die in Iraq was more of a reality than the reality of making it back home. I was quite comfortable with dying in war.

But I did survive war. I survived it twice. After IEDs and close encounters that created endless anxiety and hyper-vigilance, I made it home and was completely unprepared." [\[Keep Reading\]](#)

Kisha Bashkiharatee celebrates her three years in dancing and talks about how it has developed in her personal wellness.

"You can be uncomfortable and you can also recognize so many other things about yourself. Being able to recognize that there's more out of every situation and we have the choice and the opportunity to pick which part of that situation we're going to focus on." [\[Watch Here\]](#)

Suicide Prevention

➤ Mental Health First Aid Training

If you are looking for training to help identify signs, symptoms, and learn how to respond, sign up for Mental Health First Aid (MHFA). MHFA teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among adults.



Mental Health First Aid Covers:

- Common signs and symptoms of mental health challenges
- Common signs and symptoms of substance use challenges
- How to interact with a person in crisis
- How to connect a person with help
- Expanded content on trauma, substance use and self-care

Learn how to respond with Mental Health First Aid Action Plan (ALGEE):

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- Listen non judgmentally
- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional help
- Encourage self-help and others support strategies
- Trainings range from 5-30 adults per class.

Who needs to know Mental Health First Aid?

- Employers
- Police officers
- Hospital staff
- First responders
- Caring individuals

This is a certified training, following the fidelity standards set by the National Council for Wellbeing and led by certified MHFA trainers.

[Contact Us to Learn More](#)



**Mental Health
FIRST AID**

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

Suicide Prevention Resources

National Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

A 24/7 free, confidential crisis service offering support for people in distress, as well as resources for prevention and crisis intervention. Available by phone or online chat.

[Website](#) | 988

Crisis Text Line

Provides free, confidential 24/7 text support for people in crisis. Simply text "HELLO" to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

[Website](#) | [Text "HELLO" to 741741](#)

The Columbia Lighthouse Project

The Columbia Protocol supports suicide risk screening through a series of simple questions that anyone can ask.

[Website](#)

Veterans Crisis Line

A free, confidential resource that connects veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified responders. The service is available 24/7 via phone, text, or chat.

[Website](#) | [Phone: 988, Press 1 / Text: 838255](#)

The Trevor Project

The leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ youth under 25. They offer 24/7 support via phone, chat, and text.

[Website](#) | [Phone: 1-866-488-7386 / Text: "START" to 678678](#)

SAMHSA's National Helpline

A confidential, free service that provides information, support, and resources for individuals facing mental health or substance abuse issues, available 24/7.

[Website](#) | [1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](#)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

AFSP provides community programs, research, and education aimed at preventing suicide. Their website offers information about local resources and ways to get involved in prevention efforts.

[Website](#) | [1-888-333-AFSP \(2377\)](#)

Trans Lifeline

A peer support service run by trans people for trans and questioning individuals, offering confidential and compassionate support.

[Website](#) | [1-877-565-8860](#)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) HelpLine

A free, nationwide service providing information, referrals, and support for those affected by mental illness and their families.

[Website](#) | [Phone: 1-800-950-NAMI \(6264\)](#)
[Text: "HELPLINE" to 62640](#)

Support Resources for Suicide Loss Survivors

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Support for Loss Survivors AFSP offers a comprehensive support network for individuals grieving the loss of someone to suicide. They provide resources, support groups, and guidance for navigating the grieving process.

[Website](#) | [1-888-333-2377](#)

Suicide Prevention Lifeline – Loss Survivors

The Lifeline provides resources for those who have lost a loved one to suicide, including support groups, coping tips, and information on how to help others affected by the loss.

[Website](#) | 988

The Dougy Center – Grief Support for Suicide Loss

The Dougy Center specializes in providing support to children, teens, young adults, and families grieving a death, including suicide loss. They offer resources and peer support groups.

[Website](#) | [1-866-775-5683](#)

Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors

A nonprofit organization that provides online support communities, grief resources, and personal stories for those coping with the loss of a loved one to suicide.

[Website](#) | [1-877-536-4673](#)

Survivors of Suicide Loss (SOSL)

A nonprofit organization offering support groups, resources, and information for individuals and families grieving someone who has died by suicide. They also provide education on suicide prevention.

[Website](#) | [1-619-482-0297](#)

NAMI – Navigating Grief After Suicide

NAMI offers guidance and support for those grieving after a suicide. They provide educational resources and support groups to help individuals process their grief and find community.

[Website](#) | [1-800-950-NAMI \(6264\)](#)

Healing Conversations Program (AFSP)

Through this program, AFSP connects suicide loss survivors with trained peer volunteers who offer personal support, understanding, and guidance after losing someone to suicide.

[Website](#) | [1-888-333-2377](#)

A young woman with dark, curly hair is looking down at a black smartphone she is holding in her hands. She is wearing a yellow t-shirt and a blue and white patterned wristband on her left wrist. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with warm lighting.

988

SUICIDE
& CRISIS
LIFELINE



**If you or someone you know
needs support now, call or text
988 or chat 988lifeline.org**

A young man with a brown beanie and headphones is looking at his smartphone. He is wearing a green t-shirt and a gold bracelet. In the background, another person is visible, working at a desk with a laptop.

988

**LÍNEA DE
PREVENCIÓN
DEL SUICIDIO
Y CRISIS**

**Si tú o alguien que conoces
necesita apoyo, llama al 988
(servicio en español) o envía
un texto al 988 o chat vía
988lineadevida.org**



Navigating the Holidays

➤ Holiday Stressors

According to the [APA](#) (American Psychological Association), 89% of U.S. adults experiences stress related to the winter holiday season. 43% note that holiday stress interferes with their ability to enjoy the holidays. In this study, they identified the 10 most common sources of holiday stress:

Money: 58% stated that they were stressed over either spending too much money or not having enough money to spend on the holidays. This is the highest of the stressors found in this study. Food, transportation, lodging, décor, gifts, activities, clothes... the list goes on for how much we invest in our holidays, and for some, it's after we've already spent hundreds of dollars celebrating a Thanksgiving feast or another harvest centric celebration!

- Setting a holiday budget can be a helpful strategy for managing your holiday expenses. Plan ahead for all the items you anticipate you will need and add in an emergency buffer if you can for those unexpected additions. Setting aside funds throughout the year can help build a healthy savings for the winter.
- Use your creativity to keep costs down. Instead of being the only one cooking for a holiday meal, make it a potluck and assign dishes and décor to all your guests. Low on gift giving money? Try making a gift – writing a poem, crocheting a blanket, painting a picture, planning quality time to be collected in the months ahead (giving you additional time to save for any activities) are all ways you can cut the costs and increase the thoughtfulness of your presents.

Gifts: 40% stated that finding the perfect gift contributed to holiday stress. Did you know that in many households who celebrate Hanukkah, you give out one gift to each family member for every night of celebration – that's eight nights of presents. Depending on your traditions and how large your family is, this could make for a lot of shopping, crafting, and planning.

- Finding just the right gift to make your loved ones feel special can be stressful. Ease the pressure of perfection by focusing on the person you are planning to give to. Think about what they enjoy, what they value, and the relationship you share. Take time to plan out who is on your gift giving list and write it down. Organize the who, the what, and the how much before you head to the store. Use [MHC's Holiday Budget Worksheet](#) to make your person gifting budget.
- While many holidays have gift giving traditions, honor your personal feelings about gift giving and ensure it's a healthy and enjoyable experience, not an obligation.

Navigating the Holidays

Holiday Stressors

Missing loved ones: 38% stated that their main cause of holiday stress is missing a family member or loved one. Many of us know the grief of loss and that first, second, or 20th celebration without our special someone to share it with can be heart breaking.

- Creating a tradition that honors your loved one(s) may be a helpful way to include their memory in your festivities. Lighting a candle, sharing a happy memory, preparing their favorite dish, or playing a song they loved are just a few ways you can include those no longer with us in our holidays this season.
- Give yourself grace, space, and time. There is no time limit on grief. Be sure to make time for self-care during the holiday season.

Too much on the to-do list: 32% of those in this study stated that their holiday stress is related to the never-ending to-do list. The winter holidays may only be a short period of the year, but the task list to prepare, travel, clean, bake, cook, shop, wrap, dress, and celebrate – all on top of our day-to-day tasks can be overwhelming.

- Plan ahead: Much like our holiday budget strategy, take the time to write down all the tasks needed to host or enjoy the holiday(s) in mind. Give each item a realistic due date and assign tasks to anyone willing to chip in. You can start planning at anytime during the year to get a head start. Some families pick names for a gift exchange at their harvest celebrations. Others call dibs on who is hosting what over the summer to ensure everyone has time to plan, prep, and enjoy the holiday.



Pressure: 30% stated that their stress came from a feeling that they had to make the holidays feel special. With this pressure, some lost the joy the holiday used to bring them as they became too wrapped up in perfecting every detail. This hyper focus on perfection can distract us from what the holidays really mean to us.

- Take time to remind yourself why you celebrate your holiday. What does it mean to you and your loved ones? Where did it originate? What was the original purpose and traditions associated with the holiday. Take a look at our collection of [Winter Holidays](#) to learn more.

Navigating the Holidays

Holiday Stressors

Over/under indulgence: 25% shared that their stress was directly related to food and/or alcohol related issues. As study conducted in 2023 by the Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center shows that two-thirds of people say they overindulge over the holidays with 45% also taking a break from their regular exercise routines. The holidays can also exacerbate symptoms of eating disorders, alcoholism, and substance use or misuse due to the added stress and pressure to indulge.

- It's important to listen to your body. Make sure you are providing yourself a balanced diet, plenty of hydration, and sticking to your regular sleep cycle. While it's certainly okay to treat yourself, remember Oscar Wilde's sage advice: "Everything in moderation," which is an age-old concept from Greek poet, Hesiod who once said, "observe due measure; moderation is best in all things."

For those seeking support for an eating disorder or suspected eating disorder:

- Visit the [National Eating Disorders Association](#) for a collection of resources including a confidential screening tool, list of treatment providers, nutrition counseling, helplines, hotlines, and educational resources.
- ANAD Eating Disorder Helpline: 630-577-1330

For those seeking support for substance use, misuse, and sobriety supports, view the below resources:

- [Substance Use Disorder Resources and Information for CT Residents \(211\)](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [Narcotics Anonymous: 1-888-GET-HOPE \(438-4673\)](#)
- [Dual Recovery Anonymous](#)
- [Article: How to Maintain Sobriety During the Holidays](#)

Loneliness: 25% shared not being able to spend time with their loved ones over the holidays was a major stressor this time of year. According to [The CT Collaborative to End Loneliness](#), 60% of Americans experience loneliness at any given time of the year. This experience can lead to depression, substance misuse, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and physical ailments including heart disease. This is why MHC is a Collaborative member working toward its collective mission of ending loneliness.

- If you are separated from your loved ones this season, there are communities across CT that you can connect with to combat loneliness. Visit [forallages.org](#) to view their collection of programs connecting individuals from all generations together. You can also search for local events through [Meetup](#) where you can meet people based on shared interests and location.

Navigating the Holidays

Holiday Stressors

Feeling or being excluded: 20% shared that their stress came from feeling left out or being excluded during the holidays. This can include not being invited to a family outing, being left out of the gift exchange, or not being included in the family holiday photo. Much like the feelings of loneliness, being excluded from your loved ones can cause a host of emotional and physical reactions that can harm our wellbeing. Being excluded may also be an outcome of a family conflict or not being accepted as your authentic self. These feelings can occur at any time of year and can be especially hard to face this time of year.

- You can combat these feelings of exclusion by speaking up. Sometimes a missed invitation is a simple mistake. Make sure you communicate with your loved ones and not make assumptions. You can also take the initiative to be the planner and coordinate that special event or outing.
- If the exclusion is intentional, know that you are not alone. There are a multitude of community groups and supports, ready and willing to share space and time with you this holiday season. Check our resource list for a variety of groups that can support you this holiday season.
- **Handling the Holidays in a Non-LGBTQ+ Affirming Environment** is a panel discussion hosted by our national affiliate, Mental Health America, which discusses how to set boundaries and prioritize your own mental health regardless of who you chose to share your holidays with. You can watch the recording at no cost [here](#).

Family conflict: 22% shared that family conflicts and even the anticipation of potential conflicts caused holiday stress this season. While it's perfectly natural to not always agree with family, ongoing and reoccurring conflicts can be extremely stressful.

- [HelpGuide.org](#) provides detailed tips and strategies for dealing with difficult family relationships from identifying the cause, navigating difficult conversations, and learning when it's time to cut ties and move forward.
- [Lincoln Park Therapy Group](#) offers "3 Ways to Cope with Family Conflict Over the Holidays" which include self-care, setting boundaries, and changing our familial role.
- [Center for Excellence](#) created "The Holiday Checklist for LGBTQ+ People" to help navigate the holidays when not all family members are affirming.

Traveling: 19% shared that traveling contributes to their holiday stress. Traffic, long lines at the airport, even booking your travel arrangements can all cause stress over the holiday season.

- Preparation is key when combatting travel stress. Be sure to plan ahead, get lots of rest before traveling, and prepare to practice patience you won't be the only one trying to "get home for the holidays."
- Travel + Leisure provides "[15 Holiday Travel Tips for a Less Stressful Festive Season.](#)" Their list includes booking flights and car rentals well in advance, being as flexible with your dates as possible, having a backup plan in case of poor weather or cancellations and strategies for packing your gifts.
- NPR posted a special episode of Life Kit on "[Traveling for the holidays? 7 tips to help you keep your cool](#)" that shares important tips when flying during the holiday season including a handy "carry on essentials" list.



Gift giving is the second most common holiday stressor. Planning ahead and setting a budget for gift giving is a helpful strategy to combat holiday stress. Use the grid below to plan ahead this holiday season, and remember, not every gift comes from a store. Consider which gifts you can create, craft, and DIY!

[illegible]

Navigating the Holidays

Talking About Your Mental Health Over the Holidays

Talking about mental health during the holidays can be difficult, especially given the often high expectations around family gatherings, celebrations, and traditions. However, it's also an important opportunity to check in with ourselves and others, as the holidays can be a stressful time for many people. Here are some tips for navigating those conversations with care and intention:

1. Be Honest and Set Boundaries

It's okay to acknowledge if you're struggling, but you don't have to go into detail if you don't want to. It's perfectly fine to say, "I'm not feeling my best right now" or "The holidays are hard for me this year." If someone presses for more information or tries to push you to "cheer up," it's okay to set a boundary by saying something like, "I appreciate your concern, but I'm not ready to talk about it in depth right now."

2. Be Specific About Your Needs

If you feel comfortable sharing, explain what would help you during the holidays. For example, "It would mean a lot if we could keep things low-key this year." If you need time alone or to leave a gathering early—let people know so they can respect your space without feeling hurt or confused.

3. Approach the Topic with Empathy

If you're concerned about someone else's mental health, approach them with empathy. Instead of saying, "You look down, what's wrong?" try something like, "I've noticed you seem a little quiet lately. I just want to check in—how are you doing?" Offer your support, but also allow the other person to set the tone and pace of the conversation. Keep in mind that their response may be that they don't want to talk right now, and that's okay. You can share you are open to listen if they want to talk another time and connect them with alternative resources for self-care and professional supports.

4. Recognize the Impact of the Season

Acknowledge that the holidays can be stressful for many reasons: financial strain, family dynamics, grief, or just the pressure to be happy. If you're having trouble, chances are someone else is, too. It can be helpful to talk about the challenges of the season without focusing only on the "happy holiday" expectations. This can create space for more genuine and meaningful conversations.

5. Take the Pressure Off

Mental health discussions don't need to be long, deep, or dramatic. Sometimes a quick check-in can be just as meaningful as a heart-to-heart. "How are you really doing?" can be a simple but powerful way to start. It's also okay to acknowledge that the holidays don't have to be perfect. Shifting the narrative from perfection to presence (e.g., "I don't have to be in the holiday spirit to enjoy the time with you") can be freeing for everyone involved.

Navigating the Holidays

Talking About Your Mental Health Over the Holidays

6. Remove the Stigma from Mental Health Conversations

If you feel comfortable, lead by example. You can help break the stigma by talking about mental health in a way that feels approachable and nonjudgmental. If you're open about your own struggles, others may feel more empowered to open up too. You don't need to have all the answers or solutions—sometimes just listening can be incredibly supportive.

7. Be Mindful of the Setting

If you're planning to talk about mental health during a family or group holiday gathering, make sure it's an appropriate time and space. Private conversations may be better than trying to talk about sensitive issues in front of others who may not be understanding.

It's okay to take a pause or walk away if the conversation starts to feel too heavy or uncomfortable. Setting boundaries with those engaging in the conversation may also be helpful to ensure everyone feel comfortable.

8. Take Care of Yourself

The holidays can be an emotionally demanding time, so don't forget to take care of your own mental health, too. If you need time alone to recharge, make that a priority. Even small moments of self-care—like taking a walk, meditating, or journaling—can help you stay grounded.

9. Respect Each Person's Journey

Not everyone may be ready or willing to talk about their mental health, and that's okay. Be respectful of where others are in their own journey, and don't take it personally if they don't want to engage in the conversation. Remember that while the holidays may come with a lot of external pressure, it's also an opportunity to show compassion, understanding, and support. Open, honest conversations about mental health can help reduce stigma and make the season a little lighter for everyone.

10. Know Your Resources

If you or a loved one are struggling or just need someone to talk to, there are a variety of resources like hotlines, warmlines, treatment services, and community supports available. View our collection of resources and share with your loved ones to ensure everyone is supported this season.

WORKSHEET



Caregiver Reflection

Caregivers are often at high risk for burnout during the winter holidays, when emotional, financial, and social pressures intensify. This self-paced worksheet can offer grounding, reflection, and gentle skill-building without adding more to already full plates.

Pause and Breathe

Take a moment to close your eyes. Place one hand over your heart and the other over your belly. Take three slow breaths. After you open your eyes, write down:

One word that describes how you're *feeling* right now: _____

One word that describes how you *want* to feel this season: _____

Reflection – “The Pressures and the Joys”

Use the space below to list the things in your life that cause you stress as well as those that bring your comfort.

Pressures or Stressors	Joys or Sources of Comfort

Circle one joy and plan to intentionally savor it this week.

What's taking the most energy from me right now? _____

What gives me the most renewal or meaning? _____

WORKSHEET



Caregiver Reflection

Create a "Gentle Plan"

Instead of setting rigid goals, create a compassionate care plan for yourself:

My Daily Check-Ins

- ☐ I pause and breathe.
- ☐ I nourish my body (food, rest, movement).
- ☐ I connect with someone or something that lifts my spirit.

My "Non-Negotiable" for Self Care

Even if everything falls apart, I will still: _____

My "Winter Permission Slip"

I give myself permission to _____ without guilt.

Closing Affirmation

Read this aloud (or write your own):



***"Even in seasons of giving, I deserve gentleness and rest.
I am enough. I am doing enough. I am caring enough."***



Mental Health Resources

In an Emergency or Crisis:

For assistance in an emergency situation: [Dial 9-1-1](#)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **9-8-8**
(press 1 for veterans, 2 for Spanish)

Crisis Text Line: **Text HOME to 741741**

Mobile Crisis Line: **Dial 2-1-1**

Treatment Resources:

SAMHSA's National Helpline
[Website](#) | **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**

National Council for Mental Wellbeing
[Website](#) (click on "Find a Provider")

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Helpline
[Website](#) | **1-800-950-NAMI (6264)**

ANAD Eating Disorder Helpline | [Website](#) | **630-577-1330**

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)
[Website](#) | **1-800-656-HOPE (4673)**

Black Mental Health Alliance | [Website](#) | **410-338-2642**

Resources for LGBTQ+ Community

988 LGBTQ+ Line
[Website](#) | **Dial 988, Press 3, Text PRIDE for 988**

LGBT National Help Center | [Website](#) | **1-888-843-4564**

LGBT National Youth Talkline
[Website](#) | **1-800-246-PRIDE (1-800-246-7743)**

Trevor Project Crisis Line for LGBTQ Youth
[Website](#) | **1-866-4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)**

TransLifeline | [Website](#) | **1-877-565-8860**

Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity – MASGD
[Website](#) | **Call 71-QTM-INARA (717-864-6272)**
Friday and Saturday, 5pm - 11pm, CT

SAGE LGBTQ+ Elder Hotline | [Website](#)

DEQH – Desi LGBTQ Helpline for South Asians
[Website](#) | **908-367-3374**

The Holiday Checklist for LGBTQ+ People
[View or Download PDF](#)

Self-Help Resources and Groups

Take a Mental Health Test | [Website](#)

Warmline | [Website](#)

Alcoholics Anonymous | [Website](#)

Narcotics Anonymous
[Website](#) | **1-888-GET-HOPE (438-4673)** (Hopeline)

Dual Recovery Anonymous | [Website](#)

Anxiety and Depression Support Group | [Website](#)

Domestic Violence, Abuse, and Sexual Assault Resources

National Sexual Assault Hotline | **1-800-656-HOPE (4673)**

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
1-800-787-3224 (for deaf or hard of hearing)

National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)
[Website](#) | **1-800-656-HOPE (4673)**

FORGE
For trans+ survivors of domestic violence, sexual, or hate violence or stalking.
[Website](#) | **414-559-2123** (not an immediate assistance line)

National Deaf Domestic Violence Hotline
[Website](#) | **Video Phone: 855-812-1001 (24/7)**

Blackline
24/7 hotline, crisis counseling and collecting info on negative police or vigilante contact
[Website](#) | **1-800-604-5841**

National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline
[Website](#) | **866-331-9474 (call or text) / TTY: 800-787-3224**

StrongHearts Native Helpline
For Native Americans experiencing domestic or dating violence
1-844-762-8483 (available every day from 8 am to 11 pm)

Children of the Night | For sex trafficking victims
[Website](#) | **1-800-551-1300 x 0**

National Center on Elder Abuse | **1-855-500-3537**

Other Resources

211 | Free and confidential information and referral, available 24/7, for help with food, housing, employment, health care, counseling and more.
Dial 211 or visit [211.org](#)

National Runaway Safeline | A federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth.
[Website](#) | **Call 1-800-786-2929 (24/7) or text 66008**

National Disaster Distress Helpline | **1-800-985-5990**

Emergency Foodline | **1-866-888-8777**

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Provides fact sheets and information for parents and caregivers as well as teachers, law enforcement, and other professionals including information on talking to children and adolescents on natural disasters and other traumatic events.
[Website](#)

Caregiver Help Desk | Available every day from 8 a.m. – 7 p.m. to help caregivers navigate complex challenges and provide peer to peer support.
1-855-227-3640

[Mental Health Connecticut's Online Resource Directory](#)



mental health
CONNECTICUT

Enhancing Environments Through Education

We believe education is essential for lasting change, which is why we've developed a range of curricula to support communities and workplaces across Connecticut.

MHC's Community Education Catalogue includes:

- Certified trainings
- Customizable workshops
- Coaching and consultation

Each offering is designed to strengthen your workforce, empower your community group, and support individual growth.



Visit mhconn.org/education or scan the QR code to learn more about MHC's Community Education offerings.

Home for the Holidays



Housing Assistance ◀.....

"Oh, there's no place like home for the holidays," Perry Como famously sang, and this sentiment rings true for many of us seeking the warmth and love of family during the winter holiday season. Obtaining a safe home is one of many goals we strive for with our participants at MHC. It is important for everyone to have a secure and welcoming environment to call their own as it improves your overall wellbeing and is a key pillar for recovery.

Unfortunately, this sentiment is not a reality for everyone. Not every home is a safe home, and some individuals are at risk of experiencing homelessness or struggling to find a secure place to sleep this season. **Current statistics** show that there were 3,410 unhoused people in CT on a single night in January 2024, 13% higher than the previous year. Approximately 700 of those were children and nearly 800 were 55 or older.

At MHC, we aim to support our communities in obtaining safe environments to call home. We do this as an active partner of Connecticut's Coordinated Access Network (CAN) in the northwest sector. CAN staff assess the housing needs of all individuals experiencing homelessness and work with the individual to identify solutions to resolve or prevent a housing crisis. To learn more about MHC's Housing Assistance program, [click here](#).

Safety Plan

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline publishes a collection of resources at no cost to the public to promote the 988 Lifeline and share life saving resources. The "Safety Plan" (right) is available to [download](#) or [order](#) as a 5x7 pad for use by counselors, clinicians, teachers, or anyone working with people in need of a safety plan.

Safety Plans Work

1. Write 3 warning signs that a crisis may be developing.

2. Write 3 internal coping strategies that can take your mind off your problems.

3. Who/What are 3 people or places that provide distraction?
(Write name/place and phone numbers)

4. Who can you ask for help? (Write names and phone numbers)

5. Professionals or agencies you can contact during a crisis:

6. Write out a plan to make your environment safer.
(Write 2 things)

There is hope.

Phone _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Address _____

Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org

Modified from Stanley & Brown (2021)

PEP22-08-03-007

Housing & Other Resources

Experiencing or at risk of Homelessness

211

If you, or someone you know, is at risk of having to leave their home and having nowhere to stay, please dial 2-1-1- and press Option 3 to speak with a 211 Housing Crisis Specialist. The line is open daily 24 hours a day. For a listing of local shelters and affordable housing/ rental supports, [click here](#).

Transit HOP Program

Connecticut Harm Reduction Alliance (CTHRA) outreach workers and CT State Troopers are located at transit stations in Hartford and New Britain between 10 p.m. - 1 a.m. These workers are identified with a lanyard and badge and can assist individuals with shelter placement, making housing plans, obtaining mental health or substance use treatment, and other services. For questions on this program, contact Mollie.Machado@ct.gov

CT SOAR Initiative

Aims to increase access to the Social Security Administration's disability income benefit programs. This program is open to those experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness and also have a mental illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorder. For information on this program [click here](#) or contact your local CAN agency as listed below:

Fairfield County Coordinated Access Network
Catholic Charities of Fairfield County | **203-743-4412**
New Reach | **203-492-4866**

Greater New Haven Coordinated Access Network
Columbus House | **203-401-4400**
Liberty Community Services | **203-495-7600**

Northwest Coordinated Access Network
Center for Human Development | **203-596-9323**

Middletown/Meriden/Wallingford Coordinated Access Network
Columbus House | **860-343-3145**

Greater Hartford Coordinated Access Network
Community Health Resources | **(860) 646-3888**

Central CT Coordinated Access Network
Friendship Service Center | **860-225-0211**

Northeast Coordinated Access Network
Perception Programs Inc. | **(860) 450-7122**

Southeast Coordinated Access Network
Reliance Health | **(860) 887-6536**

Seeking Food

Emergency Foodline | **1-866-888-8777**

Connecticut Foodshare

To locate a Food Pantry or Mobile Food Pantry in your area, [click here](#).

Freefood.org is a database of local food banks across the state. To search for one near you, [click here](#).

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is available to CT residents seeking assistance is purchasing food. To learn if you qualify and to apply for assistance, [click here](#).

Experiencing an Unsafe Home Environment

If you are facing an immediate crisis, call 911.

Mobile Crisis Line | [Website](#) | **Call 211**

National Suicide Prevention Line | [Website](#) | **Call 988**

Crisis Text Line | [Website](#) | **Text HOME to 741 741**

LGBT National Help Center | [Website](#) | **1-888-843-4564**

Trevor Project Crisis Line – LGBTQ Youth
[Website](#) | **1-866-4-U-Trevor (488-7386)**

TransLifeLine | [Website](#) | **1-877-565-8860**

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network)
[Website](#) | **1-800-656-HOPE**

National Child Abuse Hotline
1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

National Domestic Violence Hotline
1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
1-800-787-3224 (for deaf or hard of hearing)

FORGE

For trans+ survivors of domestic violence, sexual, or hate violence or stalking.
[Website](#) | **414-559-2123 (not an immediate assistance line)**

National Deaf Domestic Violence Hotline
[Website](#) | **Video Phone: 855-812-1001 (24/7)**

StrongHearts Native Helpline

For Native Americans experiencing domestic or dating violence.
1-844-762-8483 (available every day from 8 am to 11 pm)

Blackline

24/7 hotline, crisis counseling and collecting info on negative police or vigilante contact.
[Website](#) | **1-800-604-5841**

National Center on Elder Abuse | **1-855-500-3537**

National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline
[Website](#) | **Call or Text 866-331-9474 / TTY: 800-787-3224**

Children of the Night

For sex trafficking victims.
[Website](#) | **1-800-551-1300 x 0**

National Runaway Safeline

Federally designated national communication system for runaway and homeless youth.
[Website](#) | **Call 1-800-786-2929 (24/7) or text 66008**

Domestic Violence Shelters in CT

For a directory of shelters, [click here](#).

CTSafeConnect | [Website](#) | **Call or text 1-888-4774-2900**

THANK YOU

Thank you so much to those who have supported MHC's efforts and donated to our year-end fundraiser. Your contributions make a direct impact in providing essential services to individuals across Connecticut and allow MHC to create and share valuable, educational mental health resources.

If you would like to contribute toward our Winter Wellness with MHC campaign you can:

Donate Online



Host a Fundraiser



Volunteer with Our Development Team



For check donations, please make checks payable to:
Mental Health Connecticut
76 Batterson Park Road, Suite 303
Farmington, CT 06032

Thank you for supporting our work!

Follow MHC on Social Media!

Stay up to date with events and happenings with MHC! Click the links below to follow our pages or search [@mentalhealthct](#). Make sure to like and share!





**Wishing You a
Wonderful Winter!**



**mental health
CONNECTICUT**

Did we miss something? We'd love to hear from you! Share your thoughts by emailing us at info@mhconn.org.