

May Is Mental Health Month

Since 1949, Mental Health America and affiliates across the country have led the observance of May as Mental Health Month. That message is that mental health is something everyone should care about. In Extension, there is a heightened concern about the economy, family and especially the agriculture issues. Extension does have many web based resources that can be helpful to those looking for assistance or to help to those wanting to offer assistance. Our website of <https://www.atchison.k-state.edu/> under the ag news tab will take you to some farm stress resources.

While 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. In 2020, the theme of Tools 2 Thrive will provide practical tools that everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase resiliency regardless of the situations they are dealing with. These tools – even those that may need to be adapted for the short term because of COVID-19 and social distancing – will be more useful than ever.

One method to help cope with mental stress is finding the positive after loss. At some point in our lives we will all experience loss. It may be the end of a relationship, being let go from a job, losing a home or business, or the death of a loved one. It is natural to go through a grieving process. By looking for opportunity in adversity or finding ways to remember the good things about who or what we've lost, we can help ourselves to recover mentally and emotionally.

-You are not alone! Nearly 60% of people have experienced a major loss in the last 3 years.

-Healing takes time. Following a loss, nearly half of people said it took up to 6 months for their strong feelings of grief to lessen.

-You might literally hurt. Over 2/3 of people who went through a life-changing event had physical symptoms while they were grieving

The following are some “Tips For Getting By” as we deal with loss and emotional stress.

***Try to see your experience as strength.* When bad things happen they can be painful to go through, but as you continue to live your life without the person, thing, or situation you once had, you become a stronger person. Going through a loss and learning to carry on helps give you the skills to deal with tough situations in the future.**

***Learn from others.* You are not alone! There may be support groups in your**

community to help you get through whatever loss or tragedy you've gone through. If you're not ready to talk about things face-to-face or can't find the right kind of support group, the internet is full of places where people gather online to talk about their shared experiences. Ask questions about how other people got through tough times to remind yourself that if they can do it, you can do it too.

Look for opportunity amid adversity. Sometimes loss opens us up to new possibilities. You may feel guilty or selfish at first for exploring these thoughts, but there is nothing wrong with looking for ways to improve or change your life after something tragic has happened. The end of a romantic relationship or death of someone that you had been caring for may free you up to spend more time with friends or pursue interests that you've been putting on the back burner. If you've lost your home or business to disaster, you might consider relocating to that place you've always dreamed of living.

Remember the good times. When you've lost something you love, it is almost automatic to focus on the pain that you are feeling about your loss. By remembering the good times you had in a certain place, with a pet, or with a person, you're practicing gratitude for having had those experiences. It can be even more helpful to have someone else who is sharing your loss join you in reminiscing. Maybe you'll even be able to share a laugh together.

Do what makes you happy. Pampering yourself can help you remember how to feel good after dealing with a negative or tragic situation, and bring you back to a place where you can appreciate all the positive things that life has to offer. You might choose to do something exciting or something relaxing-it's all about doing whatever you love.

Don't be afraid to get help. It's perfectly normal to have trouble adjusting to life after something bad has happened to you, but if you find it's been weeks or months and you can't seem to function or just don't know what to do to feel better, it's time to get help. Your employer may have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), you can get a referral for a mental health professional from your primary care provider, or if you don't have insurance you can look for services with payment assistance at findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

Kansas Department of Agriculture recently developed a website of KansasAgStress.org which has helpful references. We all need to be alert to friends and neighbors and to be there during these stressful times.