

## Taking Care of our Mental Health - Together

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Stress affects everyone; whether we are dealing with a challenging health issue, struggling as a student or employee, or suffering from the death of a loved one. Even if we are not experiencing a mental health challenge, more than likely someone we know is going through difficulty. The National Institutes for Health have designated April as [National Stress Awareness Month](#). During and following the pandemic, everything changed. Many people work or take classes remotely, we gather in groups in a range of behaviors, and we likely know of someone who lost a friend or family member. We may have lost someone ourselves, or have experienced a major change in our lives due to the pandemic. Now is a great time to take care of each other and take good care of ourselves.

Students at UAF, much like students enrolled in universities and colleges across the nation, are reporting more frequent and more intense experiences with mental health challenges. Anxiety, stress, and depression cost the global economy around \$1 trillion in lost productivity according to the [American Institute of Stress](#). You may be noticing that students and others are demonstrating higher levels of stress or reporting symptoms of depression and anxiety. You may also be wondering what you can do to help. One of the most significant ways you can offer support to a colleague, student, or friend is to be aware of the signs and symptoms of developing and/or worsening mental health challenges and know how to connect the person with appropriate resources. Early intervention can be crucial to helping people recover from mental health challenges before cascading consequences occur and worsen their emotional state.

Signs and symptoms of mental health challenges can include (but are not limited to):

- Changes in behavior - no longer engaging in class or activities, observable difficulty with concentration or focus, or angry outbursts not typical of this person.
- Changes in appearance - looking disheveled or more unkempt than usual, noticeable changes in hygiene, lacking emotional expressions that match circumstances.
- Expressions of emotional distress - frequently talking about death and dying; displaying feelings of hopelessness, worry, or panic; demonstrated agitated, erratic, or aggressive behaviors or frequent self-blame or self-criticism.

What you can do to help, according to [Mental Health First Aid](#):

- Assess the person for risk of suicide.
- Listen non judgmentally.
- Give reassurance and provide local and [national mental health resources](#).
- Encourage appropriate professional help.
- Encourage self help activities such as exercise, relaxation and meditation techniques, and engaging with family, faith, friends, and other social networks.

If you or someone you know are experiencing a mental health challenge, please reach out to a trusted family member or friend. If you are interested in learning more about [Mental Health First Aid](#), an organization that helps you assist someone experiencing a mental health or substance use-related crisis, reach out by going to their [website](#) or The [National Council for Mental Health Wellbeing](#).