

Building Connections for Mental Health

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The World Health Organization defines mental health as, “a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to contribute to his or her community” (Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response, 2018). With World Mental Health Day being this month, it is important to recognize how we can all promote mental health in our own communities.

Mental Health promotion doesn't always have to be grand gestures. In a TED talk, Drew Dudley shared a story of what he called a “lollipop moment.” He discusses a story of young girl who was terrified of starting her university career. She was standing in a line, waiting for registration and made the decision to quit because she was so afraid. He was recruiting volunteers for an organization by handing out lollipops and he ended up giving one to the girl who was afraid and made a joke. To this day, she still remembers the way she felt and how in that moment she decided to stay in school (Dudley, 2012). In another story, Kevin Hines discusses his suicide attempt. For years, Kevin struggled with bipolar disorder and one day he decided to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge. As Kevin says in his story, “on the way there I was looking for one person, someone who would notice me” (Angeles, 2017). These two stories showcase that even a small act of making a connection with another person, can make a big difference.

Illustrating the importance of connecting with others, research shared by Psychology Today says that social connection improves all aspects of health, including mental health (Seppala, 2020). This shows that even the small act of reaching out and building or improving social connections can make a big difference in health, especially mental health. If you aren't sure where to start, here are some simple ways you can build social connections to help promote mental health:

1. Send a text to a friend you haven't seen recently and let them know you care.
2. Share positive mental health messages on social media.
3. Make a habit of saying thank you.
4. Make cookies for a neighbor and spend some time visiting with them when you drop them off.
5. Take a mental health literacy course and learn to recognize signs and symptoms and where to get help.
6. Smile at everyone you see for an entire day.
7. Send thank you notes to people in your life who have impacted you for the better.
8. Try not to say anything negative for an entire day.
9. Call up a family member you haven't spoken to for a while and chat about their life.
10. Be open about your own mental health and be honest the next time someone asks how you are.

Social connection is something we all need, and it comes as a great benefit not only to ourselves, but to others as well. No matter the No matter how you choose to build social connections, remember that you can make a difference by doing something small and simple.

References

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