

COVID-19: Honouring our Mental Health as Much as our Physical

Ask anyone you know three things we can do to protect ourselves from Coronavirus and they might rattle off a list likely longer than that: social distancing, handwashing, mask, gloves etc.

Ask the same question regarding mental health and you just might get a slower response. And a far shorter list.

While there's no denying the importance of adhering to smart physical procedures, it is essential that we take a similar approach to our mental health and that includes those of us who work in agriculture.

For one thing, in agriculture, physical distancing can amount to 'too much of a good thing.' Farmers practice physical distancing on an ongoing basis by virtue of the distance to neighbours, not to mention family and friends. This can result in an increased sense of isolation. For someone dealing with mental health challenges, this can make their situation worse.

Sustain Good Social Contact

Physical distancing doesn't have to mean social distancing in all its forms. It is crucially important to employ all means available to sustain good social contact. Whether it be Zoom, Facebook or other social media, not to mention a good old fashioned phone call.

Conversely, those of us who have people in our lives who are struggling with their mental health, need to make sure we regularly check in, both in the above mentioned ways as well as driving by for a wave and maybe a chat from a safe distance at the bottom of the stairs. If they happen to not be at home, leave a note or something else behind – it may go a long way to showing them people care.

During this time of COVID-19, stresses we feel can become compounded – a stacking effect, that intensifies issues which have already been cause for concern. For example, financial worries that previously may have been top of mind may now feel even more pressing because of the adverse effects of COVID-19 plaguing businesses. Those at higher risk of experiencing depression, may turn to negative coping mechanisms. If predisposed, this can result in increased use/abuse of alcohol, drugs or even self-harm behaviours.

Take Advantage of Available Resources

There are excellent resources in Ontario to help us or those in our lives who are in crisis, distress or struggling with stress. The Government of Ontario is now offering services, which once required payment, for free. This includes the opportunity to speak with therapists, psychologists and other mental health supports without charge while emergency measures are in place.

211 Ontario is another source of support. Either dial 211 or visit 211ontario.ca. The website has excellent information on mental health resources in your community.

WSPS also has excellent COVID-19 mental health resources at covid19.wsps.ca. There are informative articles and videos as well as links to other resources like the *COVID-19 Playbook for Employers*.

It's important that all of us know we are not alone and we are surrounded by those who do care about our well-being.

Visit our *Psychological Safety Blog* for tools resources on managing your mental health during COVID-19. Located on the *WSPS COVID-19 Hub* covid19.wsps.ca.