

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS: FINDING JOY IN THE NEW YEAR

The holidays can bring added stress and anxiety. There can be extra spending, extra eating, extra time with family and friends, and extra emotions with the potential of love and/or loss. The outside pressures of daily life can also pile on and steal your joy. Yet, there is good news ahead. The new year offers a chance for a new beginning. A new opportunity to find and keep JOY in your life.

So why joy? Joy is a powerful emotion. Joy is often compared to happiness; yet they are very different emotions. Research states that “*happiness refers to the pleasurable feelings (emotions) that result from a situation, experience, or objects, whereas **joy** is a state of mind that can be found even in times of grief or uncertainty.*” Happiness is often the result of a reaction to something, whereas joy comes from within. This speaks to the importance of having a mindset of joy.

A great benefit of joy is that it can increase your physical and mental well-being. Several studies have shown that depression, anxiety, and other challenges to your mental health can affect your physical health. The lack of joy can lead to neglecting your health and creating unhealthy lifestyles. Anxiety and depression can lead to a lack of sleep, poor eating habits, a lack of energy, and physical ailments. Joy can bring about positive moods and a positive mindset. When joy is infused into your life, despite your circumstances, sleep patterns may improve, there may be a better focus on healthy eating and exercise, increased energy, and long-lasting health benefits. Another benefit of joy is improved mental well-being and lower stress. It is time to shift your mental state and find joy.

Joy is not difficult to find. In fact, there are some simple ways to bring joy into your life as you begin this new year. Here are a few to get you started:

Smiling and laughing help to relax the body.

Try or learn something new.

Find an activity you enjoy but haven't found time to do. Make time.

Face your troubles head on and make a plan to conquer them slowly.

Read a motivational book.

Try meditation or yoga.

Volunteer and make a difference in the life of someone else.

Exercise, hike, or go for a walk.

Connect with friends who add value to your life.

Listen to music. Sing out loud. Dance, dance, dance!

As you take on this new year, limit negativity and create moments of joy each and every day.