

# NEW BEGINNINGS IN COMMUNITY LIVING

Newsletter of the Community Living Education Project • Rutgers School of Public Health  
*Educating individuals, families and professionals about possibilities in community living*

SPRING 2020 Volume 15

## *Social Distance Does Not Have to Equal Social Isolation*

By Antoinette S. Johnson

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, we have all become familiar with the term “social distancing” and best practices for maintaining appropriate social distance from one another. However, social distancing can come with a price to mental and physical well-being, particularly for those who may already experience isolation.

For individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), social isolation occurs due to “...lack of social contact with friends, lack of emotional ‘connection’ with friends and society, lack of day-to-day participation in society, and conflicts with family and friends,” according to an article written by Disability Researchers entitled, *Disabled Social Isolation*. The article also states that an individual with a disability has a shorter life expectancy “...due to poorer quality of life.”

According to Sujata Gupta, from the article entitled, *Social distancing comes with psychological fallout*, some of the short- and long-term issues related to mental health include “...stress, insomnia, emotional exhaustion, substance abuse, anxiety, and depression.” To lessen the pain associated with mental health and psychological distress, some individuals have turned to alcohol to ease their pain. Also, regular communication is essential.

Phil McCabe, a Health Educator for the Rutgers School of Public Health, who is also a Disaster Response Crisis Counselor and social worker, shared his views on COVID-19 and the effects on mental health. As he assists the Monmouth County Department of



Health with helpline calls related to COVID-19, he states that according to his experience, despite the stress that comes about in moments of difficulty, some “...older Americans are very adaptable to diverse and difficult situations. Typically, they are often the individuals who are calling because they have concern for someone else. As a social worker, I often listen to what is being said, but also how it’s being said.”

During the pandemic, we have seen individuals display incredible levels of resiliency. The word “resilient” seems to be a rallying cry for many seeking refuge and security during this time. It takes a certain amount of resiliency when you’re in social isolation while social distancing. According to Phil, “Some people think resiliency is something you’re born with, which is inaccurate. The ability to recover, recuperate from, or adjust easily to a difficult situation is how we view resiliency. When teaching resiliency, I use the example of a spring. We see the spring often as a tight coil; we also know it can be expanded, stretched even to what seems beyond its capacity. Eventually, a spring will still return to its original shape.” Phil continues, “To summarize, resiliency is adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, and other sources of stress.”



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As mentioned by Phil, according to the CDC website, ways to cope with stress include:

- Taking breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media.
- Taking care of your body – do deep breathing, exercise, eat healthy well-balanced meals, get plenty of sleep, avoid alcohol and drug misuse.
- Making time to unwind by participating in activities you enjoy.
- Connecting with others – talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you feel.

While adapting to the “new normal” each day, Phil noted that people are coping with physical distancing as well as other “major changes to everyday life, such as home confinement. Their families may struggle to meet their basic physical and emotional needs, financial concerns, and loss of employment.” Moreover, for individuals who receive supports and services, they are concerned about losing those services, adding to stress levels. Keeping in touch with one another is an important way to diminish stress and social isolation.

The capacity to survive is a fantastic feat that Phil has felt while answering the helpline. “As with my work in previous disasters, I am often amazed at the ability of the human spirit to endure and survive. People helping each other during difficult times is amazing to bear witness. And like other situations, we will get through this.”

We can all help with eliminating social isolation. It starts with recognizing dangerous situations and understanding that we all have value and deserve inclusion in society. There are many great things happening in the human experience lately. People are displaying more warmth, service-oriented behavior, showing love, kindness, and patience with one another.

Dealing with the coronavirus has allowed us to become creative in our interactions. We are keeping in touch with our loved ones and friends through the use of mobile technology via video conferencing. We are making more of an effort to check on those with whom we are connected. When this pandemic is over, we can evaluate what we’ve learned about one another, and hopefully, that evaluation will show that individuals are more compassionate than previously thought.

One day, social distancing will become a thing of the past. When it does, hopefully, we will continue to be kinder, warmer, and more thoughtful people. Truthfully, no one has to suffer through the emotional toll that social isolation and distancing can cause, due to the creative ways of including each other in the community. Life is precious, and each person deserves to live their best life and have inclusion in society.



Article contributions were made by Philip T. McCabe CSW, CAS, DRCC, a Certified Social Worker, Nationally Certified Addiction Specialist in the areas of Compulsive Gambling, Alcoholism, Tobacco, Other Drugs, and Sex Addiction. He is a Disaster Response Crisis Counselor and has over 34 years of experience.

Phil is a Health Educator for Rutgers School of Public Health and an instructor for the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Rutgers School of Social Work, and Rutgers School of Nursing.

***Be sure to see page 4 for links to Phil’s webinars on Resiliency and important ways to help manage through this challenging time.***

#### **References:**

Disabled Social Isolation: <https://www.disability-researchers.com/disabled-social-isolation>

Social Distancing with Psychological Fallout: <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/coronavirus-covid-19-social-distancing-psychological-fallout>

# Coronavirus Information and Resources

The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) recommends that everyone - regardless of age or disabilities - take the same basic precautions to avoid illness. Here are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy!

- [Wear a mask](#) when you have to go out in public, to protect others in case you are infected. The mask can be store-bought, made out of a t-shirt, or even a bandana. There are several tutorials about how to make masks on the internet. For a very helpful, plain-language explanation of why we need to wear masks at this time, check out '[Masks Keep Us Safe](#)', developed by EasterSeals of Chicago.
- [Wash your hands often](#) with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing; going to the bathroom; and before eating or preparing food. Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when you can't use soap and water.
- Avoid close contact with people outside of your home, staying at least six feet away from others. This is especially important if someone is sick.
- [Stay home when you are sick](#) - whether it's corona-virus related or the flu
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. Be sure to wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- [Clean and disinfect frequently](#) touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipes. To learn more about cleaning and disinfecting, be sure to view CLEP's recent webinar, [Hygiene, Sanitizing and Disinfecting in the COVID-19 World](#), with Jack Caravanos, DrPH, CIH, from the NYU College of Global Public Health.

**Additional Resource Information on Page 4!**

## Living in the Moment: Moving from Tragedy to Triumph

By Antoinette S. Johnson

We have all heard the saying "there's a reason for everything." I would add to that and say there's a reason for everything and how you handle things makes all the difference in the world. Human beings experience varied levels of tragedy. Handle each tragedy with care so that you move to triumph.

There are moments in life when tragedy comes as a surprise, and life is certainly not perfect. However, as long as we are alive, we can get through anything that comes our way. What do you do to center and calm yourself? Do you have a "go to" exercise that helps you become centered? Exercises like talking with someone who has a positive spirit, deep breathing, counting to ten, focusing on something still, and

going to a quiet place are helpful with moving from tragedy to triumph.

In addition to centering exercises, set a goal to determine other ways to move into your triumph.

Allow yourself time to process the tragedy. You will start to break free from it at a certain point so that it doesn't hold you back or down. Life is going to throw curve balls that you must duck. You will make it through the tragedy one day soon. Keep on striving and think as many positive thoughts that your mind will allow. Remember, we need rain for the flowers to grow and the sun always shines after the rain. Be well.



**We're Open!**

Funded by the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), the CLEP team works to educate individuals and families interested in exploring a transition to community living. The CLEP team are family members, who recognize the importance of person-centered planning. CLEP helps by gathering pertinent information regarding their loved one, by listening and learning about their support needs, what is important to/for them, along with learning about their hopes and dreams.

**CLEP Team  
Continues to Serve During Pandemic**

With state restrictions in place, CLEP quickly re-invented how they can assist individuals and families. Natalie Trump and Melanie McGackin have managed to continue this important work by using video conferencing tools to bring together all members of an individual's circle of support. These members may include family, system partners, and provider agencies.

For those young adults transitioning from the Children Systems of Care (CSOC) into DDD adult services, CLEP has engaged participation from school-based professionals, behavior support teams, CMO and DDD case management. According to Natalie, "I never would have imagined CLEP could continue to support the families without in-person visits to homes and apartments in the community during this time of social distancing. I am amazed and so happy to be able to continue our work educating and mentoring families."

If your loved one is seeking community living options, or is transitioning from CSOC to residential services through DDD, CLEP is here to assist. We are open for business - please call!

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**Additional resources,  
continued from page 3**

[Coronavirus Info](#)

[Stress and Coping \(CDC\)](#)

[Mental Health Telephone Support](#)

[COVID-19 and Autism in NJ](#)

[Infection Prevention and Control](#)

[Recommendations \(CDC\)](#)

[10 Things to Manage COVID-19 at home \(CDC\)](#)

**Webinar Series:  
Our New Normal is Not Normal**

CLEP recently co-sponsored a three-part webinar series with the Center for Public Health Workforce Development at the School of Public Health, featuring social worker / health educator Philip T. McCabe, CSW, CAS, CDVC, DRCC. Each is less than one hour, and focuses on resiliency, with many suggestions on how to manage through this difficult time.  
*Did you miss them? Check out the links below.*

[Part 1: Resiliency Skills](#)

[Part 2: The Importance of Rituals in Our Daily Lives](#)

[Part 3: Managing Grief and Loss](#)

**CLEP is funded by a grant provided by the New Jersey  
State Department of Human Services Division of Developmental Disabilities**

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