



Choose **Well**

You are Not Alone

2023 Mental Wellness
Caregiver Toolkit



Table of Contents

You Are Not Alone	3
Let's Talk About Therapy	4
Love, Friendship & Social Support	5
Building Virtual Community	6
Zero Suicides: No One Cares Alone	8
Explore Your Spiritual Health	9
Ecoanxiety	10
Movement for Mental Health	11
Finding Your Bliss	13

You Are Not Alone

This toolkit focuses on our shared experiences, building community, and focusing on our mental health. By reading about our caregivers' lived experiences, we hope to encourage you to prioritize your mental health, while increasing awareness about available resources and decreasing stigma.

- ✓ Download this [You Are Not Alone MS Teams background](#) to use during your on-camera meetings.
- ✓ Use your Virgin Pulse account to connect with others and check in with yourself. If you don't have a Virgin Pulse account, go to HRforCaregivers.org and click on Choose Well (Virgin Pulse) to create an account.
- ✓ We encourage you to find time in your day to look inward and acknowledge [how you have been feeling](#). Learn about the free and confidential mental wellness resources available to support you and your family members.



Caregiver Story: *"During the pandemic I was a stress ball. I would bottle up inside everything that I was stressing about regarding at home life stuff/work and it was hard for me to tell anyone how I felt. I have eventually learned to make time for myself to help take away the stress. I kept myself busy and spent all the time I could with my daughter. She is my happiness. Sometimes you just have to remind yourself, that you have to focus on yourself and those around you who need you (including you) to be strong. This is life/this is normal, and it is okay to sometimes not be okay. Reminder to self: life goes on. Start each day with a positive attitude and it really changes everything."*

You Are Not Alone

Let's Talk About Therapy: What to Expect and How to Get Started

For many of us, the benefits associated with talk therapy are well known. Therapy can help to build self-esteem, reduce anxiety, strengthen personal coping mechanisms, and improve social functioning in both personal and professional settings, in addition to countless other benefits that can help someone flourish. Yet, for those new to therapy, the initial process can seem particularly daunting. Here are some tips to help you explore mental health care.

Three Myths About Mental Health Care, Debunked

Knowing how to separate fact from fiction when it comes to therapy can help you make those first crucial steps toward getting care. Below are a few common misconceptions that often prevent people from understanding how mental health care can help.

1. Myth: Your colleagues will think something is wrong with you.

The truth: Mental health care is for everyone. Since the goal of all mental health care is to provide support, build skills, and achieve personal goals, pursuing care doesn't make someone "crazy," nor does it mean something is "wrong" with them.

2. Myth: You'll spend your session lying on a couch.

The truth: In pre-pandemic times, most mental health care was provided face-to-face, but even then, you'd meet in a private space with your provider. Nowadays, video calls have become more common. Teletherapy and virtual coaching make it faster and more convenient for people to access help from the comfort of home.

3. Myth: All mental health care is the same.

The truth: There are many different types of mental health care and providers. However, you should pay close attention to whether the type of treatment is evidence-based. Evidence-based care uses treatments that are backed by research, and it is tailored to meet people's needs, preferences, and cultural expectations.

For an in-depth resource on all things therapy, check out this guide from NPR: [How to Start Therapy](#)



Take Action: To learn more about whether Therapy or Coaching is right for you, visit [MyChooseWell.org](https://www.mychoosewell.org) and click on [Mental Wellness Resources](#).

You Are Not Alone

Love, Friendship & Social Support

Research has shown that having close friendships and social connections provides benefits such as increased feelings of happiness, reduced stress levels, improved self-esteem, and feelings of purpose and inclusion. Making time to build friendships and nurture our current relationships, is an important piece of life—just like making time for exercise and regular sleep.

But how do we choose meaningful relationships? From [CredibleMind.com](https://www.crediblemind.com)

If you are feeling agitated, critical, impatient, unmotivated, or stuck, perhaps it's time to consider the company you keep.

- Are you surrounded by others who are self-motivated, goal-oriented people who inspire you to be and do your best? To work hard? To have a good attitude? To live with integrity and accountability? To make choices that move you closer to achieving your goals?
- Are you living among those who treat themselves and others with patience, acceptance, humor, compassion, and respect?
- If you are unhappy with your energy, first look inward and then around to assess the energy that surrounds you. If it's not good energy, change it.
- You deserve to live a healthy, positive, and productive life—and those you share it with should reflect this vision.
- Now is the perfect time for intentional self-reflection and boundaries as a form of self-care. Shed the weight of whomever no longer supports how you wish to feel in your life.
- Pay attention to how you feel when you're around friends, family, and colleagues. Who depletes, and who elevates? Who inspires and empowers, and who criticizes and makes you feel small?
- Choose wisely.
- Seek out people in your life who encourage, motivate, and inspire you to be and live the very best version of yourself.

If you have 30 minutes, check out [this Podcast](#) on How to Build Healthy Relationships, whether that is with a partner, friend, family member, or anyone else.

You Are Not Alone

Love, Friendship & Social Support

Research has shown that having close friendships and social connections provides benefits such as increased feelings of happiness, reduced stress levels, improved self-esteem, and feelings of purpose and inclusion. Making time to build friendships and nurture our current relationships, is an important piece of life—just like making time for exercise and regular sleep.

But how do we choose meaningful relationships? From [CredibleMind.com](https://www.crediblemind.com)

If you are feeling agitated, critical, impatient, unmotivated, or stuck, perhaps it's time to consider the company you keep.

- Are you surrounded by others who are self-motivated, goal-oriented people who inspire you to be and do your best? To work hard? To have a good attitude? To live with integrity and accountability? To make choices that move you closer to achieving your goals?
- Are you living among those who treat themselves and others with patience, acceptance, humor, compassion, and respect?
- If you are unhappy with your energy, first look inward and then around to assess the energy that surrounds you. If it's not good energy, change it.
- You deserve to live a healthy, positive, and productive life—and those you share it with should reflect this vision.
- Now is the perfect time for intentional self-reflection and boundaries as a form of self-care. Shed the weight of whomever no longer supports how you wish to feel in your life.
- Pay attention to how you feel when you're around friends, family, and colleagues. Who depletes, and who elevates? Who inspires and empowers, and who criticizes and makes you feel small?
- Choose wisely.
- Seek out people in your life who encourage, motivate, and inspire you to be and live the very best version of yourself.



Caregiver Story: *"Ten months ago I became a mom. The best and hardest job I have ever had. My marriage, mental health, and physical health took a toll. I sought therapy and asked for help. Now I feel my marriage is strong again and my mental and physical health is starting to improve. I have learned instead of bottling up even the smallest feeling ends up turning in to something more than it should. I have started to express how I am feeling in the moment. Talking about what I need or at least just saying the emotion out loud helps me and my husband find a solution. I have the most supportive husband who just wants to help and be there for me. I've found I get in my own way when I try to please everyone else, and I ignore my own needs. I am so proud of the wife and mother I have become!"*

You Are Not Alone

Building Virtual Community

Building a sense of community has become more challenging as many teams transition to virtual spaces. Creating and maintaining relationships under these conditions requires being more intentional. The good news is that this doesn't demand time-intensive strategies. Consider the ideas below to build, restore or strengthen virtual community. Many of these can be used in-person as well.

Set aside a few minutes at the start of each meeting.

- Check in with everyone.
- Play a brief ice-breaker activity.
- Discuss a reflection in greater depth.

Ask team members to:

- Share highlight(s) of their week.
- Present a travel-log (photos, stories) of a recent or favorite vacation or event or do another type of virtual show and tell.
- Respond to a different question. For example: favorite movie or character/why, person who most influenced their life, alternate career they'd enjoy, their perfect day, etc.

Meet regularly to focus on community building.

- While periodic retreats are great for community building, weekly, biweekly or monthly gatherings work well too.

More team activities to build virtual community

- **Virtual show & tell**
- **Commonalities:** Divide your team into groups of 3 or 4. Ask each group to find three things all members have in common. For example, a group might find a common love for Shakespeare or disdain for fiery Cheetos.
- **Virtual museum tours**
- **Which animal would you be and why?**
Ask team members to submit their answers to you in advance. Then create one slide for each animal submitted. During your meeting, display one slide at a time and ask the group to match each animal with its team member.
- **Two truths and a lie:** Ask each member to submit two truths and one lie about themselves in advance. Create one slide for each member that includes their name. During your meeting, display one slide at a time and ask the group to identify the lie for each teammate.
- **Collage of life:** Ask each team member to create one slide that visually conveys their life through photos, quotes, graphics, etc. Then during the meeting, each member briefly explains their slide.



Take Action: Check out the Social Section of your Virgin Pulse account to connect with others within the organization.

You Are Not Alone

Zero Suicides: No One Cares Alone

Core leaders and co-workers can play a crucial role in suicide prevention. Every person shows their feelings differently, and there is no universal warning sign for suicide risk. However, there are some common behaviors that may indicate a person is thinking of suicide or experiencing a significant mental health concern. While it can feel awkward or uncomfortable to approach a fellow caregiver who may be struggling, checking in with others can provide opportunities for that person to seek the care they need.

Some signs that indicate someone may be thinking of suicide or experiencing a significant mental health concern include:

- Persistent sadness or irritability
- Increasingly aggressive or hostile behavior
- Neglecting basic hygiene or one's appearance
- Withdrawal from people or activities
- Increased or new use of drugs or alcohol
- Giving away cherished or valuable possessions
- Excessive shame or humiliation
- Statements about feeling trapped or hopeless
- Expressing thoughts of wanting to die



Caregiver Story: *"I had a massive panic attack that came out of nowhere about 2 years ago during Covid. I had no prior history of any conditions related to this. I received professional help and did a lot of research to help understand my anxiety. I recognize my triggers and have adjusted my lifestyle to maintain work-life balance. During work, I take time to go outside and walk briskly around the outside of the hospital. Not only does this healthy habit calm my nerves, I also get my steps in! I have also recruited other coworkers to join me in my quick walks and they love it. With my new coping skills I have been medication free for over a year which was my initial goal."*

You Are Not Alone

Zero Suicides: No One Cares Alone (continued)

If a caregiver is showing any of these signs or isn't acting like themselves, consider checking in with your colleague and connecting them to professional support if needed. [Suicide Prevention Training](#) is a great resource for additional training on how to support someone in crisis. The course is offered in an on-demand module through Virgin Pulse. Search Suicide Prevention Training in the Benefits section of your Virgin Pulse account.

1. If there's no imminent risk and you're not sure where to start, these steps can help guide the conversation:

1. Be direct: "I notice that you haven't seemed like yourself lately."

2. Describe what you see: "I notice you haven't been responding to emails and you seem distracted in meetings."

3. Ask open-ended questions: "How have you been lately?" "Tell me more." Do more listening rather than talking.

4. Validate and reassure them that help is available: "I can understand why this feels so difficult. I care about you and want to make sure you get the support you need."

5. Encourage the coworker to seek support: "Have you thought about getting professional support?"

6. Avoid common pitfalls: Try not to be judgmental, don't try to diagnose, and avoid giving advice or becoming their sole source of support. The goal of the conversation is to help connect your colleague to the appropriate resource.

If you believe a caregiver is at high risk of harming themselves or others, call 9-8-8, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or go to your nearest emergency department. Help is also available by visiting <https://988lifeline.org/>



Take Action: Sometimes people may not realize they need help, while those around them can see the warning signs clearly. If you notice a coworker showing signs of distress, know that there are several ways to support them in the workplace.

- **Normalize conversations** about mental health at work. Doing this together has several benefits: It lessens the burden on those affected, it increases health literacy, and it promotes a safe and healthy workplace.
- **Be a friend**, not a hero. Lend a non-judgmental ear, but don't try to diagnose or tell others how to proceed.
- **Remind coworkers that help is available.** Encourage them to take advantage of their free resources by asking, "Have you thought about talking with a mental health expert?"

You Are Not Alone

Explore Your Spiritual Health

Spirituality influences many decisions that people make. It encourages people to have better relationships with themselves, others, and the unknown. Spirituality can help you deal with stress by giving you a sense of peace, purpose, and forgiveness. It often becomes more important in times of emotional stress or illness.

Our professional chaplains are skilled and trained to care for the whole person (mind, body, and spirit) coming from any or no spiritual/faith backgrounds or practices. As wonderfully unique persons, we are created with a sense of connection, relatedness, meaning and purpose. As wonderfully unique persons, we are created with a sense of connection, relatedness, meaning and purpose. This can be understood as a person's spirituality, and it may be viewed through the lens of a particular religion, faith tradition or practice, or a connection outside of established spiritualities. Our professional chaplains are available to support your needs through TeleSpiritual Health.

What Can You Expect?

We seek to listen and to honor your unique needs. The chaplain will complete a spiritual assessment, provide interventions, and refer to disciplines of care as needed. They are here to ease your way, offering gentle, caring, holistic spiritual support with the goal of integrating the mind, body and spirit. Learn more at mychoosewell.org and click on Spiritual Health.

Your chaplain will address concerns regarding:

- Loss of meaning and/or joy in life
- Spiritual or religious issues
- Concerns related to death and grief
- Emotional and spiritual well-being
- Mindfulness and prayer resources
- Reconnecting/connecting to a community of support
- Affirming the goodness within



Take action: Take the Explore Your Spiritual Health Module. In this module, you will look within to explore your spiritual health. Theresa Vithayathil Edmonson, Vice President Spiritual Health along with a panel of Spiritual health providers from across the organization, will be hosting each topic. This on-demand module is offered through your Virgin Pulse account. Search Explore Your Spiritual Health Module in the [Benefits section of your Virgin Pulse account.](#)

You Are Not Alone

Ecoanxiety: A Deep Breath is the First Step

When we think and talk about community, it often includes the world outside the walls of our homes and offices. Where we live and spend our free time is a significant factor in our community, social life, and often mental health. Some of us may find ourselves concerned about issues like climate change. Ecoanxiety is the emotional distress related to climate change. Those directly impacted by natural disasters, poor air quality, and extreme conditions are not the only ones at risk for distress; the environmental crisis can also have consequences for people who feel regret about their own impact on the planet, and what the crisis means for our future generations.

On the individual level, there are simple steps people can take to manage their ecoanxiety despite the worldwide crisis—from engaging in nature-based mindfulness practices to joining others who support large-scale change.



Nearly 3 out of 4 people worry climate change harm them personally at some point.



More than 8 in 10 children are moderately worried about climate change, and 6 in 10 are very or extremely worried.



An increase of 2 degrees F over 5 years corresponded to a 2% increase in mental health difficulties.

4 Ways to Calm Ecoanxiety

- 1. Go Outside.** Spend time in nature to help reduce stress hormones and remind yourself why protecting the planet matters.
- 2. Connect with like-minded communities.** Get involved with organizations and events that support taking action to slow global warming.
- 3. Make green choices.** Commit to reducing your own carbon footprint while knowing that individual actions can inspire large-scale changes.
- 4. Practice Compassion.** Acknowledge your feelings around climate change, and be understanding of others who feel differently. We're all doing our best.



Take Action: If you're experiencing a high level of ecoanxiety, Lyra Health can help. Whether you're looking for self-guided mindfulness practices to keep you grounded or you want to talk with a trained provider, Lyra can connect you to support your well-being. [Click here](#) and go to Therapy or Mental Health Coaching to get started.

You Are Not Alone

Movement for Mental Health

People are often overwhelmed with the thought of adding 60 heart-pounding minutes of cardio into their already packed schedule, but small moments of movement added in throughout the day have a benefit. Whether it's 10 minutes of walking, taking the stairs rather than the elevator, or stretching before bed, all of these habits can have immediate benefits for reducing stress, boosting mood, and improving one's overall sense of wellbeing. A little movement goes a long way.

Three Ways Physical Activity Can Improve Your Mental Health

1. Reduces Stress: Exercise stimulates communication between your body's nervous systems, which will increase your ability to healthily respond well to stress. With exercise comes a natural increase in your heart rate. This results in the production of hormones which will improve overall mood and cognition.

Because exercising is so adaptable, you do not have to worry about it interfering with your daily life. Clock in 15-minutes on your stationary bike or complete a yoga routine right in your office or living room!

If you choose to add exercise into your life, consider investing in low-cost equipment you can rely on. Purchase a durable yoga mat, a high-quality pair of running shoes, or a bike and an accompanying lock. Investments in the equipment you need will ensure that no stress invades your daily routine.

2. Encourages You to Socialize: Socialization is an essential need for humans. It allows us to make meaningful connections, learn from one another, and find purpose in life.

While exercising can be done solo, it is often performed in groups. Attending a workout class or recruiting a running buddy are just a few examples of how socializing can be naturally integrated into exercising.

Because of the social aspect of exercising, you can reap the mental benefits that socializing offers. People who live more socially active lives have been known to have greater feelings of well-being, diminished feelings of depression, less anxiety, decreased dementia as aging occurs and overall higher life satisfactions.

The socialization that goes hand-in-hand with exercising will increase your mental health, both in the moment and in the long term.

You Are Not Alone

Movement for Mental Health (continued)

3. Improves Your Sleep: A lack of sleep can be detrimental to your mental health. People who don't get enough sleep can suffer from less energy, clouded thinking and judgment, forgetfulness, irritability, and a depressed mood.

Physical activity will help regulate your body's circadian rhythm, which determines when you are tired. Exercising will improve your sleep by allowing your body to spend the appropriate amounts of time in each essential sleep stage.

You can also fall asleep faster after a day in which exercise was performed, even if it was only a short burst of physical activity.

Exercise raises your body temperature, which can have calming effects on the mind. This relaxation is great at night and in the middle of the day when a feeling of calmness can help you through your day.



Caregiver Story: *"I am on a mental health and physical health journey. I did not have the best upbringing and with things that have gone on in my life, I have some depression and anxiety that I deal with daily. I am doing this to work to have better mental health and I also am currently heavier than I want to be, so I need to start motivating myself again to lose the weight. Have to start small and work my way to better things for myself and for my family. I want to be healthier for myself but also for them."*

You Are Not Alone

Finding Your Bliss

What comes to mind when we think about mental health? Activities, in whatever form, can help feed our sense of well-being and recharge our mental health. Whether it's traveling, scrapbooking, spending time in nature, connecting with family, meditating, or journaling, it's essential that we find activities that provide us with a sense of happiness, purpose, and lead us on the path to flourishing.

How do hobbies help with your mental health?

A hobby can be any activity done regularly during spare or leisure time for pleasure. Whether you do something creative, athletic, academic, or something more individualized, what really matters is that it is something you find meaningful and enjoyable.

Some of the mental health benefits of hobbies include:

- Reduced Stress
- Enhanced well-being
- Improved social connection and decreases in depression and anxiety
- Improved overall mental and physical health

How can I make time for a hobby?

- Try thinking of time in weeks instead of days, look for an extra hour or two in your week to participate in a hobby
- Take a look at any time you spend mindlessly, can you turn that into time where you can indulge in something that you enjoy?
- Take a micro-break during the day to find something you enjoy-taking a short walk, listening to music or a podcast, coloring or painting, reading a book, or visiting with friends or family



Take action: Check out these videos from CredibleMind on more ways to find your Bliss:
[Happiness: It's An Inside Job](#)



Choose **Well**

Go to:
MyChooseWell.org
for all your mental
health resources

