

May is Mental Health Month – Get Connected!

By Paddy Kutz, Executive Director, Mental Health America of Licking County

Since 1981 I have been promoting good mental health. Have you been listening and taking action to promote your own well being? During the month of May we focus especially on mental health because it is national mental health month, but, of course, these lessons are good all year long.

I encourage all citizens of Licking County to build your social support networks throughout May to improve upon how you deal with the stress of living in a 24/7 on-the-go society. Take the ***Mental Health Connection Challenge*** by making five positive and life-fulfilling connections this month. Research shows that social networks can reduce stress and promote overall health by providing a sense of belonging, self-worth and security.

“We all need to maintain positive connections to feel a part of our communities and families, which is why this May, Mental Health America is challenging everyone to connect with family & friends, coworkers, community members and professional help, if needed,” said Barbara Gilkes, President of the MHALC Board of Trustees. “Years of research have shown that individuals who feel valued and cared for are better equipped to deal with stress and adversity and even experience less severe illnesses than those with little social support”, Gilkes said.

Here is your challenge:

- **Connect to Family & Friends** – Loved ones are an important source of support and encouragement. Talk to them when you need extra help, allow them to provide guidance and be prepared to help them when they need you.
- **Connect to Coworkers** – Given the amount of time we dedicate to work, healthy relationships with coworkers are a must. Spend a lunch hour with officemates or reach out to someone you haven't talked to in a while to take a walk or grab a cup of coffee.
- **Connect to Community Members** – Shifting from your own issues to the needs of others can be a healthy change of pace. Select a faith-based organization, school, long-term care facility or non-profit group that needs your help and pitch in. We use many volunteers and would welcome your assistance. Call us at 522-1341.
- **Connect to Yourself** – Taking time for yourself can decrease stress and improve health and relationships. Try meditating, exercising, enjoying a hobby, read a book, eat right, sleep eight hours and for sure have fun. Whatever you choose, it's your time, so spend it doing something you enjoy.

- **Connect to Professional Help** – If you are feeling overwhelmed or unable to cope, reach out to a mental health professional. For a referral, call Mental Health America at 740-522-1341 or 211.

Mental Health America founded May is Mental Health Month 50 years ago to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of mental health for all. This year's theme, "Get Connected" is focused on the important role *social connectedness* plays in maintaining and protecting mental health and wellness.

An affiliate of Mental Health America, we are a partner agency of Licking County United Way, Community Mental Health & Recovery Board of Licking/Knox Cos. and NAMI.