

Hello from the Coventry Service Program!

Summer is a time filled with all the things that bring joy: friends, family, adventures, spending time outdoors, exercising, traveling, cooking, and the list goes on. For many of us, summer is a time to reconnect with others. With a broader perspective, it is important to find connections to others in all seasons on a regular basis. This e-newsletter is filled with information and ideas about how relationships can be nurtured and successful. Putting focus on connections can help us avoid loneliness and isolation. Efforts are definitely worth it.

Why is being connected important?

As a nation, we are experiencing loneliness at epidemic levels. Social isolation and loneliness can lead to a decrease in physical and mental health and diminished cognitive function. Loneliness is affecting people of all ages, and it is harmful to workplaces and organizations. One study concludes, “Left untended, loneliness can have serious consequences for mental and physical health”. Another reports, “The effect of social isolation on health appears to be of a similar magnitude to other risks to health, such as high blood pressure, smoking and obesity.” Yet another study found that the strengths of our social relationships could influence our risk for mortality. Those who are socially connected are happier, physically healthier and live longer. Clearly, work is needed to improve this situation as a society.



How can we become more connected?

Overwhelming evidence suggests consideration must be given to how isolated we are, as one aspect of our health. So, how can we be more connected? Here is a short list:

Volunteer: Inquire about needs at libraries, hospitals, animal shelters, and schools.

Find a Group: Join an exercise class, take a class at a lifelong learning program near you. Find start a men’s shed group. Have lunch at a community or senior center.

Use Social Media: Don’t surf the web passively. Participate in forums and be active in group discussions. Find an online support group. Video chat with friends and family using Facetime, or other programs.



or

Skype,

Reach Out to Others: Talk to a professional. Discuss with your primary care provider. Connect with your local Aging & Disability Resource Center (ADRC) for information about programs in your area. Talk to family.

Connect in Your Home: Contact your local ADRC to see if there are any friendly visitor programs in your area. Adopt a pet for some constant companionship.

If You Already Get Out and About: Think about how you can reach out to those around you. Learn more about what is happening in your community to combat social isolation and promote social health. Perhaps you could host or attend events designed to get strangers together.

To Take First Steps: This article from Mayo Clinic offers a great summary of information related to connecting with others. Take a look at this TED talk about the longest study on happiness and the role social connection plays in physical and mental wellness, or at this story about “chat benches” in England. Finally, AARP is an excellent resource.

How can Coventry Service Program help?

You can learn more about opportunities to get involved in your area. We offer information about programs local to you, and we offer an evaluation after a conversation with a wellness specialist. The results help our policyholders identify strengths and areas in which they'd like to make improvements. We occasionally receive feedback from policyholders. Below are comments we were pleased to hear:

From someone who recently completed an assessment; **"It was nice to have your encouragement in my continued efforts to walk or garden most days. And, when we talked about ways to be well, it was reassuring to hear that I'm already doing so many things."**

From someone who we spoke with about home safety: **"I'm glad you asked whether we have smoke detectors. We do, but have not checked the batteries in a long while. I'm going to have my son-in-law check for us."**

Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can support you in any way.

A few notes from us:

Taking a first step to get in touch with a friend or family when you've been feeling lonely can help to move towards having a healthy lifestyle. There are challenges to overcome but people in your family or professional circle can help. Give us a call! We can work together to find a suitable first step for you.

Note that feelings of loneliness or social isolation are similar to, and may overlap with, feelings of depression. Discuss symptoms with your primary care provider or other qualified clinician to define the difference. Check out this article about taking the initiative when reaching out for professional support.

To share with you:



Summer has come to Maine! Please share your seasonal photos of gardens, scenery, and warm weather activity with us. We could use them for sharing in our next newsletter!

Wishing you well, *Diane, Erin, Jacki, Jane, Linda, & Mary*

Resources for you:

We have found the following resources to be helpful in the development of this newsletter. Please click on the underlined link to access the webpage: Cigna, TED Talks, BMJ, NCBI & NIH, Forbes, Scientific American, Talkspace, Harvard Magazine, Harvard Medical School, N4A, Greater Good Magazine, Medium.com, AARP, Osher Foundation, Mental Health America, Psychology Today, The Guardian, & Mayo Clinic

Stay Connected. Share your summer adventures with us!

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You are encouraged to make use of these staff ideas to enhance your lifestyle; however, no content presented here should ever be used as a substitute for direct medical advice from your doctor or other qualified clinician.