



**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH and
RECOVERY SERVICES (BHRS)
Administration**

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Mental Health Awareness

MERCED COUNTY, CA---Merced County's Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS) and Public Health Departments want to remind you that May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Your mental "health" is just as important as your physical wellbeing.

Take a moment and become aware of your thoughts, behaviors, and social interactions. If needed, sanitize your negative thoughts and replace them with healthy thoughts and socially appropriate outside activities. *"To promote a healthy mental state, we need to engage in safe outdoor activities. Mediating in the backyard, a walk on a trail, taking in a deep breath of fresh air. Social distancing doesn't mean we disconnect from the things we love. It means we allow for physical space, so we can continue to have what we love,"* said Genevieve G. Valentine, Director of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.

"In an effort to maintain physical and mental health during this stressful time, the Department feels it's necessary to promote options for wellness while still adhering to the safety measures in the Health Officer Order," said Dr. Rebecca Nanyonjo-Kemp, the Department of Public Health Director.

Here are a few things you can do that are socially appropriate and mentally refreshing during your Memorial Day Weekend:

- 1. Nature exploration** with proper social distancing can happen in your yard, during a walk or bike ride, through a table-top garden, or even [virtually](#) (though not with all of the benefits).
 - a. Bring out the stroller and walk your infant.
 - b. Let your elementary aged children find twigs and leaves to build a nature sculpture.
 - c. Keep older children and teens engaged outdoors through creating a nature journal where they can write or draw how they feel.
 - d. Hold a scavenger hunt for the family. Include categories like plants, trees, animals, and birds. How many different flowers can you photograph? How many signs of spring can you find?
- 2. Create.** Cooking a meal, painting a picture, or gardening are ways to fulfill our need to experience growth and progression. Don't be afraid to get into the dirt or try a new recipe.

3. **Play ball.** Playing catch or kicking a soccer ball can be fine if you are apart from each other and don't share any sports equipment with others outside your household.
4. **Meditate or pray.** Research shows that taking just 5 minutes to meditate or pray can lower stress levels, improve sleep, prevent depression relapses, and can assist with restoring positive mindfulness.
5. **Move your body.** Take deep breaths, stretch, and eat regular meals. Our minds and bodies are interconnected. The more you move the stronger you feel.
6. **Connect with others.** Talk with people you trust and feel close to you. Using FaceTime, Skype or other digital tools to see that your loved ones are safe and sound will decrease anxieties and fears. Reconnecting is a great way to re-center.

Research has found that when people spent time in natural settings or took just 5 minutes to re-center, they had less [anger and aggression](#). Impulse control also improves in children. This is especially important because normal routines have changed.

Remember knowing the signs of anxiety, depression, loneliness is just as important as knowing the signs of COVID-19.

BHRS understands that these unpredictable times can be difficult, so if you need support, community resources, or just someone to talk to, **we are here for you.**

Please feel free to reach out (via email or phone) to BHRS:

Toll Free: 1-888-334-0163

TDD/TYY: 1-866-293-1818

Staff is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Email: bhrs@countyofmerced.com

Behavioral health resources can also be found on the Merced County COVID-19 website: www.countyofmerced.com/coronavirus.