

THE VALUE OF SUPPORT GROUPS

In a house of cards, every card leans upon another and the house is able to stand. No card stands on its own. Together, they form a triangular construction that seems to deny the laws of physics. Each card supports the other and as a group the cards build upon each other to form a stronger structure.

The basic idea of a house of cards is the same basic idea of support groups. According to the Mayo Clinic, a support group is simply, “a gathering of people who share a common condition or interest.” Ideally, everyone in the support group helps everyone else stand on their own, much like the house of cards. It is, admittedly, not a perfect analogy... but it does capture the essence of support groups. Support groups can be a keystone of rehabilitation. They can be helpful to those who suffer from virtually any mental illness. Support groups can be extremely effective treatment options in our battle for good mental health and must be considered on the bag of tools utilized to attain and sustain mental health.

Despite their effectiveness, support groups are consistently underutilized. Perhaps this is due to common misconceptions. Support groups are not psychotherapy or group therapy sessions. Support groups generally don't hinge upon analysis or great emotional epiphanies as does traditional psychotherapy (talk therapy).

Instead, support groups bring a slightly different treatment approach to mental illness: the power of self-expression and empathy. Members typically share their thoughts and feelings with the rest of the group (self-expression). The rest of the group is generally able to empathize with other group members in a way that others outside the group could not. This empathy – the knowledge that we are not alone and that there are others who know an experience of some similar pain – can be extremely therapeutic.

Support groups are generally fairly informal and relaxed. They are usually the creation of a “lay” person – that is, a concerned person (usually a family member of a sufferer). They are a fairly “grassroots” approach to mental health. They may be led by a moderator, but, are often led by a peer. Support groups are generally far more open, communal, and democratic than therapy sessions.

Continued on Page 3...

POLL: 46% OF TWITTER RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEIR SCHOOL HAS NO EATING DISORDERS RESOURCES

On September 21, National Eating Disorders Awareness (NEDA) asked Twitter to respond to the question “Does your school have eating disorder resources?” After collecting responses from 405 people, the results showed that the schools of nearly half of these respondents (46%) had no resources in place. The rest of the results were as follows: 14% said “Yes,” 17% said “Very few,” and 23% said “Not sure.”

Unfortunately, the results seem to be consistent with mental health resources in schools nationally. According to 2010 data collected by the National Association of School Psychologists, there is a nationwide average of 1,300 students per one school psychologist. School counselors are faced with a similar dilemma as the average counselor in the country is responsible for 500 students, double what the American School Counselor Association recommends it should be.

The results of the Twitter poll and various studies demonstrate how difficult it can be for people struggling to reach out and seek treatment.

Luckily, NEDA is here to help. NEDA offers a variety of services such as an online screening tool, *Continued on Page 3...*

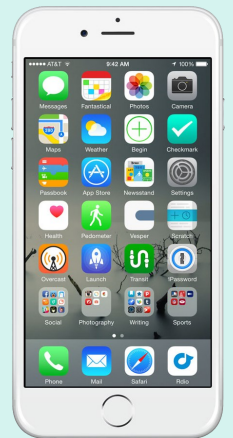


APP OF THE MONTH:

The Random App of Kindness (RAKi) to help increase empathic habits in teens using interactive games designed for smartphones. We used evidence-based approaches to *design and test* an engaging and interactive smartphone app with the purpose of teaching and reinforcing some basic building blocks of empathy in teens. The goal is that playing with RAKi will help young people develop skills for healthier and more positive social connections. Although this app was developed for young teens, it can be enjoyed by all.

iPhone: <https://apple.co/2DObfsk>

Android: <http://bit.ly/2FtZt2D>



THIS IS WHAT SELF-CARE REALLY MEANS, BECAUSE IT'S NOT ALL SALT BATHS AND CHOCOLATE CAKE

Self-care is often a very unbeautiful thing.

It is making a spreadsheet of your debt and enforcing a morning routine and cooking yourself healthy meals and no longer just running from your problems and calling the distraction a solution.

It is often doing the ugliest thing that you have to do, like sweat through another workout or tell a toxic friend you don't want to see them anymore or get a second job so you can have a savings account or figure out a way to accept yourself so that you're not constantly exhausted from trying to be *everything, all the time* and then needing to take deliberate, mandated breaks from living to do basic things like drop some oil into a bath and read Marie Claire and turn your phone off for the day.

A world in which self-care has to be such a trendy topic is a world that is sick. Self-care should not be something we resort to because we are so absolutely exhausted that we need some reprieve from our own relentless internal pressure. True self-care is not salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to build a life you don't need to regularly escape from. And that often takes doing the thing you least want to do.

It often means looking your failures and disappointments square in the eye and re-strategizing. It is not satiating your immediate desires. It is letting go. It is choosing new. It is disappointing some people. It is making sacrifices for others. It is living a way that other people won't, so maybe you can live in a way that other people can't.

National Eat Ice Cream for Breakfast Day is February 3rd. REALLY.



It is letting yourself be normal. Regular. Unexceptional. It is sometimes having a dirty kitchen and deciding your ultimate goal in life isn't going to be having abs and keeping up with your fake friends. It is deciding how much of your anxiety comes from not actualizing your latent potential, and how much comes from the way you were being trained to think before you even knew what was happening.

If you find yourself having to regularly indulge in consumer self-care, it's because you are disconnected from actual self-care, which has very little to do with "treating yourself" and a whole lot to do with

Continued on Page 4...



Mental Health Association
OF CORTLAND COUNTY

We are a volunteer Board of Directors that act to initiate and promote advocacy services, educational presentations, prevention programs, and information and resource referrals.

President:

Patricia Schaap

Vice President:

Kurt Warner

Treasurer:

Richard Bush

Secretary:

Amanda Joslin

Writer:

Kurt Warner

Board Members:

Martha Bush

Michael Pisa

Sue Marks

Kathy Taylor

Sue Lewis

Shari Weiss

To learn more about the
Cortland MHA visit:

<http://www.mhacortland.com>

or contact:

mhacortlandny@gmail.com



THE VALUE OF SUPPORT GROUPS

Continued from Page 1...

Once such a group is found, the benefits come. Mental illness is able to make us feel fiercely alone and support groups supply the human element that enables us to know we're not alone. Participants may gain tips as to how to do battle with inner demons. We may also find motivation in support groups. Still another benefit is the cultivation of hope. Support groups may serve as wellsprings for the cultivation of hope.

There are many more benefits to a support group. They can be an immense weapon in the arsenal against mental illness. Support groups can be a pivotal part of healing. If you believe in the power of human empathy and the benefit of human connection, they may work for you.

By Kurt Warner, MSW, Catholic Charities, Cortland County MHA Board of Directors

Sources:

Mayo Clinic: "Share Experiences about depression, other mental conditions"

WebMD: Support Groups and Social Support: Overview

HOW TO FIND A SUPPORT GROUP

Once you've decided that support groups can benefit you in attaining better mental health, you must find one. Locating support groups is generally a fairly easy task. Below are some of the ways to locate a support group for your condition. Shop around – visit several before landing on one. And remember, these groups are grass-roots formed and led – so if you can't find one, make one!

Ways to find a support group:

1. The Internet (often best bet – online and in person support groups listed... try google searching it). Forums, emails, chat rooms and message boards are information centers filled with details on support groups.
2. Asking others with the condition.
3. Asking your doctor or therapist
4. Asking libraries or community centers
5. Asking you local newspaper
6. Asking you local church
7. Asking your local (or national) mental health organization

ANDREA'S VOICE SILENCED BY BULIMIA

Presented by Tom and Doris Smeltzer

Wellness Wednesday

February 21st, 7:00 pm

Corey Union Function Room, SUNY Cortland

This emotionally impactful and inspirational talk contains the lessons learned about eating disorders through a daughter's tragic experience ending with a call to personal action via changed attitudes and behaviors. The Smeltzers' goal is to transform perspectives by promoting understanding without judgment and clarifying misconceptions. Through candid honesty, they reduce the stigma and shame felt by those affected by eating disordered behaviors. Ultimately their message is one of hope and possibilities.

For more information contact the SUNY Cortland Health Promotion office at 607.753.2066 or emailing lauren.herman@cortland.edu

POLL: 46% OF TWITTER RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEIR SCHOOL HAS NO EATING DISORDERS RESOURCES

Continued from Page 1...

a confidential helpline and online chat option for those who prefer to instant message with our trained volunteers. In addition to these services, educators can find information about eating disorders as well as ways to support young people in our Educator Toolkit.

If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, utilize the resources mentioned above and remember that you are not alone! For more information visit: www.nationaleatingdisorders.org





THIS IS WHAT SELF-CARE REALLY MEANS, BECAUSE IT'S NOT ALL SALT BATHS AND CHOCOLATE CAKE

Continued from Page 1...

parenting yourself and making choices for your long-term wellness.

It is no longer using your hectic and unreasonable life as justification for self-sabotage in the form of liquor and procrastination. It is learning how to stop trying to “fix yourself” and start trying to take care of yourself... and maybe finding that taking care lovingly attends to a lot of the problems you were trying to fix in the first place.

It means being the hero of your life, not the victim. It means rewiring what you have until your everyday life isn't something you need therapy to recover from. It is no longer choosing a life that looks good over a life that feels good. It is giving the hell up on some goals so you can care about others. It is being honest even if that means you aren't universally liked. It is meeting your own needs so you aren't anxious and dependent on other people.

It is becoming the person you know you want and are meant to be. Someone who knows that salt baths and chocolate cake are ways to enjoy life – not escape from it.

By Breanna Wiest

From: Thoughtcatalog.com



COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SUPPORT

Food For Thought:

*Wednesday, February 14th from Noon—1:00pm
Cortland Elks Club, 9 Groton Ave.*

We will be watching the video “Chasing The Dragon” and seeking community feedback of who this video can best be presented to in the future. Free lunch provided. Please Preregister at:

FoodforThoughtRSVP@gmail.com

607 Healing Hearts

*Monday, February 26th; 6:00 - 8:00pm
28 N. Main St., Cortland, NY*

Grief support group for parents/guardians who have lost a child due to an overdose.

For more information: 607healinghearts@gmail.com

Cortland LGBT Men's Group (Monthly)

- Where: Cortland LGBT Resource Center, 73 Main St.
- Contact: (607) 756-8970

Parents & Change Support Group

Feb 12 March 12 April 9 May 14

(Monthly/2nd Monday)

- When: 6:00 to 7:30 PM
- Where: Community Center, 90 Central Avenue
- Contact: Beckey Tripp (parentsandchange@yahoo.com)

If you have an upcoming community event or article you would like considered for inclusion in the MHA Newsletter, send your submission to susan@sevenvalleyshealth.org by the 14th of the month prior, Or subscribe to the newsletter via email.

Disclaimer: The information presented here does not constitute professional medical advice. Individuals respond to treatment for mental health conditions in different ways, and treatment plans often need adjustment over time. Patients should work closely with their doctor and other health professionals in order to achieve optimal control of symptoms.