

# Living Our Best Life: Now and Beyond COVID

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Share your ideas in the chat

What have you done to cope during COVID-19 that you have found helpful?

Presenter:

**Cathleen Pessolano, M.A.**

**MHAF Executive Director**

# At the end of the training, you will:

**KNOW:** Effects of stress on the mind and body, the truth about mental health, and how to increase resiliency

**BE:** aware of self-care strategies and feel connected with your community

**PRACTICE:** positive coping skills

# Mental Health America of Fredericksburg

- 1955 Founding
- 1956 Created Mental Hygiene Clinic (RACSB)
- 1968 Created Opportunities Unlimited (Goodwill)
- 1971 Hotline services began
- 2000 Senior Visitors Program began
- 2007 Walk for Mental Wellness began
- 2010 Adult support grounds began
- 2014 Suicide Prevention Education Program began
- 2015 Live Life Love Teen Support Group began
- 2017 Yoga in the Park began
- 2018 Healing Grove established



Our Mission:

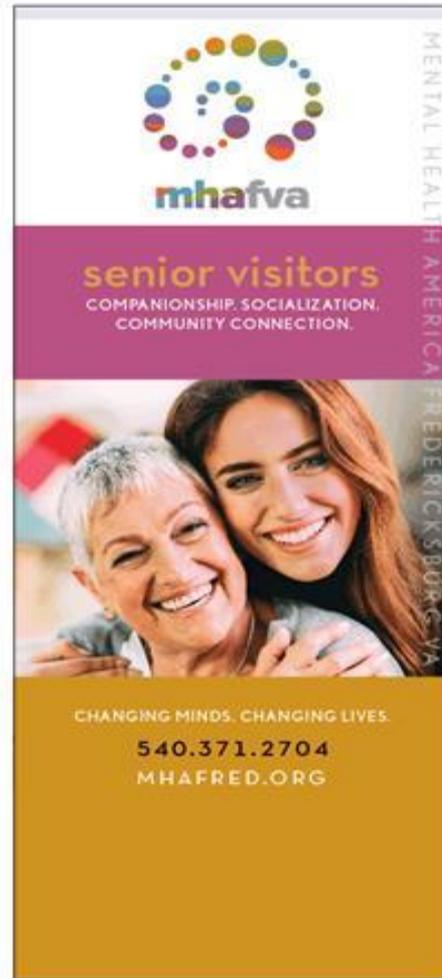
**Mental Health America of Fredericksburg improves individuals' mental health and wellness through *education, advocacy, and supportive services.***

## Our Vision:

**MHAF envisions a just, humane society in which all individuals are accorded respect, dignity, and the opportunity to achieve their full potential, free of stigma and prejudice.**

# MHAF Programs

- Senior Visitors
- Suicide Prevention
- Helpline
- Support Groups



# How does stress affect the mind and the body?



# Stress

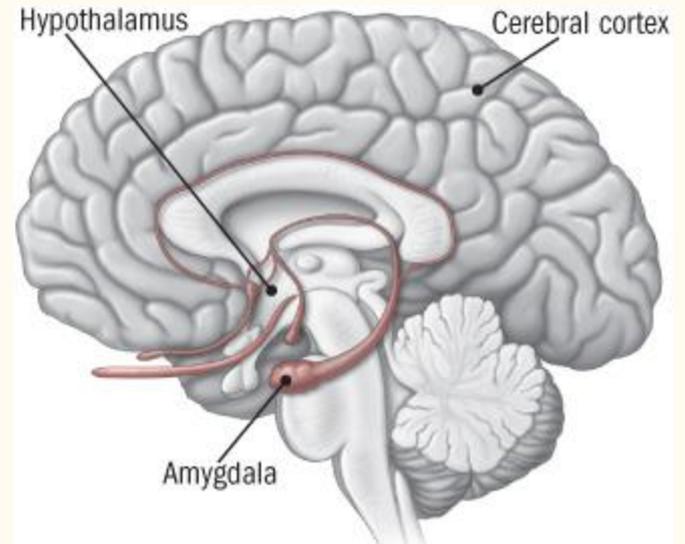


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The body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes physically, mentally, and emotionally.

# Physical Response

- Begins in the brain
- Adrenal Glands produce adrenaline and cortisol
- Dilation of Bronchioles
- Increased Heart Rate/Blood Pressure
- Liver converts glycogen to glucose
- Decreased Digestive system activity



# Mental Response

- Increased alertness and vigilance to the stressor
- Inability to focus on other tasks
- Increased mental fatigue
- Difficulty in problem solving or managing complex issues
- Difficulty in making decisions





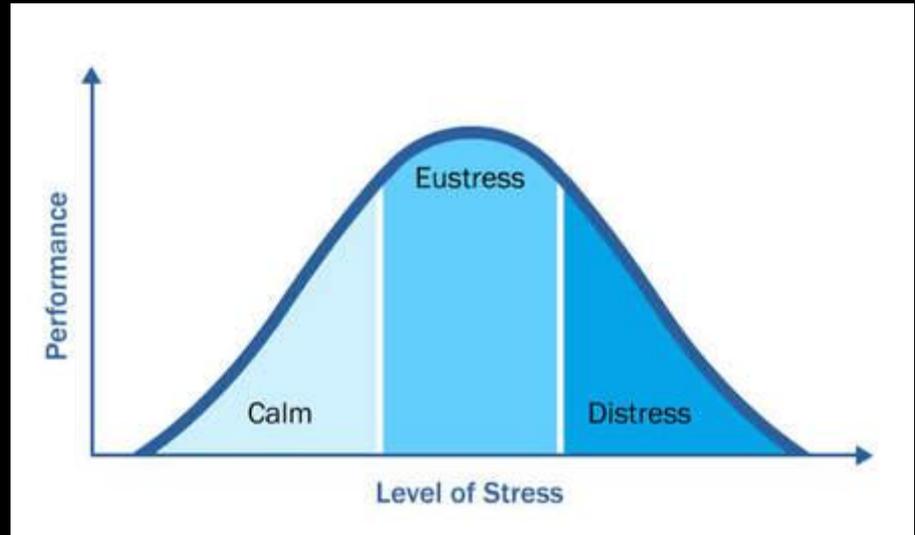
Is stress always  
negative?



# Eustress

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Positive stress



# Eustress

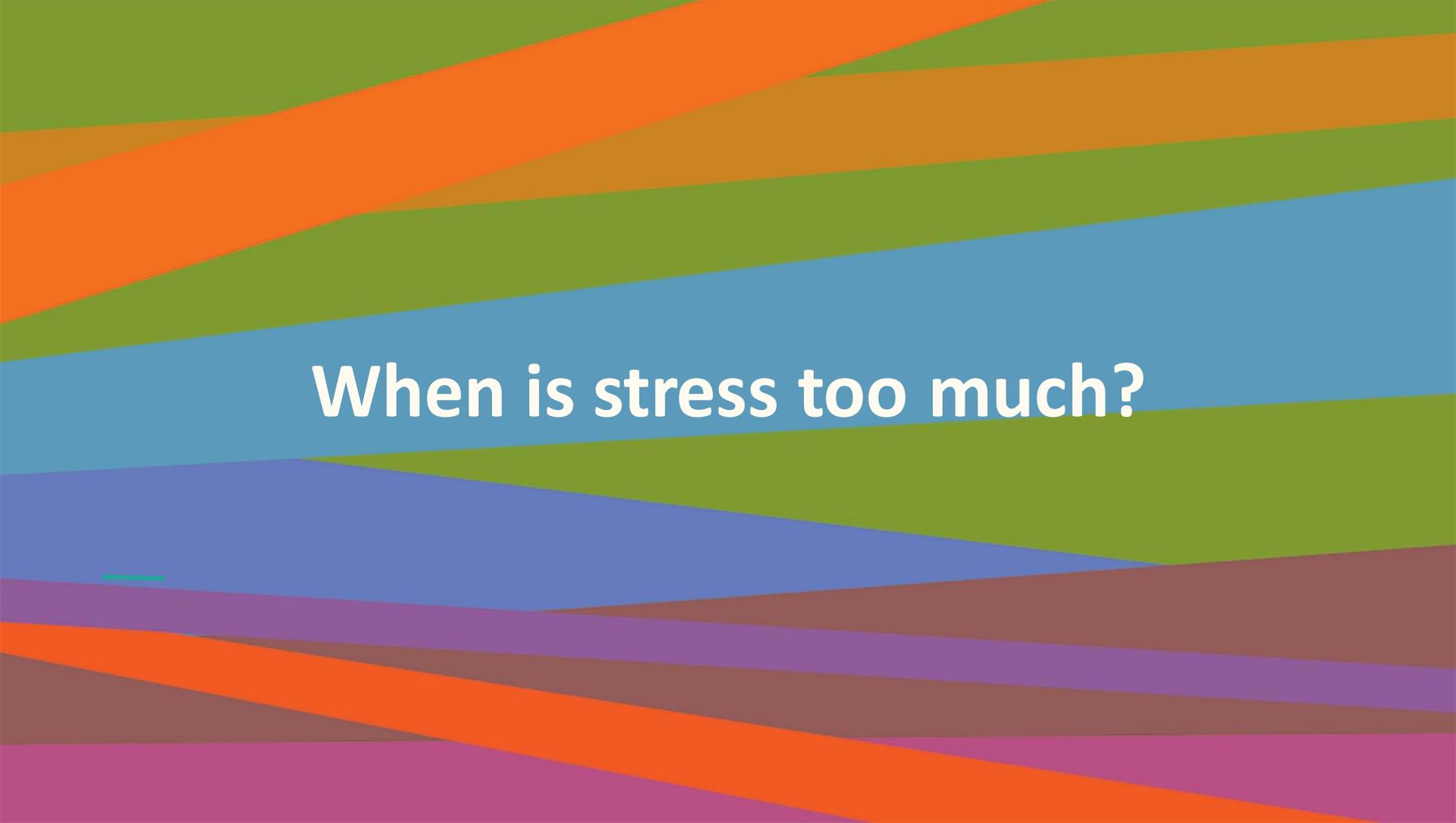
- Motivates, focuses energy
- Short-term effect
- Perceived as within our coping abilities
- Feels exciting
- Improves performance



# Fight or Flight Response

- The body enters survival mode
- Provides body with the energy needed
- Triggered by release of hormones
- Physical or Psychological attack
- Both real and imaginary threats
- Happens automatically
- Meant to be short-term





**When is stress too much?**

High intensity

Extended time period

Seriously affects your daily life

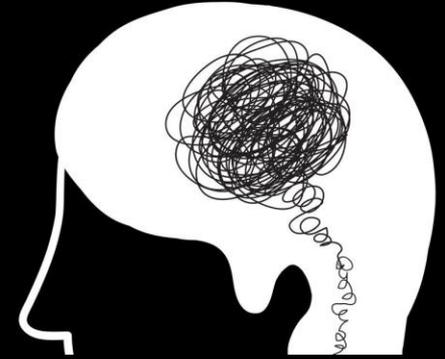
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Getting help is suggested



# What is mental health?

# Mental health is...



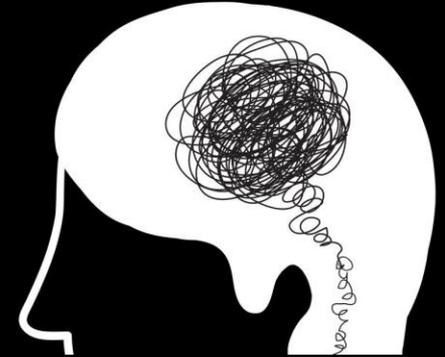
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a person's condition regarding their psychological and emotional well-being.



# What is mental illness?

# Mental illness is...



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Condition which impairs normal psychological functioning which causes distress and impaired thinking.

# What is resiliency?



# Resiliency is...



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the process of finding healthy ways to adapt and cope with adversity and distress.

# High Resilience

- Community connections & family support
  - Exercise
  - Healthy Diet
  - Hobbies/other enjoyments
  - Helping others
  - Humor
  - Practice positivity
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# Community Connections

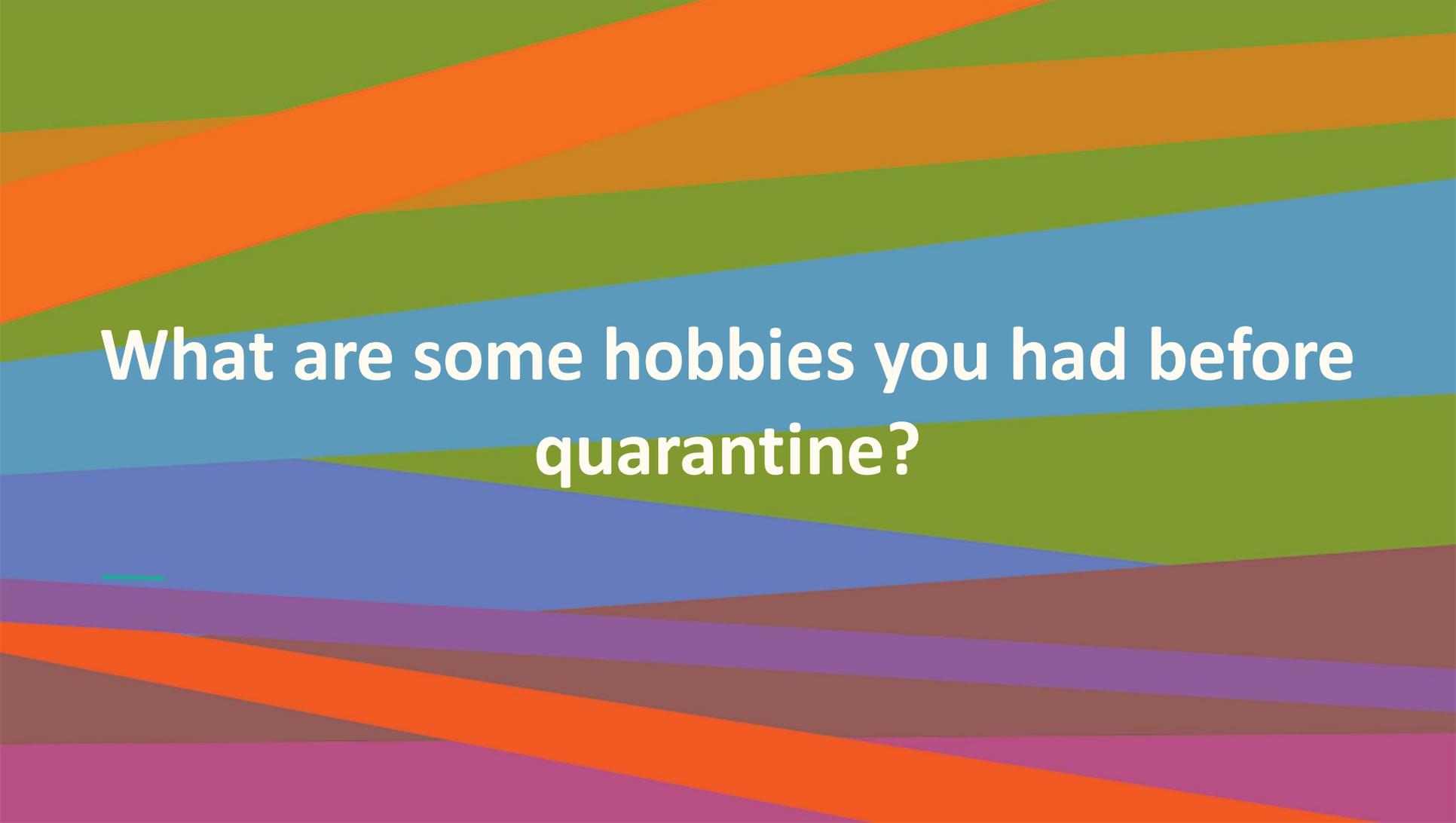
- Maintain social networks even though it may look different (Zoom, phone calls, emails, Facebook)
- Check in with others
- Socially distanced gatherings with friends/family
- Don't pause your networking, but proceed with care

# Exercise

- Can be beneficial in promoting better sleep habits/patterns
- Body movement (dancing, walking, yoga) acts as an innovative method to address loneliness
- Contributes to sharper memory and thinking
- Boosts the immune system
- Reduces the impact of stress
- Helps one cope in a healthy way: **stronger resilience**

# Healthy Diet

- Nutrition is essential for building, maintaining, fueling, and repairing every cell in the human body and brain
- Eating fruits and vegetables daily
- Learn a new recipe to mimic a restaurant favorite
- Reduce alcohol and caffeine consumption
- News diet
  - Staying informed but not devoting to 24-hour news channels
  - Check the news once in the morning and once in the evening
  - If on social media, unfollow news sites to lessen anxiety



**What are some hobbies you had before quarantine?**

# Things we enjoy doing

- Hobbies, Sports, Musical expression, art
- Be creative
- When we do something we enjoy, our body releases endorphins
- Learning something allows us to grow and develop
- Provide a sense of mastery

# Be There for Others

- Seek out and offer empathetic and compassionate support to friends/family
- Promotes understanding and coping for people giving and receiving support
- Prioritize relationships
  - Connecting with with others remind you that you're not alone in the midst of difficulties
- Maintain a hopeful outlook



# Humor

- Laughing can reduce feelings of stress and can elevate your mood
  - Found something funny on Facebook? Giggled at a commercial? Pass it along to your friends!
- Laughing boosts the immune system and relieves stress
- Promotes group bonding and strengthens relationships

*Laughter  
is the  
BEST  
medicine.*

# Practice Positivity

- Certain mindsets can help **build resilience**: gratitude, serenity, interest, love
- Allows for better coping skills during hardships and times of stress
- Keep a gratitude journal
  - What gives you a sense of hope? What are you grateful for?



# Self Care

- Emotional: listen to music that soothes you, re-establish a routine
- Spiritual: use religious and/or spiritual resources and communities, practice gratitude, find creative ways to express yourself (drawing, painting, writing)
- Remember to: identify what you can and cannot change, allow others to give to you, find a reason to laugh or smile everyday
- Continue to engage in your own coping strategies

# Breathing

- a necessity of life that occurs without much thought
- blood cells receive oxygen and release carbon dioxide
- Improper breathing can: increase anxiety and panic, cause fatigue, and other physical and emotional disturbances.

# Breathing Exercises to De-stress

- \* **Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose.** Keep your shoulders relaxed. Your abdomen should expand, and your chest should rise very little.
- \* **Exhale slowly through your mouth.** As you blow air out, purse your lips slightly, but keep your jaw relaxed. You may hear a soft “whooshing” sound as you exhale.



Questions?

# What is posttraumatic growth?



# Posttraumatic growth is...

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the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of struggles concerning challenging life crises.



# Growing Beyond Resilience

- Posttraumatic growth can manifest itself in many ways
  - Increased appreciation for life
  - Strengthened relationships
  - Boosted sense of personal strength
  - Improved priorities
  - Deepened spiritual life
  - A new career path
- Our condition may be chronic, but “still we rise.”



# Seeking Treatment

Treatment can take on many shapes and sizes; there is no one size fits all treatment approach. Each person has their own unique story, and therefore each person will have an unique treatment plan.

No matter what path brings you to the decision to seek treatment, you can find links to local providers on our [mhafred.org](http://mhafred.org) website. You can also contact the HelpLine at 540-371-2704 to have one of our staff members help you find a provider that meets your unique needs.

HelpLine 540-371-2704

MHAF assists those struggling with a mental health crisis in navigating the healthcare system and identifying appropriate resources and services.



# Mental Health Services Available

## Online/Offline(Cont'd)

- Mental Health America of Virginia Warm Line
  - Call 886-400-MHAV (6428)
  - Friendly, compassionate, non-judgmental peer-run support service for individuals residing in Virginia who just need to talk or need a referral to mental health resources.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness Rappahannock (540) 847-6974
- Mental Health Emergency
  - Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, Stafford counties (540) 373-6876
  - Caroline County (804) 633-4148
  - King George County (540) 775-5064
  - Snowden at Mary Washington Hospital (800) 362-5005
  - Suicide Lifeline (800) 273-TALK (8255)

# Mental Health Services Available Online/Offline

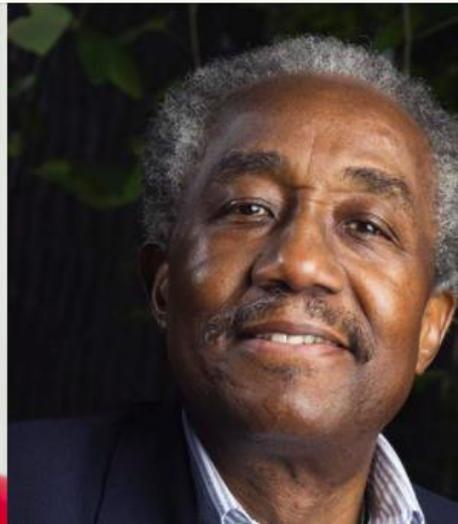
- Mental Health America HelpLine 540-371-2704, Provider Directory at mhafred.org
- Crisis text line (741-741 Text SHARE)
  - Can be used for other things than a crisis (anxious, depressed, scared)
- Senior visitors
  - Call: (540) 371-2704
  - Email: mhafred.org
- <http://www.mhafred.org/helpline/>
- Samaritans Helpline offers
  - Call (877) 870-4673 , text or online access
- Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center
  - Call their 24/7 Behavioral Health Access Line at (540) 498-4344
- Rappahannock Area Services Board at (540) 373-6876



# Senior Visitors Program



MHAF matches trained volunteers with lonely, isolated seniors at high risk for depression to offer companionship and community engagement.



# Suicide Prevention Education Program

MHAF teaches youth and adults about the warning signs for depression and suicide and how to get help.



# Support Groups

- Live Life Love Life
- Mental Wellness
- Survivors of Suicide Loss

“Alone, we can do so little;  
together, we can do so  
much.”

Helen Keller



Questions?

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