



Becoming a **WISE Congregation for Mental Health**

mhn-ucc.org

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Greetings from . . .



United Church of Christ
MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK™

- The UCC Mental Health Network was created in 1992 to help congregations become places of radical belonging that reduce stigma and actively include individuals living with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and other brain differences into the life, leadership, and work of the congregation.
- Today, the UCC Mental Health Network supports faith communities—from Congregations to Conferences—in becoming WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged) for Mental Health.

[**www.mhn-ucc.org**](http://www.mhn-ucc.org)

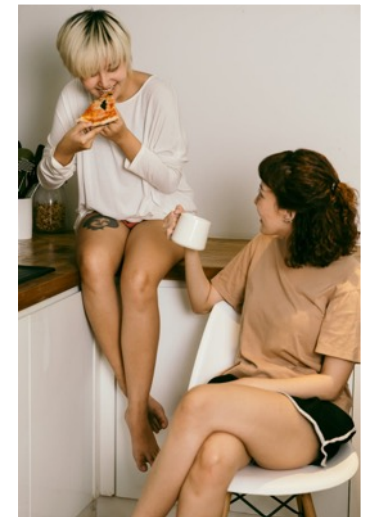
What is Mental Health?



According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.”

Another way to describe this is in terms of the 4 L's: Live, Laugh, Learn, and Love (ourselves and other people).

Mental health occurs on a continuum. It is impacted by our genetics, experiences, and environment.





Startling Statistics

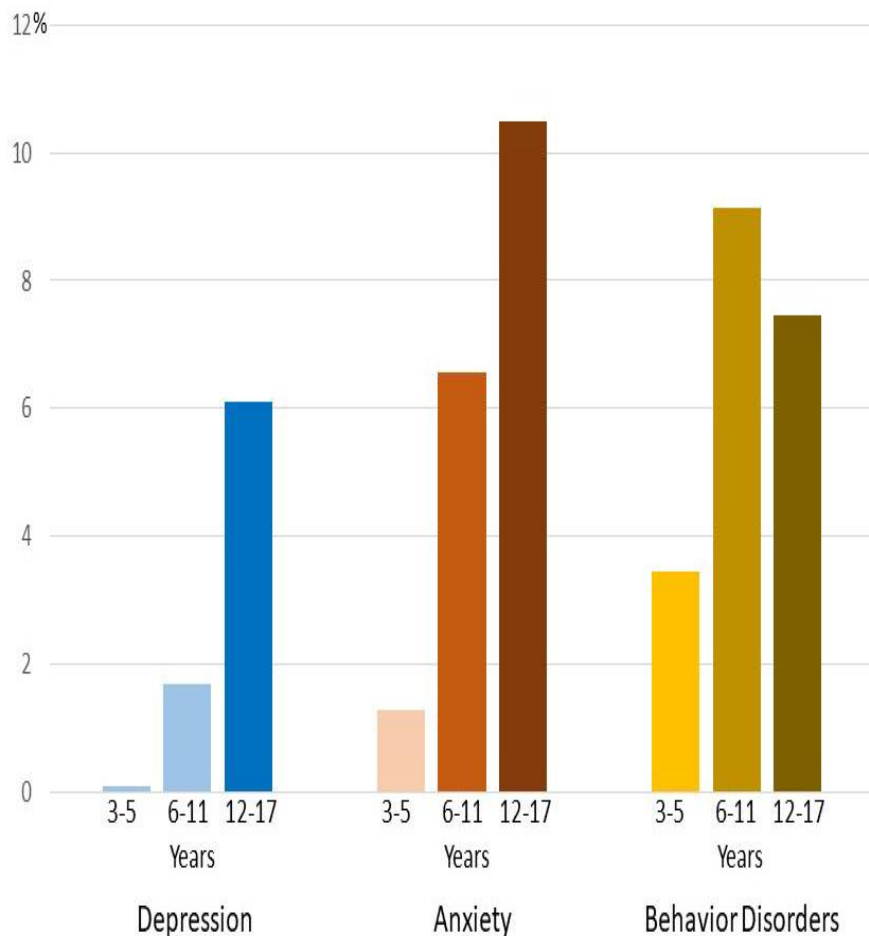


1 in 6 children aged 2-8 years has a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.

- **Suicide was the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34**, and the fourth leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 35 and 54 in the United States. (American Foundation of Suicide Prevention)
- **Approximately eight percent of the population age 12 and older have a substance use disorder in any given year.** (National Council of Behavioral Health)
- **People from racial/ethnic minority groups are less likely to receive mental health care.** In 2015, among adults with any mental illness, forty-eight percent of whites received mental health services, compared with thirty-one percent of African Americans and Hispanic Americans, and twenty-two percent of Asian Americans. (National Institute of Mental Health)
- **Jails and prisons house ten times more individuals with serious mental illnesses than state mental hospitals.** (“Inside the nation's largest mental health institution: a prevalence study in a state prison system.” BMC Public Health Journal, 17(1), 342. (2017))

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Depression, Anxiety, Behavior Disorders, by Age



Mental health conditions are common among teens and young adults. 50% of all lifetime mental illnesses develop by age 14 and 75% develop by age 24.

1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2–8 years (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.⁵

Minority Mental Health

Black/African American Community

Percent of African Americans with Mental Illness: 17%

Number of African Americans with Mental Illness: 6.8 million

Latinx/Hispanic American Community

Percent of Latinx/Hispanic Americans with Mental Illness: 15%

Number of Latinx/Hispanic Americans with Mental Illness: 8.9 million

Asian American/Pacific Islander Community

Percent of Asian Americans with Mental Illness: 13%

Number of Asian Americans with Mental Illness: 2.2 million

Native and Indigenous Communities

Percent of Native Americans/Alaskan Natives with Mental Illness: 23%

Number of Native Americans/Alaskan Natives with Mental Illness: 830,000

Multiracial

Percent of people who identify as being 2 or more races w/ mental illness: 25%

People who identify as being two or more races are most likely to report any mental illness within the past year than any other race/ethnic group.





LGBTQIA+



- LGBTQ older adults face a number of unique challenges, including the combination of anti-LGBTQ stigma and ageism. Approximately 31% of LGBTQ older adults report depressive symptoms; 39% report serious thoughts of taking their own lives.¹¹
- The rate of suicide attempts is four times greater for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth and two times greater for questioning youth than that of heterosexual youth.¹⁰

Sexual Orientation

Considered Attempting Suicide

Heterosexual

2.3%

Gay or Lesbian

4.4%

Bisexual

7.4%

Transgender

30.8%

Source: Mass. Dept. of Public Health, 2009

Challenges to Mental Health Amid COVID 19



- In a recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll, **nearly half (45%) of adults in the United States reported that their mental health has been negatively impacted** due to worry and stress over the virus.
- **Across the country, calls to helplines have spiked.** The Disaster Distress Helpline, operated by the federal government, saw a 880% increase in calls and a 1000% percent increase in texts.
- Illness, death, job loss, alterations to our daily routine, decreased human interactions, financial difficulties and poverty, increased violence, and oppression and segregation, **cause an influx of grief, sense of helplessness, confusion, distress, and traumatic stress to individuals.**
- **We are experiencing a collective trauma.** Like 9/11, during COVID 19 we are living through a traumatic experience that affects and involves entire communities. It brings distress and negative consequences to individuals, but can also change the entire fabric of a community.



"Many people living with mental illness are shunned, feared and discriminated against. . . . Consequently, they are not included in the network of care our congregations normally extend to a member who is ill. They struggle through alone or with the help of a few close family members they trust to keep their illnesses secret."

*Rev. Alan Johnson
2015 United Church of Christ General*



A Solution: **WISE Faith Communities for Mental Health**



Certified WISE Congregations, Faith Communities, and Organizations covenant to become, and intentionally remain, sacred places of radical belonging that are WISE: Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive & Engaged with individuals experiencing mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and brain disorders.



The Process of Becoming WISE



To become certified as WISE, faith communities must journey through the 10 Steps to Become WISE for Mental Health in partnership with the UCC Mental Health Network. This typically takes one to three years.

Fulfilling all the WISE steps ensures that a faith community has engaged in education on mental health challenges and examined its overt and unconscious stigma around mental illness, substance use disorders, and brain differences.



There are currently 24 WISE Congregations across the country: from Buffalo, NY to Spring, TX and Henderson, NC to Berkeley, CA.

WELCOMING

1. **Consult with your ministers and leader(s)**
2. **Form a WISE Team**
3. **Connect with the UCC Mental Health Network and a WISE liaison**



Practical Tips

- Invite individuals and families living with mental health and substance use challenges, as well as people from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds to your WISE Team.
- Do a survey of members to see the level of knowledge and interest in mental health. You can find survey examples at www.mhn-ucc.org
- Check out the INMI website for resources at www.inmi.us.

INCLUSIVE

4. Develop an approach that leads to the congregation's vote to become **WISE for Mental Health**

This ideally includes events that educate, engage members in advocacy, and address minority mental health. Contact your WISE Liaison for resources.

5. Draft your **WISE covenant** *and share it with your WISE Liaison. You can use IKC UCC's Covenant as an example. Others are available on at www.mhn-ucc.org*

6. Involve your community's leadership in the **WISE covenant**



Practical Tips

- Consider how your community will address the lack of access to mental health care in minority communities
- Discuss how the Association may provide crisis resource information for LGBTQIA+ individuals (who have a higher suicide rate than the general population) while still honoring theological differences.

SUPPORTIVE

7. **Vote to adopt the WISE Covenant.**
8. **Certify your faith community and celebrate becoming WISE**



Practical Tips

- Continue to reach out to anyone who voted against your WISE Covenant. Are there concerns you can address?
- Share the result of your congregational vote with UCC MHN
- Take time to celebrate as a community!

ENGAGED

9. **Publicize your WISEdom**
10. **Turn to the future**



Practical Tips

- Continue to support your faith leaders as WISE programs are implemented. UCC MHN connects with WISE communities annually to learn from your successes.
- You are now community leaders that offer belonging for members of the community with mental health challenges. Share with the media!
- Celebrate becoming WISE each year on the anniversary of your WISE Covenant.
- Connect with local advocacy and behavioral health organizations, like NAMI, Mental Health America, hospitals, mental health systems, your city government, and even your state's health and human services department.
- Determine how your congregation will offer financial support to the UCC MHN each year.

Examples of WISE Actions



- * Check out the UCC MHN website, follow our Facebook page, and sign up for the UCC MHN email list to get the latest resources.
- * Celebrate Mental Health Sunday each year
- * Connect with other Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGS) working on racial justice in the UCC, Colectivo de UCC Latinx Ministries, United Samoan Ministries, Pacific Islander & Asian American Ministries (PAAM), and the Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM)
- * Find additional resources on LGBTQIA+ justice at the Open & Affirming Ministries' website and the Trevor Project.
- * Provide spiritual support groups in local behavioral health community centers and to racial justice, immigrant justice, environmental justice, and LGBTQIA+ justice groups.
- * Hold Mental Health First Aid training for your members and the larger community
- * Host a book study group and read books on mental health by people from minority and LGBTQIA+ communities: Blessed Are The Crazy, Black Mental Health Matters, The Lifesaving Church, Bipolar Faith
- * Start a mental health support group or host a NAMI group at your congregation
- * Write emails and make calls to your legislators in support of bills increasing access to mental health and substance use services.



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Thank You!

How can we help your congregation become WISE?

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