

May 2021: Self Care/Wellness

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I believe that each and every one of us is on a continuum of wellness. There are so many factors that impact our overall wellness: our life experiences, our genetics, our finances, the amount and quality of the sleep that we get, the foods we eat, our jobs, school, our relationships, our values and beliefs, the stories we see on the news, the stories we tell ourselves, our emotions, our thoughts, our sense of purpose, our level of hopefulness, and the pandemic. I believe that many individuals that have never previously faced mental health concerns are now facing mental health concerns and addiction as a result of the pandemic.

In my work with students, I teach them about the 8 dimensions of wellness and we create a wellness puzzle. The wellness puzzle is an individualized tool that I use to help students understand all of the pieces that contribute to their overall wellness, and how the puzzle pieces impact each other. Often, when a person is facing a mental health diagnosis they begin to think that the diagnosis defines them. I work with them on understanding that their diagnosis is a piece of the puzzle, something that they face, and sometimes have to battle, but it does not define them.

In my work as a therapist, I often see people avoiding getting the help they need because of the stigma around mental health. If a person develops physical symptoms, they often reach out to a doctor to determine next steps and ask for help to take care of themselves. Why is it when a person develops mental health symptoms that a person often hides their symptoms or does not reach out for help or support until it develops into a crisis? When we ignore the warning signs or we try to hide any concern it will only get worse.

Mental health, addiction, and recovery are very personal to me. I have a family member that died by suicide, a family member in recovery, and I have personally struggled with anxiety throughout my life. Anxiety was the thing in my life that I did not want. It got in the way of a lot of things for me throughout my life. I could have easily gone down the path of addiction due to my symptoms of anxiety. I saw my symptoms of anxiety as a character flaw, and did not understand that it was anxiety. I tried to hide it. After years of fighting it, I now know that it is actually my superpower. My personal experience with anxiety helps me to understand and empathize with others when they are facing mental health symptoms. My own experience with anxiety allows me to help others find the ways that the thing that they struggle with the most can be used for good. My experience of wanting to hide my anxiety has taught me the importance of talking about our mental health, telling our stories, and educating kids from the time they are very small. I know that I am not alone. We need to help others know that they are not alone, and openly talk with our kids about mental health and addiction.

It is time to think of our own mental health on a continuum. We have to stop thinking that mental health, trauma, and addiction are things that happen to other people. We have to acknowledge that mental illness, trauma, and addiction are things that happen to us, our friends, our families, and our community. There is so much we can do once we take that step.