



# It's Up to Us<sup>®</sup>

to Create a Healthy & Supportive San Diego

A special bulletin covering mental health topics for San Diegans



Edition Twenty-Eight

## About the Campaign

The "It's Up to Us" campaign is designed to empower San Diegans to talk openly about mental illness, recognize symptoms, utilize local resources, and seek help. By raising awareness and providing access to local resources, we aim to inspire wellness, reduce stigma, and prevent suicide.

Recovery is possible and help is available. It's Up to Us to make a difference in the lives of San Diegans experiencing mental health challenges by offering support and providing opportunities.

This campaign is developed through the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency and supports the County's *Live Well San Diego* vision to promote a community that is healthy, safe, and thriving.

**Up2SD.org<sup>®</sup>**  
LINK UP FOR INFORMATION AND MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Access & Crisis Line  
**(888) 724-7240**

COMMUNITY RESOURCES  
**2-1-1**



## Read Up:

### Loneliness and Your Health

Experts say that loneliness has the same negative effects on health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is more dangerous than obesity.

Despite our busy lives, whirlwind of activities, and crammed schedules, the average person in the United States has only one close friend, according to a recent report in the *American Sociological Review*. One in four people do not have any confidantes at all.

We have unlimited data and the ability to make immediate connections anywhere in the world, yet loneliness is increasing. Feelings of loneliness or emotional isolation can have a strong impact on our mental health. These feelings affect a region of the brain that manages emotion and helps us deal with stress and anxiety. Studies show that feeling lonely can lead to depression, anxiety, and irritability, and it can make it harder to interact with others. It has also been tied to physical health issues such as inflammation in the body and high blood pressure.

It's hard to pinpoint a precise measure of loneliness; someone could feel alone or emotionally isolated even though they are surrounded by family and friends. Conversely, someone else may be perfectly content having few close friends or enjoy living alone. Loneliness is typically defined as having less emotional connection than one desires.

Everyone is at risk for loneliness, but, according to a recent study by Cigna, teens and young adults are more prone to feelings of loneliness than other age groups. Generation Z (adults aged 18–22) and Millennials (adults aged 23–37) are lonelier and claim to be in worse health than older generations.

A major consideration in safeguarding against loneliness is the *quality* (not the quantity) of a person's meaningful face-to-face interactions. It's thought that quality friendships can really protect against feelings of isolation. It's well known that human connection is vital to life, but meaningful relationships are what make life purposeful.

### What can you do if you're experiencing feelings of loneliness?

- **Reach out to others.** Call a family member or get together with a friend in person.
- **Move from small talk to real talk.** Make it a point to bring up meaningful conversation topics, practice active listening, and share what is on your mind.
- **Join or organize a social gathering such as a book club.** Suggest everyone bring a guest, to get to know new people. Be patient and persistent until you find a group or activity with the right fit for you.
- **Volunteer.** Visit Up2SD.org for volunteer opportunities and other ways to get involved in your community.



**Did You Know?** Feelings of loneliness or emotional isolation, experienced by three out of four Americans, can have a strong impact on our mental health. *Source: International Psychogeriatrics, 2018*

## Get Up and Participate:

### Get Outside – Nature and Your Brain Health

We all know that going for a walk is good for our physical health, but research shows that getting outside in nature is good for our mental health as well. Exercising or even just spending time in the great outdoors can reap positive benefits for the brain. Nature calms our minds, lowering blood pressure and reducing stress and anxiety, and can decrease activity in areas of the brain linked to depression. Other benefits include increased energy, improved focus and clarity, better sleep quality, and an immediate effect on elevating our overall mood.

#### What can you do to get more nature into your life?

- Take your exercise routine to the outdoors: walking, biking, and hiking are all great ways to exercise while soaking up nature.
- Walk for a good cause! Examples include the National Alliance on Mental Illness annual Walk for Mental Health ([NAMIWalks.org/SanDiegoCounty](http://NAMIWalks.org/SanDiegoCounty)); the Walk in Remembrance with Hope ([WalkingInHopeSD.org](http://WalkingInHopeSD.org)) for suicide prevention; and the Out of the Darkness Walk sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention ([AFSP.org](http://AFSP.org)).
- Engage your senses to fully relax and de-stress: breathe deeply and really absorb the sights and sounds that nature has to offer.
- Plan a camping trip with loved ones: spending a longer period of time in nature will help you fully disconnect.
- Team up with your family, kids, or friends and try out one of SoCal's outdoor challenges. Examples include the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy Coast to Crest Trail Challenge, which is also known as the C2C Challenge ([SDRVC.org/Coast-to-Crest-Trail-Challenge](http://SDRVC.org/Coast-to-Crest-Trail-Challenge)); the 52 Hike Challenge, which helps you get outdoors once a week for a year ([52HikeChallenge.com](http://52HikeChallenge.com)); and San Diego's 5-Peak Challenge ([MTRP.org/5-Peak-Challenge](http://MTRP.org/5-Peak-Challenge)).

## Shine a Light On: Mindfulness

Several evidence-based treatments have been shown to relieve stress and anxiety, lower depression, increase self-compassion, and improve our overall health—one of those is mindfulness.

Mindfulness is the art of being present in the moment and aware of our thoughts and feelings, without worrying about the past or being anxious for the future. Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is a modified form of cognitive therapy that incorporates mindfulness practices such as meditation and breathing exercises. MBCT has been shown to produce powerful health benefits, including higher brain functioning, lowered blood pressure, improved ability to better regulate emotions, lowered heart rate, and an increase in the experience of feeling connected.

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*“If you truly want to change your life, you must be willing to change your mind.”*

*– Donald Altman, M.A. LPC, psychotherapist*

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# Liven Up Your Health:

## Pets and Mental Health Go 'Hand in Paw'

Sixty-eight percent of U.S. households report owning a pet. And San Diego has been ranked among the most pet-friendly cities in America.

Pets have revolutionized our everyday lives: pet-friendly cafes, restaurants, and bars are mainstream; dog-friendly activities have become social events; and dog water bowls are placed outside many local shops and businesses. Our “fur babies” have the power to help us heal, cope, and improve our overall mental health. Even animal therapy is on the rise, confirming that social support—a proven defense against anxiety and loneliness—doesn’t just come from our human counterparts.

- Pets provide a calming effect on their owners, providing comfort and companionship.
- Simply interacting with a pet has shown to increase levels of oxytocin, the “love hormone,” while decreasing levels of the stress hormone, cortisol.
- Studies have shown that hanging out with a pet results in a decreased heart rate and lowered blood pressure.
- Dogs specifically are great motivators to go out and exercise, which has physical and mental health benefits. Regular exercise can help those experiencing depression.
- Taking your dog for a walk or to the dog park can lead to socializing and interacting with others, providing opportunities to strengthen mental health.



### Amazing Animal Facts

Horses have been involved in medical treatment plans in Europe since the 1860s. Spending time with horses, such as grooming them, has shown to reduce symptoms of PTSD in children and adolescents.

Dogs have a sense of time; they know the difference between you being gone for an hour or all day.

Guinea pigs in a classroom setting had a positive impact on children with autism; the children were more social with their peers, smiled and laughed more, and showed reduced stress.

Sea otters hold hands while sleeping so they don't drift apart.

Prairie dogs say hello by kissing.

Cats meow to communicate with humans, not with other cats.

### Support Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Awareness

Connect with the “It’s Up to Us” campaign for inspirational messages, educational facts, local resources, information on symptoms of mental illness, warning signs of suicide, updates on mental health and prevention efforts, and more!

Continue the conversation here:

 **Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/up2sd](http://www.facebook.com/up2sd)

 **YouTube:** [www.youtube.com/user/up2sd](http://www.youtube.com/user/up2sd)

**Prefer Paperless?** To view this campaign bulletin online or download as a PDF, visit: [Up2SD.org/Bulletins](http://Up2SD.org/Bulletins).

## SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE

These signs may mean someone is at risk for suicide. Risk is greater if the behavior is new or has increased and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

### Warning Signs

- ▶ Talking about wanting to die
- ▶ Looking for a way to kill oneself
- ▶ Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- ▶ Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- ▶ Talking about being a burden to others
- ▶ Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- ▶ Acting anxious, agitated, or reckless
- ▶ Sleeping too little or too much
- ▶ Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- ▶ Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- ▶ Displaying extreme mood swings

### What to Do

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide:

- ▶ Do not leave the person alone
- ▶ Remove any firearms, drugs, alcohol, or sharp objects that could be used in an attempt
- ▶ For life-threatening emergencies or immediate response, call 9-1-1
- ▶ For urgent and other concerns, contact the Access & Crisis Line at (888) 724-7240

## Growing Up:

### Helping Our Children Cope with Stress (yes, that's a thing!)

From academic pressure such as a heavy homework load, jam-packed schedules, and highly competitive sports, to the anxiety of appearing perfect on social media, youth experience more stress and pressure than ever before. The "everyone gets a trophy" mentality may not benefit our youth either, as it hinders the understanding that it's okay to fail sometimes and how to cope with this eventuality. The following tips for parents and caregivers might help with lowering your kids' stress levels:

- Don't avoid the hard stuff. Kids need to learn to embrace challenges and build resiliency for when times get tough down the road.
- Learn how to be mindful in stressful situations. Teach kids to be present and observe how they are feeling. Encouraging them to breathe deeply can be a highly effective stress reducer.
- Have open conversations. It's important to talk with your kids about stress and have open conversations so they feel more comfortable coming to you during tough times.
- Model good behavior. How do you react to stress? Stress is contagious, as are other emotions. If you are able to reduce your own stress or react positively to it, your kids will be more likely to better cope when it comes their way.



## NEED TO TALK TO SOMEONE?

Unsure of where to go for help? Chat online or call a counselor today!

- Free confidential support
- Crisis intervention and suicide prevention
- Referrals for mental health and/or alcohol and drug related needs



### SAN DIEGO ACCESS & CRISIS LINE

- All languages
  - 7 days a week / 24 hours a day
- (888) 724-7240

### LIVE CHAT

- Chat with a counselor today!
  - Available Mon–Fri 4–10 p.m.
- Visit: [OptumHealthSanDiego.com](http://OptumHealthSanDiego.com) or [Up2SD.org](http://Up2SD.org)

COMMUNITY RESOURCES DIAL 2-1-1

