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MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS
WHAT NOW? - MENTAL HEALTH AFTER COVID
By AUA University Counseling Center

The mental and mortal wounds Covid-19 inflicted on our society has been believed to exceed that caused by World War II, according to WHO's Director-General. Antigua's 108 square miles, with our population of about 100,000, has certainly been terrorized by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Seeing that the pandemic is over, and Covid-19 appears to be drifting away, the question remains, *What Now?* With clear observations the mental scars left by the pandemic on our collective experiences appears not to be going away anytime soon despite the pandemic being declared as over. The fact is that transitioning back to a society's "normal lifestyle" can unconsciously re-open those wounds without intention. If persons find themselves trying to navigate, but experience some levels of anxiety or worry, it is fair to recognize that they are not alone. Like PTSD, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, daily efforts can be disrupted by intense emotional or physical reactions.

As restrictions are getting more relaxed, schools and communities are encouraged to return to what was normal. However, societies may begin to see the mental health effects impacted by the pandemic as this occurs. The younger generation could exhibit the worst of the pandemic trauma as children may start to show social withdrawal, increased anxiety, hopelessness or powerlessness, sleep disturbances, numbness, loss of appetite, depression, or substance misuse. As the full impact of the pandemic is beginning to be realized, the adverse effect on our mental health is yet to be properly observed. Moreover, persons who have experienced pre-pandemic mental health issues could be at risk of experiencing worsening effects.

Some of the evidence that describes mental health and its impact as covid drifts can be detected from the groups that experienced job loss, friend or family loss, and even spiritual stagnancy. The two ends of the spectrum appear to have swung from the feelings of loss of social connections during the pandemic to a fearful awkwardness when attempting to reconnect socially. Individuals who work from home ever since the pandemic could face an aversion of in-person interactions. There are ways to be proactive in contributing to one's mental health status as covid drifts. Some of the positive ways we can be of support to self and others can be of value with mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Here are three ways:

Living life one day at a time. The acknowledgement and recognition of certain activities that makes you uncomfortable. Make a list of such feelings and see how they relate to the activities. Support usually comes with the help of support groups and taking baby steps into activities you hope to enjoy once again.

Be Creative. Connecting with people who understand and can empathize with your emotions is vital. Virtual classes, book clubs, and social meetups can be beneficial in satisfying one's social needs if they are not ready to explore being outdoors just yet. Always remember that adequate rest is an essential factor in allowing the brain to function healthy and be creative.



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Consider therapy. A safe space to share feelings with someone goes a far way. Getting engaged with interventions such as professional psychological support, support groups, group therapy, and spirituality allows individuals to not only feel better about themselves but guides to balance with wellbeing. It is also recommended that where medication is necessary that this also helps with one's mental health.