



THE TALON

SENECA VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL GERMANTOWN, MD

Volume 45 || Issue 1 || Fall 2020

Mental Health Signs to Look For: When to Worry and When it's OK

By: Katherine Mendoza

The definition of mental illness is a health condition involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior maybe all of these at the same time. Some examples of mental illness are depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors. A lot of people actually worry that they may have issues with mental health, and it is actually normal to worry about it from time to time although when there are signs and ongoing symptoms that cause a person frequent stress and start to affect a person's ability to function properly, it then becomes a mental illness. According to the Mayo Clinic, some mental illness signs/symptoms are feeling sad or down, confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate, excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt, extreme mood changes either high or low, withdraw from friends and activities, significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping, detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations, inability to cope with daily problems or stress, trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people, problems with alcohol or drug use, major changes with eating habits, sex drive change, excessive anger, hostility, or violence along with suicidal thinking. If you have suicidal thoughts, get help. Call a suicide hotline number. In the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255) or use its webchat on suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat.

A Lot of people view mental health differently, some don't believe it's real, and others do believe. Mental health actually has a couple names that it could go by. There is mental health, mental illness and mental health disorder. A Lot of people don't know much about this topic, and in this article we will be speaking about a lot of facts that many people may not know. People who can be affected by mental illness all vary. There are those who inherit it from blood relatives who have mental illness. There are also some genes that could run in the family which make you at risk to have a mental illness. Your way of life and the conditions you live in can also cause your mental health to decline. In actuality 1 in 5 adults have a mental illness in any given year. Environmental exposure before birth can actually affect you a lot as you are growing, environmental exposure can be environmental stressors and some examples of these stressors are noise, crowding, air quality, tornadoes and other natural disasters, war and other manmade disasters also. Inflammatory conditions are another environmental exposure that can occur and some examples of inflammatory conditions are allergy, asthma, autoimmune diseases, coeliac disease, glomerulonephritis, hepatitis, inflammatory bowel disease, reperfusion injury and transplant rejection. Other than these examples of environmental exposures there is also toxins. Alcohol or drug use while in the womb can sometimes be linked to mental illness. Brain chemistry has an effect on a person's mental health, "Neurotransmitters are naturally occurring brain chemicals that carry signals to other parts of your brain and body. When the neural networks involving these chemicals are impaired, the function of nerve receptors and nerve systems change, leading to depression and other emotional disorders." There could also be life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse. These are some things that cause mental health issues for people. If you want more information go to Mayo Clinic, mental illness, symptoms and causes.

Mental illness doesn't really have a certain age where you either have it or don't. You can have a mental illness at any age. Although it can start during childhood or later adult years, it would normally show sooner rather than later. Three-fourths of all mental illness begins by age 24. Mental illness affects every person differently; it also can last a long time or a short time.

One in five American adults experienced a mental health issue. One in ten young people experienced a period of major depression. One in 25 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression. Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. It accounts for the loss of more than 41,000 American lives each year, more than double the number of lives lost to homicide. Some people seem to think that people with mental health illnesses are lazy and unreliable but people with mental health problems are just as productive as other employees. Employers who hire people with mental health problems report good attendance and punctuality as well as motivation and good work. Friends and loved ones can make a big difference and be important influences to help someone get the treatment and services they need. You can do this by reaching out and letting them know you are available to help, helping them access mental health services, learning and sharing the facts about mental health, especially if you hear something that isn't true, treating them with respect, just as you would anyone else, refusing to define them by their diagnosis or using labels such as "crazy." These are just some interesting facts about mental health. For more information you can go to Magellan Health Insights.

This article told you a lot of information about mental illness that you may have not known before and it speaks a lot about what to look out for and some statistics about mental illness.

It gives you a lot of examples of what may cause someone's mental health to deteriorate along with giving examples of what may have affected your mental health since before you were born. Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy or weak, and many people need help to get better.

Students in Montgomery County, MD are suffering taking classes online. When will this all end?

By: Karla Sanchez

Imagine being at home, with a computer, taking classes online. Not having to worry about what to wear for the next day, not having to forget your supplies, not even worrying about going to the school building. Life is easier when everything's online, right?

Well, that varies on the kind of person you are. Montgomery County Public Schools has started the school year virtually due to the pandemic. The Board of Education made its final decision on August 26th to start the first semester virtually. Students are interacting with teachers this year through an app called Zoom, where classes are held weekly. Instead of using Google Classroom in order to find assignments, a new platform, "MyMCPS Classroom" was created in order for teachers to organize and structure their plans each week for students to complete their work. While this does give a new learning experience for students and teachers, there's a lot of issues behind this.

According to an article from FOX 5 DC, children are "spending more time on troubleshooting than virtual learning." Students who are still in elementary school are struggling to access these different platforms. In Germantown, MD a fourth grader was very frustrated and upset, telling his mother, Cara Fletcher, that he can not "spend more time on how to access all the platforms he needs for virtual learning." Natalya Dvorson in Rockville, MD shows a video on the amount of steps her kids have to take in order to navigate through Canvas, and explains how much of a struggle it is to access the classroom. The mothers of the students state that these "platforms are not designed for that age group."

In terms of virtual learning, "parents of students with disabilities tell Montgomery County Schools leaders, online learning isn't working." In Kensington, MD - a mother of a 5-year-old boy who has autism spectrum disorder states that she's upset having to watch her kid try to engage in learning when it's not "an appropriate method". Another mother in the area says her 11-year-old who has the same disability mentioned that her son finds it upsetting that he has to go through the learning process online, reported by FOX 5 DC.

Virtual Learning can't replace in-person educational experience for students. They (MCPS) have been trying to work together in strategizing in-person returns, for their main goal is to return to in-person instruction. Safety of students and staff is the top priority. Employees are notified that they are able to return in 45 days (minimum) - though it does not mean that instruction in-person will begin in 45 days. This is just slowly allowing staff to get together in person, and work on more in-depth planning in order to proceed to an eventual return to buildings, according to Jack Smith Ph.D. on The MocoShow.

In Maryland, Governor Larry Hogan announced about stage three (the final stage for recovery) in order to reopen other businesses. While he does reopen these businesses (indoor theaters, outdoor venues, retail and religious facilities), Montgomery County stays in phase two due to the number of cases. According to Executive Marc Elrich on WUSA9, he was disappointed in Maryland for reopening so soon, he said that the county will not be following the governor's plans. For the rest of Maryland, though, there are still restrictions/regulations that must be followed for the safety of citizens. "Indoor theaters where live performances occur or motion pictures are shown may open to the general public at 50% capacity, or 100 people per auditorium...Outdoor venues where live performances occur or motion pictures are shown outdoors may open to the general public at 50% capacity, or 250 people...Capacity for retail establishments and religious facilities may increase from 50 to 75 percent." Reported by Maryland.gov. Everyone is required to wear a mask wherever they go, no excuses.

Until this day, we still need to follow guidelines in order to reduce the spread of the virus. That means wearing a mask in public, staying six feet apart from others, using hand sanitizers and washing our hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), they've come up with strategies for school administrators to "control COVID-19 Exposures." "Reduce the risk of COVID-19 by having teachers, staff, and students stay home when sick or if they have been in close contact with a person with COVID-19..." (Continued on page 2.)

Classes Online - Continued from page 1

“Safe work practices” are recommended for staff to work on, meaning to have “appropriate cleaning and disinfection practices and appropriate mask policies.” “Provide PPE in accordance with the school administrator’s worksite hazard assessment to protect staff from hazards not controlled by engineering and administrative controls alone (e.g., school health staff, janitorial and maintenance staff).”

In a survey of 6 students, 5 out of 6 said that they would rather go back to school than continue online school.

I asked teachers who teach students at Seneca Valley High School about returning to school.

One of the first teachers, Madame Rebecca Hanford, gave some very reasonable responses. Madame Hanford is a French teacher at Seneca Valley and is a sponsor of the French Honor Society and LGBTQ+ Alliance for the school.

“What will you do in order to ensure the safety of students?”

“...I would need lots of cleaning supplies handy - hand sanitizer and cleaning wipes. I would do my best to keep my classroom clean and of course, I would wear my mask at all times when I'm in close proximity to students and staff (however, I question whether it's really safe to take off my mask if I'm alone in my classroom). I would remind students of social distancing but that can be hard to monitor and enforce at all times.”

I questioned Julianna Taylor, an English teacher who teaches Honors English for 9th graders and IB Literature and Language 1 at Seneca Valley:

“Do you believe learning online is a struggle for students? Shouldn't it be easy for them?”

“I think learning online has been great for some students and awful for others...I think it's given some students some independence who want independence. But I think it's forced some students to struggle who wouldn't usually struggle because the teachers are there immediately to support them in the classroom. I do feel like some students have learned to be independent learners over the course of this distance learning. And I see that as a good thing!”

Lastly, I decided to ask Vonetta Wideman, a Science teacher at Seneca Valley.

“Do you think it’s better for students to return to school buildings or continue learning online? Why?”

“I believe that we should continue online learning until we know that it is safe to go back. We need to continuously check on the numbers of deaths and the numbers of cases per area (populated). MCPS states that SAFETY IS FIRST at all times...I would like for them to live up to that statement.”

In conclusion, while students, parents and even staff are struggling with online school (or some could be doing fine)- staying home and learning online is the best safety measure to take in order to prevent the spread of Coronavirus. It’s definitely not the time for students to go back to buildings- it will only increase the number of cases and end up closing again. MCPS will continue figuring out a plan in order to return to school safety and appropriately.

Voting: In-Person vs. Mail

By: Parissa Ghahreman

As the US 2020 presidential election approaches, the masses have been urged to register to vote through public advertising, Instagram stories, and informational newsletters for what is perhaps one of the most important days in American history. With the coronavirus case tolls rising, many are concerned about voting on-site for fear of spreading the illness should they go to the traditional polling places. The safer alternative to this would be to submit a mail-in ballot, but problems arise with this option, as well.

First, it’s key to understand the very basics of how mail-in voting works.

According to the National Confederation of State Legislatures, two-thirds of the United States offer absentee voting without an excuse, while the remaining one-third require an excuse to receive the ballot. Few states put individuals on a list in which they are sent a ballot annually without request. After submitting a request and receiving the ballot, the voter fills out the ballot appropriately and places it in their state’s designated postal drop off box that specifically transports ballots.

The challenges and advantages that come with mail-in ballots vary per person, but as stated by the League of Women’s Voters and an article written by Richard Dahl, below is are some of the specific pros and cons of absentee voting.

Disadvantages

- The increased cost of printed material for jurisdictions
- Lack of transportation
- Ballots not being received - requests are approved but ballots are never distributed
- Ballots being rejected - oftentimes this is due to the ballot being filled out incorrectly
- Coercion swaying a vote - the voter’s peers may influence their decision
- Slow vote count - the ballots must be received and hand-counted
- Voter impersonation - though extremely rare and often caught, voter fraud is possible, especially when a ballot has been sent to someone who passed away
- Late submissions - voters send in their ballots too late to be counted

Advantages

- Time - voters aren’t pressured to make a decision immediately and can be more well-informed
- It is impartial to political parties
- Reduces pressure of placing polling booths
- Reduces cost of polling staff
- Decreases lines at polling stations, which is especially significant during the pandemic
- Decreased cost of staffing poll booths for jurisdictions
- Increased voter turnout - convenience causes more people to request absentee ballots to fill out during their free time
- Decreases booth lines - this is especially significant in reducing the spread of the coronavirus
- Allows voters to better inform themselves before deciding
- In many states, it is relatively easy to obtain

By related articles published by NCSL and Dahl, the strengths and weaknesses with on-site voting are compiled below.

Advantages

- Convenient for those who live near the booths
- Election specialists provide support for voters’ inquiries
- Votes are counted much quicker which allows for voter gratification and speedy results

Disadvantages

- Lack of transportation is an inconvenience for those who live far from the booths
- Time - wait times to cast a vote may take hours depending on the site, and it’s difficult for people with jobs and families to take that kind of time
- Crowds increase the risk of spreading the coronavirus
- Jurisdictions lose money hiring booth employees
- Lower voter turnout

In closing, each voting method may share few similarities, but the best way to vote is objective to the individual’s preferences and resources available to them. However, no matter how one votes, every single vote counts when it comes to political matters such as the presidential election.

Opinion: The Election To Start A New United States?

By: Mizell Scott III

Overview: This presidential election is firing up, and the two candidates, Joe Biden the former vice president under Obama of the democratic party, and the current president as of right now Donald Trump of the republican party, are waging a war against each other and the prime political beliefs of the United States, that being liberalism and conservatism, each person reflecting one. In this article, I will be delving into each man's stance on the polarizing subject of immigration and how it will impact America's growth for the coming future.

Immigration, Border wall, ICE: There's no surprise that this issue is first on the list. This was a topic that was brought to the forefront in the 2016 election with Donald Trump spearheading it, so there is no surprise how he still has the same views on the wall and immigration this election, with a “take no prisoners” attitude and a funding of the wall. “We are proposing an immigration plan that puts the jobs, wages, and safety of American workers first” Trump said during a Rose Garden interview in 2019.

With that in mind let's move on to the Views of Joe Biden who is outspoken about his view on Donald Trump's immigration policies saying, “It’s criminal. It’s criminal.” Joe Biden is the exact opposite spectrum when it comes to immigration, stating that he would have legislation passed within his first 100 days as president offering a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. With those statements taken into account, you can make an accurate assumption by stating that if Bidens wins the election and pulls through on his promise, illegal immigrants will move over to the Democratic party, especially in Texas where there are approximately 1.6 million illegal immigrants. This would lead to Texas becoming a Democrat controlled state for, I would say, the rest of this country's history due to the point that Texas is half and half when it comes to either party, but they mostly lean right.

In Donald Trump’s case, if he were to win and complete the wall and go against the immigration plans like he's been doing, I don't see Texas going blue I see it going red for the duration of his presidency due to the fact a lot of conservatives and Republicans’ morale would be higher since the president that most aligns with their values would be in office.

In conclusion to the immigration policies, I see no foreseeable outcome that any state that shares the border with Mexico will stay red if Biden wins due to the citizenship he promised to the illegal migrants across the United States, which will lead to them voting blue, but if Trump wins, I see it staying red the rest of his presidency.



Photo from NBC News

How Pets Destress!

By: Fatema Ali

Have you been begging your parents for a pet? Maybe a dog, to run around and play with? Maybe a cat, to sit and cuddle with? Regardless of the pet, your parents are still saying no.

Well, look no further because I have a new argument for you! Pets actually help destress! Yeah, you read right! Pets help us destress. Interacting with pets, especially dogs and cats, has shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure, says the famous NIH (National Institute of Health).

So what does this mean? It means that spending just 10-20 minutes with a dog or a cat will help calm you down. So cuddling with a pet at home may just be the thing you need while you are preparing for a test. COVID-19 has brought stress to all of us, no matter if we have COVID (god forbid), or not. Staying at home, not seeing your friends, a lot of school work; these are all compounds that increase our stress levels. Maybe we just need a furry friend to help out.

When schools were open, some schools used to bring in dogs to the library for students to play with before taking big tests. And guess what? They found out that the students who played with the dogs before taking the test got better scores than those who hadn't spent time with the dogs.

I myself have a cat at home and whenever I am troubled or stressed, I always take some time to play with her or pet her, and then I feel so much better.

Although pets can be quite the responsibility, convince your parents that you will take care of them. Parents love it when we take responsibility for something. And plus, maybe looking after an animal will give you something to do during quarantine. Take walks with your dog. Make toys for your cat. The possibilities are endless.

So next time you beg your parents to get you a pet, bring this argument up. Who knows, maybe you'll have a pet to spend time with afterall!



Photo From History.com



Photo From IMSA.edu

COVID-19 changed Seniors' lives

By: Mikaela Penaflor

Despite the pandemic that's messing with everyone's lives across the nation, the class of 2021 is still in high spirits, regardless of their Senior year being ruined. Just like the class of 2020, the class of 2021 had their year cut short due to COVID-19. Since March, many changes have happened over nine months, for instance, online learning, changes in the college application process, missing events, etc.

The class of 2021 is still trying to have a normal senior year by continuing to do their Senior traditions. Clarksburg High School students continue their social distancing Senior Sunrise. Some parents still took the first day of school pictures for their seniors. Many schools around the county are still trying to do senior traditions but with safety precautions. Many schools like Richard Montgomery are doing a virtual pep rally trying to lift some students' spirits during remote learning. Some students at Seneca Valley are doing social distant Homecoming with a few of their close friends, no more than eight people per group. There are many other ways that Seniors can make their Senior year a bit brighter. According to Grown & Flown, an article called *For the Class of 2021: Here are 21 Ways to Make This Senior Year Great* has many ideas and many ways to make this year more enjoyable and safe. Many seniors however, are missing many social events. One student from Northwest High School explains that he misses Marching Band, Homecoming, Prom, and many more social events. As a senior myself, I also miss these social events and I am afraid that I would never be able to experience them again.

This school year has many changes, including college applications. Many colleges across the nation are deciding that they are going test-optional this year. Most schools including UMBC (University of Maryland, Baltimore County), UMD (University of Maryland), and Cornell University are switching to test-optional due to most students not being able to take the SAT/ACT during Covid-19. Many students have mixed opinions about this year's college application process. Regch De Leon, a senior from Northwest High School, has mixed feelings about the college admission process, "I like the college application because it is less on students and you don't know what a student is going through and it is mentally healthier for everyone." College Applications are a stressful time for seniors. It seems like they have an advantage, since many colleges are changing their rules about the standardized tests. Students who are not able to take the SAT or ACT do not have to stress about taking the test since some colleges are being lenient with standardized tests. This is a good thing. Standardized testing does not determine a student's academic achievements throughout their high school career. Daniel Gower, a senior at Seneca Valley High School, explains his college application process experience, "I am happy that they made most college tests optional and we don't get much support from counselors for our college apps and everything being online is confusing and it is a big mess. Another thing that sucks is that we can't visit schools that we want to apply to."

The class of 2021 did not expect to spend their senior year in their own homes. Seniors wonder if they would be able to walk across the stage for graduation. Everyone has dreamed to walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. Only time will tell, but as of right now, we are trying to make the most of it.

The most important thing is that we are healthy and safe. Time will come when we will be able to experience Prom, Homecoming, and football games. As advice to the freshmen, enjoy your time in high school. It goes by very quickly and when the pandemic is over, go to events with your friends and enjoy your social life as much as you can because it can be easily taken away from you.

The Origins of Halloween

By: Kirubel Negash

Here are some facts about Halloween from History.com:

- Halloween is a holiday celebrated each year on October 31, and Halloween 2020 will occur on Saturday, October 31.
- The tradition originated with the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain, when people would light bonfires and wear costumes to ward off ghosts.
- In the eighth century, Pope Gregory III designated November 1 as a time to honor all saints. Soon, All Saints Day incorporated some of the traditions of Samhain. The evening before was known as All Hallows Eve, and later Halloween.
- Over time, Halloween evolved into a day of activities like trick-or-treating, carving jack-o-lanterns, festive gatherings, donning costumes and eating treats.
- The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago, mostly in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1.
- This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death.
- Celts believed that on the night before the new year, the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred.
- On the night of October 31 they celebrated Samhain, when it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth.

Happy Halloween to all those that celebrate!

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