

#StayConnectedMN

MENTAL WELL-BEING AND COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

01/07/2022

This toolkit provides information, messaging, and resources for staying connected with others during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is vital to social and emotional well-being. People may use the toolkit in their daily lives, with their loved ones, and anywhere in the community.

For as long as we continue to live with COVID-19, please follow CDC guidance for social distancing, masking, and quarantining after being exposed to someone with active COVID-19 virus. Personal health and the health of our communities are important.

Mental health and well-being are also crucial to overall health. As we approach the start of the pandemic's third year, it is even more important for Minnesotans to take time to focus on mental well-being.

To be at home is to be known. It is to be loved for who you are. It is to share a sense of common ground, common interests, pursuits, and values with others who truly care about you.

- Dr. Vivek Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General

Connection is one of the most important things for our mental well-being and staying connected during the pandemic is one of the greatest challenges. These messages focus on the importance of staying connected to ourselves; friends, neighbors, and loved ones; and building community to survive and thrive despite the pandemic.

Each week has a theme:

- Week 1: Build casual connections
- Week 2: Foster closer connections
- Week 3: Create community
- Week 4: Know how to find help and support

How to use the #StayConnectedMN Toolkit

The goal of this toolkit is to share information about the importance of staying connected for our health. Use the information in a variety of ways with a variety of audiences, including workplaces, clients, your community, faith communities, and anyone who would benefit from the messages. Some examples:

- Introduce the weekly theme in an email to staff or group members. We recommend adding images and graphics that tie into the theme. We have provided email language you may use, but feel free to edit and add your own ideas and resources.
- The key messages provide background about why staying connected is an important aspect of mental health. Use these as talking points, and share resources found within them.
- Share the quick posts each week. Some ideas include sharing them on social media and/or on an employee intranet or message board; adding them to a newsletter; displaying them in a shared space, such as a break room or community center; or sending them by email to friends.
- Create flyers with the #StayConnectedMN messages and display them in shared spaces.
- Share the resources available in the toolkit during meetings or other points of connection with staff, clients, faith community members, and/or coworkers.

Plan to share as much as your group needs or wants. Please share your ideas on social media using the #StayConnectedMN hashtag, so others may learn from your creativity, and we all can stay connected.

Social media kick-off

Please edit and adapt the communication messages to fit your needs. Make sure to use the hashtag #StayConnectedMN in your social media posts, so as to join the statewide conversation.

The initial launch of this campaign is in February 2022, but you may use the messages whenever works best for your organization.

Week 1: Build casual connections

- **Find ways to connect with people with whom you are casually connected.** Ask neighbors about their plans for the weekend, compliment the grocery store cashier, ask a customer/client about their children's soccer game, say hello to the people you pass on the way to the bus stop.
- **Welcome newcomers.** Welcome the new person in your community, including those new to your neighborhood, an exercise class, workplace, school, etc.

Email messages for Week 1

Close relationships with family and friends are important for our health and well-being. But what about the people who make up our broader social networks: the parents at school drop-off, the neighbor down the street, or that colleague in another department who always makes you laugh?

While research on the benefits of social connections has generally focused on the importance of “strong ties,” or the intimate relationships with family and close friends, a growing body of research is shedding light on the hidden benefits of casual acquaintances, too. Surprisingly, these “weak ties” (that funny colleague, for example) can serve important functions, such as boosting physical and psychological health and buffering against stress and loneliness.

Imagine a day that begins by greeting your regular barista at the local coffee shop. You get to work and run into a colleague who you have not seen for a while, and chat about your weekend. After work, you head to yoga class where you exchange pleasantries with the girl whose hair is always a different color. Walking home afterward, you stop to chat with the guy you always see walking the pug named Wilbur. None of these people play an

important role in your life, yet a day without these kinds of interactions seems a little emptier. Read more about this at [Social Interactions and Well-Being: The Surprising Power of Weak Ties](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0146167214529799) (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0146167214529799>).

#StayConnectedMN

Quick posts for Week 1

- **Those warm fuzzies you get from helping others helps your health, too!** Make today your good deed day! Shovel a neighbor's walk. Buy a stranger a cup of coffee. Smile at a passerby. Check in on someone who is isolated. Extend a sincere thank you, or apology. Donate a book to a little library. Ask your friends about their favorite good deeds! Still unconvinced about the importance of casual connections? Check out Psychology Today's posting, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifetime-connections/202007/casual-friendships-are-key-happiness> #StayConnectedMN
- **Even brief and kind interactions with strangers can generate some meaningful sense of connection and value.** To how many people can you extend a smile or hold a casual conversation with to spread good cheer today? For more on the importance of small talk, watch this two-minute video https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/small_talk #StayConnectedMN
- **Find ways to show kindness to your neighbors.** The neighborhoods we live in have a big impact on our health and well-being. Fostering relationships with our neighbors through small acts of kindness is not only beneficial to them, but is also good for us, the giver. When you display kindness, you increase dopamine to the brain, leaving you feeling happier and more energized. An added bonus: kindness is contagious! Need some ideas for staying connected? Try https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/36_questions_for_increasing_closeness #StayConnectedMN

Additional resources for Week 1

- [7 Practices to Increase Social Connection and Resilience in the Workplace](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-practices-increase-social-connection-workplace-dimity-podger) (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-practices-increase-social-connection-workplace-dimity-podger>)
- [How to Stay Socially Connected to Society: Your Life Depends on It](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-stay-socially-connected-to-society-your-life-depends-on-it) (<https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-stay-socially-connected-to-society-your-life-depends-on-it>)
- [We Want to Have Deeper Conversations with Strangers](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/we_want_to_have_deeper_conversations_with_strangers_why_dont_we) (https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/we_want_to_have_deeper_conversations_with_strangers_why_dont_we)
- [These Questions Can Help you Connect \(Even When You're Apart\)](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/these_questions_can_help_you_connect_even_when_youre_apart) (https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/these_questions_can_help_you_connect_even_when_youre_apart)
- [Why You Shouldn't Hate Small Talk](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/small_talk) (https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/small_talk)
- [Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf](https://www.div12.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf) (<https://www.div12.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf>)
- [Appendix: The ESS Human Values Scale, Femail Version, Keyed](https://datadatabase.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/schwartz-value-inventory.pdf) (<https://datadatabase.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/schwartz-value-inventory.pdf>)
- [Personal Values Assessment](https://survey.valuescentre.com/survey.html?id=5l1OmCPgJO6FGafKLmkogR4E3lluZOgB0EGag0Ki1ClOvC8MbC5eSA) (<https://survey.valuescentre.com/survey.html?id=5l1OmCPgJO6FGafKLmkogR4E3lluZOgB0EGag0Ki1ClOvC8MbC5eSA>)
- [The VIA Character Strengths Survey \(personality test, personality assessment\)](https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register) (<https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register>)

Week 2: Foster close connections

Key communication messages for Week 2

- **Find ways to connect with people who share the same interests or passions.** Search out opportunities in your community to join groups that do activities you love, such as hiking, arts and crafts, workouts, book clubs, etc. Nurturing your interests is important for your overall well-being, and is an opportunity to connect with others. Experiences like these often can change your life in a positive way – getting the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual benefits of weaving your interests into forming those personal connections with others.
- **Take time to nurture close friendships.** Over time, we recognize the importance of having friends who are authentic and genuine – people who love, respect, and support us. To nurture the closeness and support of friendships, you must make an effort to connect. Host a gathering, meet for coffee, send a handwritten note, make the call. Making time for your friends reduces stress and promotes mental well-being.
- **Foster relationships with your immediate and extended families.** Our family is our first community – they are the people who we may take for granted as always being there to love and support us. One of the biggest challenges to families staying connected is the busy pace of life. Make time to foster relationships with your immediate and extended family members. Social connections like these not only provide us joy and happiness, but also contribute to our mental health and well-being.

Email messages for Week 2

Connecting with others is one of the most important things we can do for our well-being. Social connection lowers anxiety and depression, helps us regulate our emotions, and improves our self-esteem and empathy. [Note: Use any of the themes above to continue sending messages to email connections.]

Quick posts for Week 2

- **Now more than ever, it is important to take time to nurture close friendships.** Host a gathering, meet for coffee, send a handwritten note, call someone. Making time for your friends reduces stress and promotes mental well-being. For ideas to connect with others, go to: <https://tinybuddha.com/blog/6-ways-to-show-your-friends-you-appreciate-them/> #StayConnectedMN
- **Our family is our first community – they may be the people who are always there to love and support us.** One of the biggest challenges for families staying connected is the busy pace of life. Make time to foster relationships with your immediate and extended family members. Social connections like these not only provide us joy and happiness, but they also contribute to our mental health and well-being. For more information on the importance of family connections go to: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5954612/> #StayConnectedMN
- **Connecting with people who share your interests or passions can improve your mental and overall well-being.** Not only does it allow you to do activities you love, it also allows you to develop social connections that can grow into lasting friendships. You may even step outside your comfort zone! Experiences like these can change your life in a positive way. For tools and tips on connecting with others go to: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/communities/mentalhealth/quickcardmwb.pdf> #StayConnectedMN
- **When connecting with those who are close to you, remember that it is OK to talk about how you feel.** In fact, we should talk about our feelings. It is OK not to be OK. Reach out to friends, family, neighbors, a warm line, or a crisis line if you want to talk. No concern is too small. Help is available and hope is possible. For help, try these resources:
 - Minnesota Warm Line Peer Support Connection: call or text 844-739-6369 (5 p.m. to 9 a.m.)

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255

#StayConnectedMN

Additional resources for Week 2

- [Mayo Clinic - Friendships: Enrich your life and improve your health \(https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860\)](https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860)
- [6 Ways to Show Your Friends You Appreciate Them \(https://tinybuddha.com/blog/6-ways-to-show-your-friends-you-appreciate-them/\)](https://tinybuddha.com/blog/6-ways-to-show-your-friends-you-appreciate-them/)
- [Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection | PlanH \(https://planh.ca/resources/links/connectedness-health-science-social-connection\)](https://planh.ca/resources/links/connectedness-health-science-social-connection)
- [Family Relationships and Well-Being \(https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5954612/\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5954612/)
- [Piedmont Organization: Benefits of showing kindness to others \(https://www.piedmont.org/living-better/benefits-of-showing-kindness-to-others\)](https://www.piedmont.org/living-better/benefits-of-showing-kindness-to-others)
- [Harvard Health Blog: The heart and science of kindness \(https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/the-heart-and-science-of-kindness-2019041816447\)](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/the-heart-and-science-of-kindness-2019041816447)

Week 3: Connect with community

Key communication messages for Week 3

- **Contributing to your community makes you feel good.** Volunteering has many health benefits and gives people a sense of purpose.
- **Being part of something bigger than ourselves is important at any age.** Finding meaning and purpose is about being a part of something bigger than ourselves; it helps us feel connected and shapes our identity. This may include your culture, faith, a social cause, or profession.
- **Community in the workplace.** Creating a supportive community at work supports engagement and productivity, as well as helping to prevent depression and loneliness.

Email messages for Week 3

Lack of social connection is equal to the risk of smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, and is greater than the risk associated with obesity, excess alcohol consumption, and lack of exercise.

Loneliness is lethal. Social connection can help us heal our sorrows; feel seen and heard; offer us comfort when we are sad; move forward after a setback; improve our health; sleep better; create access to resources and information; and more. Social connectedness includes more than just our closest relationships. We also all have a need, at any age, to **connect to something bigger than ourselves!** Culture, faith, social causes, or professions often fill that role for many people. We may not dedicate our lives to a cause or join the traveling cultural choir (although some might!), but finding something that is meaningful to you, that you are part of in a big or small way, and taking some time to appreciate your connection is valuable to your mental well-being.

Here are some reflection questions to help you think about ways to grow your community connections:

- What do you like about your community (cultural, faith, work, or neighborhood)? How do others contribute to that factor? Can you help support that good thing that you love? Can you connect with others who like that same thing (e.g., hiking clubs)?

- How can you make others feel welcome in your community?
- Where do you feel a sense of community now, or where have you felt it in the past?
- What do you care about in your community?
- What are the big and little ways you can participate in your community?
- What are your personal strengths and how can you use them to support what you care about most?

#StayConnectedMN

Quick posts for Week 3

- **Contributing to your community helps your well-being too!** Volunteering as a family is also a great tradition. Find a volunteer opportunity that is meaningful to you. Check out these websites, your local community center, or your faith community to find what is right for you: <https://wiredimpact.com/blog/websites-to-help-you-find-volunteer-opportunities/> #StayConnectedMN
- **Being part of something bigger than ourselves is important at any age!** What matters most to you? Is it your culture, your faith, a social cause, the purpose you find in your work? Try one of these assessments if you need guidance: <https://www.div12.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf>, <https://datadatabase.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/schwartz-value-inventory.pdf>, <https://survey.valuescentre.com/survey.html?id=5l1OmCPgJO6FGafKlmgogR4E3lluzOgB0EGag0Ki1ClOvC8MbC5eSA> #StayConnectedMN
- **Being part of the change that we want to see can be a healing endeavor**, especially when you have experienced collective trauma like racism or heterosexism. Look for outlets in local cultural newspapers or radio programs, or check out one of these resources: <https://www.mnhealingjustice.org/>, <https://headwatersfoundation.org/>, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/lizmrichardson/lgbtq-organizations-pride> #StayConnectedMN
- **Strong emotional connections to colleagues improves productivity and well-being!** Create a team environment! Help each other and ask for help. Check out the Seattle Pike Place video for inspiration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSWUw2jcgYo> #StayConnectedMN

Additional resources for Week 3

- [Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits \(https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm\)](https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm)
- [3 Websites to Help you Find Volunteer Opportunities \(https://wiredimpact.com/blog/websites-to-help-you-find-volunteer-opportunities/\)](https://wiredimpact.com/blog/websites-to-help-you-find-volunteer-opportunities/)
- [7 Practices to Increase Social Connection and Resilience in the Workplace \(https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-practices-increase-social-connection-workplace-dimity-podger\)](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/7-practices-increase-social-connection-workplace-dimity-podger)
- [How to Stay Socially Connected to Society: Your Life Depends on It \(https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-stay-socially-connected-to-society-your-life-depends-on-it\)](https://www.betterup.com/blog/how-to-stay-socially-connected-to-society-your-life-depends-on-it)
- [We Want to Have Deeper Conversations with Strangers \(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/we_want_to_have_deeper_conversations_with_strangers_why_dont_we\)](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/we_want_to_have_deeper_conversations_with_strangers_why_dont_we)
- [These Questions Can Help you Connect \(Even When You're Apart\) \(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/these_questions_can_help_you_connect_even_when_youre_apart\)](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/these_questions_can_help_you_connect_even_when_youre_apart)
- [Why You Shouldn't Hate Small Talk \(https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/small_talk\)](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/video/item/small_talk)

- [Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf \(https://www.div12.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf\)](https://www.div12.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Valued-Living-Questionnaire.pdf)
- [Appendix: The ESS Human Values Scale, Femail Version, Keyed \(https://datadatabase.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/schwartz-value-inventory.pdf\)](https://datadatabase.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/schwartz-value-inventory.pdf)
- [Personal Values Assessment \(https://survey.valuescentre.com/survey.html?id=5l1OmCPgJO6FGafKLMkogR4E3lluZOgB0EGag0Ki1ClOvC8MbC5eSA\)](https://survey.valuescentre.com/survey.html?id=5l1OmCPgJO6FGafKLMkogR4E3lluZOgB0EGag0Ki1ClOvC8MbC5eSA)
- [The VIA Character Strengths Survey \(personality test, personality assessment\) \(https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register\)](https://www.viacharacter.org/survey/account/register)

Week 4: Finding support and help

Key communication messages for Week 4

- **Maintain your well-being by connecting to your support system in any way you can.** Some supports have shifted to virtual formats. It is important to find the resources that work for you. Some supports, even if they are imperfect, are better than no supports. Supports may include family, friends, coworkers, and nature.
- **If you are concerned someone may be having thoughts of suicide, ask them openly and directly if they are having thoughts of suicide.** Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) to learn about resources available to you and your loved ones.
- Warm lines and peer support can be valuable for those who are managing stressful. Warm lines provide support to callers who need it, but who may not be in crisis. You do not need to be in crisis to call a warm line. Anyone seeking support can access these resources.
- **It can be intimidating to find a therapist, or difficult to know where to start. Use your employee assistance program if you have one.** You may contact your primary care provider or health insurance company, or check out [Fast-Tracker \(https://www.fasttrackermn.org/\)](https://www.fasttrackermn.org/) to find Minnesota resources for help with mental health and substance use disorders. Personal referrals may help, too. You may be surprised what you learn when you start asking.

Email messages for Week 4

Know where to find support and resources if you or a loved one need help. Give yourself grace today and every day. Take time to recognize the people in your life – your coworkers, loved ones, or others – and to recognize yourself. A little recognition can go a long way. Make a special effort to connect with people in the community or workplace who may be vulnerable and do not have a lot of support. Talking about feelings can be uncomfortable, but just acknowledging that you or someone you know is struggling truly does help.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or need someone to talk to, please reach out and connect with one of the resources below.

- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline \(https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/\)](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/): 1-800-273-8255.
- [Crisis Text Line \(https://www.crisistextline.org/\)](https://www.crisistextline.org/): Text MN to 741741.
- [Minnesota local mobile crisis response \(https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/health-care/mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp\)](https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/health-care/mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp): Find the phone number for your county mobile crisis response team.
- [Minnesota Day One hotline for domestic or sexual violence \(http://dayoneservices.org/\)](http://dayoneservices.org/): 1-866-223-1111.

- [National Parent Helpline \(https://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/\)](https://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/): 1-855-427-2736, operated by Parents Anonymous.
- [Postpartum Support International Helpline \(https://www.postpartum.net/\)](https://www.postpartum.net/): 1-800-944-4773.

#StayConnectedMN

Quick posts for Week 4

- **Staying connected to your support system is especially important for those in recovery.** Reach out to your support system or those you know are struggling and plan to connect regularly. It is OK to seek help. Reach out to a friend, family, neighbor, or crisis line; there is help, there is hope.
 - National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-855-273-8255 or text MN to 741741. #StayConnectedMN
- **It can be intimidating to find a therapist, or even difficult to know where to start.** Use your employee assistance program if you have one. You can contact a health care provider or your health insurance company, or check out the Fast Tracker link to mental health and substance use disorder resources in Minnesota. Some people find personal referrals helpful. You may be surprised what you learn when you start asking around. For information on mental health and substance use disorder resources in Minnesota, go to: <https://www.fasttrackermn.org/> #StayConnectedMN
- **Warm lines and peer support can be valuable for those who are managing stress.** You do not need to be in immediate crisis to call the warm line. Anyone seeking support may call the Minnesota Warm Line for Peer Support connection at 844-739-0369, from 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. If you want something more interactive, check out the Virtual Peer Support Network, every day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. It offers online activities every hour. For more information, visit: [Wellness in the Wood: Transforming Wellness into Reality \(mental health advocacy\) \(mnwitw.org\)](http://mnwitw.org) #StayConnectedMN
- **Check in on your friends and family.** If you notice a friend behaving differently or seeming distressed, do not be afraid to ask your friend or loved one if they are thinking about killing themselves or thinking about suicide. Asking about suicide does not make someone suicidal. In fact, talking openly about mental health and suicide can help create an honest conversation and connection. Take a moment to learn what signs to look for in someone thinking about suicide.

For support and resources, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 855-273-8255, or text “MN” to 741 741 to get help with any crisis. For more information on suicide prevention, go to: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/suicide/basics/index.html> #StayConnectedMN



Minnesota Department of Health | health.mn.gov | 651-201-5000
625 Robert Street North PO Box 64975, St. Paul, MN 55164-0975

Contact health.communications@state.mn.us to request an alternate format.