



Know! May Is Mental Health Month

In celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month, Mental Health America (MHA) is sharing practical tools that everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase their resiliency.

While one in five people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. In fact, among the people who took an anxiety screen at mhascreening.org in 2020, 64% felt afraid, as if something awful might happen at least half of the time or nearly every day. Another 50% of people who took MHA's depression screening in 2020 reported feeling that they were a failure or had let their families down nearly every day.

It's easy to fall into negative thinking patterns and spend time bullying yourself, dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. It's part of how we're wired—the human brain reacts more intensely to negative events than to positive ones and is more likely to remember insults than praise. During tough times, negative thoughts are especially likely to spiral out of control. When these thoughts make something out to be worse in your head than it's in reality, they are called cognitive distortions.

Some common cognitive distortions include:

Overgeneralization: Making a broad statement based on one situation or piece of evidence.

Personalization: Blaming yourself for events beyond your control; taking things personally when they aren't actually connected to you.

Filtering: Focusing on the negative details of a situation while ignoring the positive.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Only seeing the extremes of a situation.

Catastrophizing: Blowing things out of proportion; dwelling on the worst possible outcomes.

Jumping to Conclusions: Judging or deciding something without all the facts.

Emotional Reasoning: Thinking that what you feel is fully and unarguably true.

Discounting the Positive: Explaining all positives away as luck or coincidence.

“Should” Statements: Making yourself feel guilty by pointing out what you should or shouldn’t be doing, feeling or thinking.

MHA provides these tips for challenging negative thoughts:

Reframe. Think of a different way to view the situation. If your negative thought is “I can’t do anything right,” a kinder way to reframe it is, “I messed up, but nobody’s perfect” or a more constructive thought is “I messed up, but now I know to prepare more for next time.” It can be hard to do this when you’re feeling down on yourself, so ask yourself what you’d tell your best friend if they were saying those things about themselves.

Prove yourself wrong. The things you do impact how you feel—what actions can you take to combat your negative thoughts? For instance, if you’re telling yourself, you aren’t smart because you don’t understand how the stock market works, learn more about a subject you understand and enjoy, like history. If you feel like no one cares about you, call a friend. Give yourself evidence that these thoughts aren’t entirely true.

Counter negative thoughts with positive ones. When you catch your inner dialogue being mean to you, make yourself say something nice to balance it out. This may feel cheesy at first and self-love can be hard, so don’t give up if it feels awkward in the beginning. Name things you love, like or even just don’t hate about yourself—we all have to start somewhere!

Remember: thoughts aren’t facts. Your thoughts and feelings are valid, but they aren’t always reality. You might feel ugly, but that doesn’t mean you are. Often, we can be our own worst enemies—other people are seeing us in a much nicer light than how we see ourselves.

There are practical tools everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase resiliency, regardless of the situations they are dealing with. One way to check in with yourself is to take a mental health screen at [MHAscreening.org](https://www.mhascreeing.org). It’s a quick, free and private way to assess one’s mental health and recognize signs of mental health problems. Living a healthy lifestyle and incorporating mental health tools to thrive may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes.

For more tools and information from Mental Health America, and to access the #Tools2Thrive outreach kit in its entirety, visit mhanational.org/mental-health-month.

Sources

[Mental Health America, May is Mental Health Month: Tools2Thrive Outreach Kit. 2021.](#)

About Know! Teachable Moments

Everyone has a role in prevention. By reading this Know! Teachable Moment today, you're doing your part to prevent substance misuse and create a healthier world for all.

We created these free tips to empower teachers and educators like you. Know! helps you promote health and wellness and protect your students from unhealthy behaviors, including alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. However, we rely on donations from people like you to provide these tips. If you found this tip interesting or helpful, [please consider donating at preventionactionalliance.org/donate](https://preventionactionalliance.org/donate).

Know! Teachable Moments are provided by Prevention Action Alliance with support from the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, the Ohio Department of Education, and Start Talking!.

[Know! Parent Tips are also available in Spanish at the Know! archives.](#)

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