

STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

FOR HOMEWOOD CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM EMPLOYEES

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

COVID-19 and Addiction

COVID-19 has had wide-reaching effects, greatly disrupting life as we knew it. People are facing unemployment, isolation, illness, and the emotional effects of widespread fear of the virus. Nearly everyone has been affected by COVID-19 in one way or another, and those who suffer from addiction have been severely affected by the pandemic. Both mental and physical health are a major concern for everyone. Between social isolation taking a toll on some people's mental health and fear and anxiety stopping people from seeking treatment, the addiction and recovery communities have faced significant struggles.

As COVID cases began to increase across the United States, businesses were not the only places that closed or turned to virtual resources. Churches, community centers, and other locations where 12-Step meetings are regularly held also closed to the public to adhere to social distancing guidelines. To avoid large groups, many 12-Step meetings across America transitioned to online platforms like Zoom and have continued to stay online.

While online meetings are a helpful resource during this time, it is not what people in recovery are used to. A vital aspect of recovery is socialization, human connection, and support groups, so it is difficult to adjust to the lack of human contact that meetings provide. Not only that, but Zoom fatigue is real — the brain must work overtime to process virtual calls, making Zoom meetings overwhelming and exhausting for some.

DRUG OVERDOSES AND COVID-19

On October 14, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) finally confirmed the number of overdoses on a national scale with the release of preliminary data. Drug overdoses increased by over 5,000 for the 12-month periods ending in both February and March 2020, reaching 72,000 and 74,000 deaths, respectively. These figures represent record high count for deaths, following two years of high-but-stable 12-month numbers. After peaking in November 2017, these death counts started declining — then started rising again from January 2019.





What to do if you or a loved one is scared to seek help due to COVID-19:

It is understandable that a person may be reluctant to go to treatment as a result of the virus. However, since most treatment centers are taking precautions, you may be safer in treatment than you think.

If you do have the resources to self-isolate and are among a high-risk population, many treatment centers are offering online outpatient therapy sessions.

Ultimately, addiction doesn't stop because of a virus, if you or a loved one needs help and you are unsure of where to start, check out the online remote resources below.

What to do if you are in recovery and are struggling to maintain your sobriety right now:

It's important to remember that social distancing and isolation are two different things. Just because you're trying to physically distance yourself from others to prevent the spread of the virus doesn't mean you should withdraw from your support group. Even though face-to-face socialization is important for recovery, online meetings are still useful tools. Continue attending meetings, call your sponsor and others in your support group, and practice coping strategies like deep breathing, meditation, or exercise in order to alleviate your anxiety, stress, or other difficult emotions. It is completely normal to feel a little depressed or lonely right now, but it is essential to deal with these emotions in healthy ways.

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ADDICTION SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES & INDIVIDUALS

Families and individuals in need of support and connection have a variety of options. Google's Recover Together lets you easily find local treatment and support services by state. In addition to what local groups may offer, the following provide different online and phone-based options:

- » 12-Step Online (Al-Anon and other variations are offered)
- » Al-Anon phone meeting
- » Families Anonymous
- » In the Rooms
- » Nar-Anon
- » Parents of Addicted Loved Ones
- » Recovery Dharma (co-dependency groups)
- » SMART Recovery for Family & Friends

— Adapted from *Partnership to End Addiction*