



Mental Health Wellness Toolbox

FOR MINISTRY LEADERS

Hi Friend!

This document was quickly pulled together after I presented on an NFCYM webinar about trauma and our response as ministry leaders in April of 2023. One of the questions that came up at the end was "What do ministers do if the trauma of their young people triggers their own traumatic stress response?" It was a great question since most of us have experienced or are currently experiencing traumatic stress.

This is an excerpt from a personal wellness plan and mental health toolbox document I created a few years ago when presenting to college students about how to take care of their mental health wellness and I wanted to share it with you.

Use this as a tool to help you prepare for when things don't go the way you expect, for when you might be triggered during your ministry, for when you experience set backs, or when you are just in need of some additional reassurance. It's a place for you to list your coping skills, social supports, and personal reminders. There are also phone numbers for people you can contact in case you or someone is experiencing a crisis. You can also add your own!

This document can serve as a toolbox for what to do in case you or someone you care about are experiencing mental health crisis situations.

This document should not replace professional mental health care, such as seeing a counselor or a therapist. This should only serve as one resource for you when thinking about your mental health.

Reach out to a mental health professional if you are experiencing a mental health crisis and get immediate health.

Please know I'm praying for you as you reflect upon the best ways to care for your mental health!

St. Dymphna, patron saint of mental illness and anxiety, pray for us!

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Helping Teens

It's helpful to have a list of people you can refer a person in crisis to. You might have to do some homework, but it's helpful to see which mental health agencies or healthcare providers are in your area. Finding them now and storing them in an easy to find place will help you respond quickly if a crisis arises.

Some general suggestions for how to help someone with a mental health issue:

- Stop. Take a deep breath. Remember your own coping skills when helping others.
- Don't say, "Stop being sad," or "Just eat more." Instead, say, "how can I help?" or "I'm here with you."
- Use "I statements." Instead of saying, "You look skinny," or "you sure do cry a lot," say, "I really care about you. I've been noticing that you have been skipping meals a lot. I'm concerned. Is there something wrong?"
- If someone does say that there is something wrong:
 - Thank them for opening up and acknowledge that this might be hard for them to do.
 - Offer to do whatever you can to safely help the person.
- If they push you away:
 - Do not take it personally. Often feelings of anger, denial, guilt, or rejection are part of the mental health issue.
 - Do not engage in an argument with the other person.
 - Calmly state your concern again and that you are there for that person.
 - It's ok to drop the subject, and bring it up again a few days to a week later.
- **If your teen expresses that they are currently experiencing a crisis (suicidal or homicidal ideation, recent victim of sexual/physical assault, abuse, or neglect or exhibits extremely disorganized or bizarre thinking or perceptions) seek immediate help from a mental health and/or child protection professional:**
 - Call 911
 - Call 988: The National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline
 - Local Department of Child Services
 - Local mental health center or crisis center
 - Contact their parents or guardians (if safe to do so)
 - Inform your supervisor

If they say that they want to hurt themselves or others, get immediate help (call 911).

Other Reminders

- Make sure you are taking care of your own wellness while you are attempting to help another person. Talk to a trusted mentor, spiritual director, or supervisor. Seek counseling yourself. You can care for the other person and support their path to recovery without taking on their struggles.
- Once they accept help, continue to be there for them. They should be learning new ways to cope, manage stress and anxiety, and manage their own health. It may not be an easy road they will be walking on. You can continue to be there for them and letting them know they are not alone.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- 911
- National Suicide Lifeline: 988
- If you suspect child abuse or neglect, contact local child services at

- Refer to Diocesan safe environment plan for other reporting protocols
- Local Mental Health Center _____

- Other Emergency Numbers

Developing a Wellness Toolbox

What are some things that can help you as you start crafting your wellness toolbox?

In my experiences, these are things that support my wellness – these are things have worked for me:

This is what carries a sense of meaning or significance for me, what inspires me, and what reminds me of my values:

These are some things that I would like to try to see if they would support my wellness:

These are people I know I can turn to for support and who will help me maintain my wellness:

Setting up A Daily Maintenance Plan

Before we can talk about coping skills, we need to understand what it looks like when we feel well.

My Baseline—What am I like when I am well? When I feel well, I am...

This is what I need to do for myself every day to keep myself feeling as well as possible:

This is what I need to do less often to keep my overall wellness and sense of wellbeing.

These are the things that I know I need to do to sustain my wellness, but for some reason I do not do them.

Let's talk about Triggers

Triggers are things that happen to us that are likely to set off a chain reaction of uncomfortable or unhelpful behaviors, thoughts or feelings.

1) Recognition: What triggers me?

2) Action Plan. What can I do about these triggers?

Avoiding your triggers—What can I do to avoid or limit my exposure to things that trigger me?

Coping with triggers when they occur—What can I do when I am triggered to prevent things from getting worse?

Early Warning Signs

Early warning signs are the subtle signs of changes in our thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior, which indicate that you may need to take action to avoid a worsening of your thoughts, feelings, or behaviors.

1) Recognition: What changes for me? What are my early warning signs?

2) Action Plan.

What action can I take when I recognize the early warning signs?

Coping—What can I do when I am triggered or recognize an early warning sign to prevent things from getting worse?

When Things Start Breaking Down or Gets Worse

It's important to recognize when things aren't going well and your typical wellness plans break down. This will help you know when you need to seek immediate help.

1) Recognition: This is how I think, feel, and behave when the situation has become uncomfortable or serious:

2) Action Plan.

When I become upset, angry, anxious, or nervous, caring for myself is very important.

What can I do to reduce these difficult and unpleasant experiences? Who can I call for help? How can I prevent things from getting worse?

Ask for help and support

Seeking help does not make me weak. Rather, it means I am taking control of my wellness.