

# Mental Wellness Toolkit:

Helping Faith Leaders Bring Hope  
and Healing to Our Communities



**Connections**  
*for mental wellness*

# Mental Wellness Toolkit:

## Helping Faith Leaders Bring Hope and Healing to Our Communities<sup>1</sup>

Connections for Mental Wellness is a community-wide collective impact initiative that brings together and facilitates diverse groups of stakeholders (i.e., nonprofits, government, education organizations, employers, health systems, etc.) to help address community needs and issues related to mental health and mental healthcare. We focus on issues that cannot be solved by one organization alone. With the core values of innovation, collaboration, compassion, inclusion, and equity, Connections envisions a community that values and embraces the need for mentally healthy children, adults, and families.

We know that faith communities have a unique ability to impact the lives of community members but may not be aware of the tools and resources that they can draw upon. With this in mind, there are some ways to partner with mental health providers and services to build a bridge of hope and healing within your faith community and support the mental health of your members.

### Categories of Action Include:

#### Open Your Doors

Host or offer space to recovery programs and support groups.

#### Increase Awareness

Provide educational opportunities that create understanding and encourage compassion.

#### Build Community Capacity

Offer training programs to build the capacity of communities to repond.

#### Rebuild & Restore

Support individuals and families in rebuilding their lives.

#### Get Ahead of the Problem

Focus efforts on youth and prevention.

#### Connect & Collaborate

Join local prevention coalitions to inform, connect, and strengthen your efforts.

Some churches have identified a layperson who can be the champion for a mental health ministry. This toolkit can give that person alternatives to begin this ministry. We strongly encourage the champion, and perhaps others from their church, to attend Adult Mental Health First Aid. For more information on Adult Mental Health First Aid, contact Rebecca Fairman by emailing [Rebecca@connectionsmdw.org](mailto:Rebecca@connectionsmdw.org) or calling 920-562-9691.

NOTE: During 2020, most in-person meetings were cancelled because of the coronavirus pandemic, and many support programs went to an online format. The actions we list include many that occur in person, which may not be possible. These may serve as inspiration for other actions a faith community might take. We are looking forward to a time when we can safely meet in person.



## How to Use This Toolkit:

Different faith communities will approach their mental health ministry in different ways. Some will find a mental health advocate within their community who will take the lead in coordinating offerings. Others may have a member of the pastoral staff who has a special interest and takes it on as part of their ministry. Still, others may form a committee comprised of members of their community to develop a plan and sponsor activities. They may use a combination of these approaches, or some other approach not listed.

Regardless of the model used, this toolkit can be a source of inspiration for developing or enhancing a mental health ministry. For each category of action, the advocate or committee can reflect on these discussion questions to help determine next steps:

1. Overall, what do we think of this strategy? Is it a good fit for us? Are parts of it a better fit than others?
2. What have we already done? Are there ways we can build on this or improve it?
3. What would we like to explore doing? If there are several things we'd like to try, how do we want to identify the thing to try first?
4. What are our immediate next steps?

It may be helpful to keep track of the answers to these questions to track progress, to enable you to refer back to how decisions were made, or to assist other faith communities in developing their own mental health ministry.



# Open Your Doors:

## Host or Offer Space to Recovery Programs and Support Groups

Finding a supportive community and building strong relationships are essential to ongoing recovery. The process of recovery is supported through relationships and social networks.

### How to Open Your Doors to Recovery Programs and Support Groups:

- Offer your space for weekly recovery programs and/or self-help support groups.
- Post your support group schedule on your community's boards and publications, such as United Way's Community Connections, [www.MyConnectionNEW.org](http://www.MyConnectionNEW.org) community calendar, and in the church vestibule.
- Offer rides to people in need of free transportation to treatment services and/or recovery support programs.
- Add a link to the [www.MyConnectionNEW.org](http://www.MyConnectionNEW.org) website on your website and post it on your social media channels.
- Be open to requests from members of your congregation for space to hold groups or to facilitate short- or long-term groups; observe themes of those seeking your counsel for possible topics for short-term trainings or support groups.
- When offering public or congregational prayer, particularly prayers for the sick, pray for people who are dealing with emotional distress, mental health illness, and/or addiction problems.
- Offer sermons about recognizing and caring for those living with mental illness.



### Communities Can Offer to Host Programs Such as:

- Adult and/or Youth Mental Health First Aid Training
- QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Training for Suicide Prevention
- Signs of Suicide (SOS) Training
- [www.MyConnectionNEW.org](http://www.MyConnectionNEW.org) Website Orientation Training
- Journey to Wholeness ([www.j2wholeness.org](http://www.j2wholeness.org))
- Fresh Hope for Mental Health ([www.freshhope.us](http://www.freshhope.us))
- Mental Health Grace Alliance ([mentalhealthgracealliance.org](http://mentalhealthgracealliance.org))
- Reboot Recovery ([rebootrecovery.com](http://rebootrecovery.com))

### Self-Help Groups Who May Need Additional Locations:

- The Gathering Place
- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)
- Grief Share or Divorce Care (currently offered by several area congregations)
- Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC): one-day trainings, support groups, screenings, caregiver support
- Alcoholics Anonymous or other 12-step recovery programs

# Increase Awareness:

## Provide Educational Opportunities That Create Understanding and Encourage Compassion

As a pastor in West Virginia noted, “Churches are not neutral bystanders: What they don’t say is just as important as what they do say.” Faith community members need to understand addiction and mental illness in order to create a culture of acceptance and support. Once these are seen and understood as treatable, medical conditions and not personal failings, stigma and shame can be replaced with compassion and hope.<sup>2</sup>

### How to Increase Awareness in Your Faith Community:

Your faith community can partner with your local public health office, hospitals, community health centers, or non-profit organizations to host educational events on:

- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)/Trauma-Informed Approaches:** Learn how early stressful or traumatic events in childhood increase the risk of poor physical and mental health into adulthood.
- **Safe Drug Disposal:** More than half of those who abused prescription painkillers obtained them from friends or family. Promote safe drug disposal sites and consider sponsoring a safe drug disposal event for your congregation to reduce the likelihood that prescription drugs will get into the wrong hands.
- **Good Samaritan Laws, Social Host Laws, and Community Policing:** Invite local law enforcement to talk about the laws in your state that may protect people providing and calling for help, consequences for hosting underage parties, and learn about mental health issues in your community.
- **What is an EAP and How To Use It:** Invite a local HR or EAP provider to describe what an Employee Assistance Program is, how to find out if your employer offers one, how privacy is protected, and the benefits of EAPs.
- **Presentations on Common Mental Health Issues:** Contact Rebecca Fairman (email [Rebecca@connectionsmd.org](mailto:Rebecca@connectionsmd.org) or call 920-562-9691) to schedule a speaker to discuss common mental health issues, such as:
  - Recognizing and dealing with depression
  - Post-partum depression
  - Parenting teens
  - Getting along with difficult family members
  - Recognizing and preventing bullying
  - Seasonal affective disorder
  - Stress reduction tools
  - Finding work/life balance
  - Money management
- **Offer Sermons** that recognize and encourage compassion for those dealing with common emotional struggles or addiction issues, such as depression. Review the liturgical calendar for opportunities to inspire compassion and instill hope for those dealing with mental health issues. Use bible stories as inspiration for those dealing with family or personal struggles. Remember the power of personal stories – sharing your own personal story can be an impactful and meaningful way to reduce stigma in your faith community.



<sup>2</sup>From US Department of Health and Human Services Opioid Epidemic Practical Toolkit. Edited to include language about mental health. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/agencies/iea/partnerships/opioid-toolkit/increase-awareness/index.html>



## Build Community Capacity:

Offer Training Programs to Build the Capacity of Communities to Respond

You can save lives by referring people to proper treatment and helping navigate systems of care. Leaders in faith community organizations can be trained to make referrals to treatment, respond in an emergency, and provide ongoing support groups for those who are recovering from substance abuse or living with mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

### Build Community Capacity: Trainings

Your community can partner with outside organizations to develop capacity building trainings. Trainings can be sponsored by a single congregation, open to other congregations, or co-sponsored by more than one congregation.<sup>1</sup>

#### These may be most appropriate for clergy and pastor care associates:

- **Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT):** is an evidence-based practice used to identify, reduce, and prevent problematic use, abuse, and dependence on alcohol and illicit drugs. It was incited by an Institute of Medicine recommendation that called for community-based screening for health risk behaviors, including substance abuse.
- **Trauma-Informed Care Training:** Train and educate the principles of trauma-informed care and the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma on both children and adults.



## These could be appropriate for members of the congregation:

- **Adult Mental Health First Aid:** Teaches adults how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. This training provides adults with the skills they need to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be developing or experiencing a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care.
- **Youth Mental Health First Aid:** Provides adults with key skills and training to be able to help youth who may be developing a mental health issue or experiencing a mental health crisis.
- **www.MyConnectionNEW.org Website Orientation Training:** Presentation on the resources available for helping people with mental health issues and how to access them. This website lists Mental Health and AODA services in Brown, Outagamie, Calumet, and Winnebago Counties. In addition, the “Library” section includes reference articles on medication, medical tests, and health conditions, as well as high-level screenings to assess mental health symptoms.
- **QPR Training for Suicide Prevention:** QPR stands for Question, Persuade and Refer: three simple steps that anyone can learn to help save a life from suicide. Just as people trained in CPR help save thousands of lives each year, people trained in QPR learn to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade, and refer someone to help.
- **Trauma-Informed Parenting Training:** Train biological, adoptive, and foster parents about childhood trauma and how to recognize and respond to trauma triggers to maximize child safety, stability, and well-being. The training helps to ensure that caregivers utilize the same language and view child behaviors through a trauma lens to more effectively meet the needs of the child.
- **Signs of Suicide (SOS) Training:** Prepares a youth service provider to educate their students using the SOS Program and engage trusted adults in their efforts. It walks participants through the program materials and planning process to make sure groups are ready to implement an evidence-based suicide prevention program.



A photograph of a man with a beard and a young man sitting outdoors, engaged in a conversation. The man is wearing a light blue button-down shirt, and the young man is wearing a light blue polo shirt. They are both looking towards each other. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

# Rebuild & Restore:

Support Individuals and Families in Rebuilding Their Lives

## **SAMHSA<sup>3</sup> Identified Four Major Dimensions That Support a Life in Recovery as:**

1. **Health:** Overcoming or managing one's disease or symptoms.
2. **Home:** Having a stable and safe place to live.
3. **Purpose:** Conducting meaningful daily activities (job, family caretaking, and resources to participate in society, etc.).
4. **Community:** Having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.

## **Ways Your Community Can Help Those Recovering or Dealing With Emotional Issues:**

- Provide help with employment readiness, housing, transportation, food, clothing, or child care.
- Provide transportation to medical or therapy appointments, or provide childcare while people attend appointments.
- Promote the [www.MyConnectionNEW.org](http://www.MyConnectionNEW.org) website that outlines available mental health and AODA resources.
- Coach families on financial management.
- Provide meals for new parents or those who may be overwhelmed with caretaking or emotional distress.
- Organize volunteer efforts at local homeless shelters or the Micah Center. Contact them for possible opportunities.





# Get Ahead of the Problem:

## Focus Efforts on Youth and Prevention

Consider targeting some of your efforts on youth to prevent issues from becoming more serious, and to help young people who may be suffering in homes where mental illness or addiction is present. Children exposed to abuse, neglect, mental illness, and substance abuse in the household may experience poorer health outcomes and fewer life opportunities. These risk factors are often called Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs. As an example, those with a history of child abuse and neglect are 150% more likely to use illicit drugs in middle adulthood.

### Examples of Youth-Focused Programs and Services:

- Offer programs on positive parenting and supporting strong family relationships.
- Support local foster children by gathering resources and donating clothing items and necessities such as cribs and car seats.
- Use materials from Mental Health America's Back to School Toolkit to help kids and parents prepare.  
([www.mentalhealthamerica.net/back-school](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/back-school))
- Develop a robust teen youth ministry that develops connections among teens, positive role-modeling, stress reduction, making good choices, school support and mentoring, and other youth-related supports. Focus on engaging youth not currently involved.
- Start a Hope Squad: Hope Squads reduce youth suicide through education, training, and peer intervention. ([www.hopesquad.com](http://www.hopesquad.com))
- Find ways to support the Pals program, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs, scouting, and other youth-serving organizations that help build self-esteem.

# Connect & Collaborate:

## Join Local Prevention Coalitions to Inform, Connect, and Strengthen Your Efforts

Across the country, treatment professionals, law enforcement, faith communities, service providers, the courts, schools, city and health recreation centers, media, business, policymakers, families, and youth leaders are coordinating their efforts to improve mental health and serve those struggling with addiction.

Here are some of the many organizations working on mental health issues in Brown County. Consider having a representative from your congregation participate in or identify how you can support their work:



- Connections for Mental Wellness
- Brown County Coalition for Suicide Prevention
- JOSHUA
- Golden House
- Homeless shelters, such as St. John the Evangelist Homeless Shelter, Freedom House, Micah Center, NEW Community Shelter, Transformation House, and House of Hope
- Coordinated Community Response Team for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- Mental Health Court
- Heroin Court
- Veterans Court

### Ways Your Organization Can Contribute to a Coalition:

- Offer space for a group to meet.
- Host sponsored events.
- Coordinate volunteers for their events.
- Recognize and promote national observances, such as Mental Health Month (May), National Prevention Week (mid-May), National Recovery Month (September), National Suicide Prevention Month (September).
- Have a representative from your congregation participate in a local coalition and report back on opportunities for involvement.

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