Chronic Illness & Mental Health:

Understanding the Impact of Chronic Illness on Mental Health &

Coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hosted by: Center of Chronic Illness & Seattle University's

Public Health Internship Nursing Students











CCI Health Education Team

Allison Fine, MSW, LICSW - Executive Director & Founder of CCI

Kerry Heckman, MSW, LICSW – CCI Support Group Facilitator

Natalie Hopkins, MSW, LSWAIC - CCI Support Group Facilitator

Zoë Freeman, CCI MSW Intern - Tech Support

Donovan Mann – Seattle University Nursing Student – Host

Rebecca Martinez- Seattle University Nursing Student – Chat Monitor











Today's Event:

1pm-3pm PST

About CCI

Allison Fine, MSW, LICSW

Chronic Illness and Mental Health

Kerry Heckman, MSW, LICSW

Coping during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Natalie Hopkins, MSW

Q&A after the presentations and additional Q&A and wrap-up at the end







Center for Chronic Illness (CCI)

(www.thecenterforchronicillness.org)

- 501(c)3 nonprofit organization
- Based in Seattle, WA
- Founded in 2016
- Free programs
- Support groups and educational programs facilitated by licensed mental health professionals











Mission: The Center for Chronic Illness promotes well-being and decreases isolation for those impacted by ongoing health challenges through support and education.

Values: Compassion, Respect, Empowerment, Inclusion, and Community

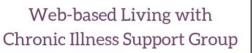






Web-based Support Groups

(www.supportgroupscentral.com/CCI)



A peer support group for those living with health challenges facilitated by Alicia Sloan, MSW, LICSW, MPH

This program is free of cost. Contact us with questions.





4th Monday of each month from 7:00-8:00pm

To sign up, visit supportgroupscentral



(425) 296-2705 info@theCenterforChronicIllness.org www.theCenterforChronicIllness.org



Web-based Living Mindfully with Chronic Illness Support Group

A supportive group for those wanting to live mindfully and with self-compassion led by Bartja Wachtel, MSW, LICSW, MHP, CMHS

2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month from 6:00pm-7:00pm To sign up, visit www.supportgroupscentral.com/CCI

Contact us at info@thecenterforchronicillness.org or (425) 296-2705 with questions www.thecenterforchronicillness.org



Web-based Rare Chronic Illness Support Group

A peer support group for those living with rare health challenges led by Kerry Heckman, MSW, LICSW

1st Tuesday of each month 4-5pm (PST) To sign up, visit www.supportgroupscentral.com/CCI

Contact us at info@thecenterforchronicillness.org or (425) 296-2705 with questions www.thecenterforchronicillness.org This program is free of cost.













Health Education Programs

Working with Chronic Illness:

Success when Facing Health Challenges in the World of Work

Please join us for an educational presentation by Joe Stuckey, MS, CRC, rehabilitation counselor specializing in helping people work while living with chronic illness





1:30pm - 3:30pm Northgate Branch Seattle Public Library

Light snacks and refreshments will be served

Please RSVP to attend



(425) 296-2705 info@theCenterforChronicIllness.org www.theCenterforChronicIllness.org

Chronic Illness & You: LGBTQ!

Join us on September 22nd from 2-5pm for a panel discussion and resource event for individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and live with chronic illness

Visit our Eventbrite page to learn more and sign up at: https://tinyurl.com/SeattleChronicIllnessLGBTQ

Contact Dana at (206) 953-9475 or dana@sasgcc.org with questions!





















Mental Health & Chronic Illness

Presented by:

Kerry J Heckman, LICSW







Introduction



Kerry - Licensed Clinical Social Worker
Therapist in Private Practice at Northwest Somatics
CCI Support Group Facilitator
Chronic Illness Patient & Advocate

Agenda

- Link between Chronic Illness and Mental Health Issues
- The Neuroscience of Mental Health
- Coping Strategies
- Additional Resources







Link between Chronic Illness and Mental Illness

There's a strong relationship between physical and mental health conditions.

People with chronic illnesses are *twice* as likely to suffer from anxiety or depression as their counterparts without chronic illness.

Parkinson's disease: 40% experience depression Multiple Sclerosis: 40% experience depression

Cancer: 25% experience depression Diabetes: 25% experience depression

Chronic pain syndrome: 30%-54% experience depression

ACEs Study changed the way we think about chronic health issues.







Chronic Illness increases stress...

- Isolation
- Relationship issues
- Financial instability
- Feeling misunderstood
- Grief and loss
- Time loss (from navigating the complex medical system)

Compounds and complicates existing chronic symptoms, such as...

- Chronic pain
- Sleep deprivation
- Medication and supplement side effects
- Inflammation









Common Symptoms of Mental Health Issues

- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Feeling pessimistic or hopeless
- Feeling irritable, easily frustrated, or restless
- Feeling guilty or worthless
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling slowed down
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Changes in appetite or weight







The Neuroscience of Mental Health

Mental Health is Actually Nervous System Health

Traditionally, we have thought of mental illness as a brain issue, but our thoughts and sensations originate in our body.

The nervous system is the mastermind of the body, so if there is dysregulation in the nervous system it affects all the other systems of the body (such as the immune, endocrine, and musculoskeletal systems).

Improving regulation in the nervous system benefits the entire body.

What does it mean to have a regulated nervous system?

A balanced (or regulated) nervous system allows us to interact and understand the environment and ourselves as they are.





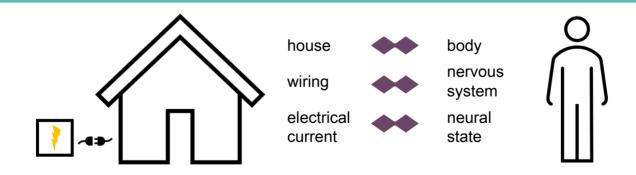


The Nervous System and the Neural States: A Metaphor

Imagine the nervous system as the wiring of a house. There are trillions of connected nerve cells throughout the body that make up our unique nervous system wiring.

Think of the neural states as the electrical current traveling through the house. Sometimes the current can be too strong or not strong enough.

Even if our nervous system wiring remains the same the current to each circuit can change moment to moment.











What affects our wiring (nervous system)? continuing the metaphor

Trauma - defined as anything that causes chronic "dysregulation" in the nervous system.

Chronic Emotional Stress

Chronic Illness

Trauma comes in many forms

Including: intergenerational, birth, developmental, racialized, vicarious, environmental, and medical.

Chronic dysreguation in the nervous system can result in mental health issues (such as anxiety or depression).









How the Nervous System's Dysregulation impacts our Mental Health

The Autonomic Nervous System typically manages stimuli to the body's systems. When confronted a threat or perceived threat it automatically puts the body into a survival state (fight, flight, or freeze).

We can manage periodic survival state moments and maintain homeostasis, but when the nervous system is constantly in survival mode it becomes the default setting.

To move a body (or system) out of survival mode, it is necessary to manage the neural state (the *flow of electricity* from our metaphor) in order to reset, and possibly rewire, the nervous system (our metaphorical *house*).







Recognizing the Neural States in order to Rework the Nervous System

Optimal Arousal

Calm Vitality

High Arousal *Autonomic Activation*

"anxiety"

muscle tension

brain fog

jittery feeling

catastrophic thinking

Low Arousal *Autonomic Freeze*

"depression"

fatigue

collapsed posture

hopeless thoughts









Foundations of Nervous System Health

- Sleep
- Movement
- Nourishment
- Routine
- Enjoyment







Coping Strategies

Think big and small

Nervous System Strategies vs. Neural State strategies









Common Nervous System Coping Strategies and Why They Work

- Talking to a friend
- Attending a support group
- Gratitude practice
- Listening to music
- Creating art
- Meditation (proceed with caution)
- Yoga/Qigong -pendulum
- Going on a walk

The different symptoms of chronic illness mean not all coping strategies are accessible to each individual.







Neural State Coping Strategies

- Neural state coping strategies are often referred to as "resources." These are resources for you to help your body to return to optimal arousal.
- Grounding a "grounding wire" is a safety wire that's connected to the earth, it
 carries the current to the ground if there is a short circuit
- Breathwork (proceed with caution)
- Orienting
- Bilateral stimulation, oscillating movement
- Imagery
- Nature
- Weighted Blanket
- Distraction or interruption
- Connection to a pet or other person









How to Amplify Coping Skills to Make them More Effective

- Noticing
- Attuning to the sensory experience (sight, sound, scent, touch, taste, if available).
- Feeling the associated feelings and sensations







How to Get Help with your Mental Health

- Mental Health Therapy
- Neurofeedback, biofeedback, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Complementary therapies
- Support Groups
- Online resources, such as Facebook groups









"Be gentle with your wounds.
Be gentle with your heart.
You deserve to heal."
- Dele Olanubi









Questions?









Strategies for coping with COVID-19

Natalie Hopkins, MSW, LSWAIC

Support Group Facilitator - Center for Chronic Illness Private Practice Therapist - The Seattle Clinic









Take care of YOU

Covering content that can be challenging and evocative

Taking care of yourself during and after this meeting is important

If you can, limit multitasking today





Overview

- Explore grief, ambiguous loss & burnout as it relates to the pandemic
- Identify stages and symptoms of grief
- Explore ways to cope
- Resources for support







We grieve because we love. What have you lost that you love?

- Loss of loved one
- Loss of a way of life
- Freedoms of moving through day like we used to
- Contact with family, friends, supports
- Coping strategies no longer have access to
- Rituals, celebrations, traditions









"We like to solve problems. We're not comfortable with unanswered questions. And (ambiguous loss) is full of unanswered questions. These are losses minus the facts.

-Pauline Boss







Much of what we are experiencing during this pandemic is ambiguous...

What is not ambiguous about this loss - it is affecting everyone







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KÜBLER-ROSS GRIEF CYCLE

DENIAL

avoidance, confusion, elation, shock, fear

ANGER

frustration, irritation, anxiety

BARGAINING

struggling to find meaning, reaching out to others, telling one's story ACCEPTANCE

exploring options, new plan in place, moving on

DEPRESSION

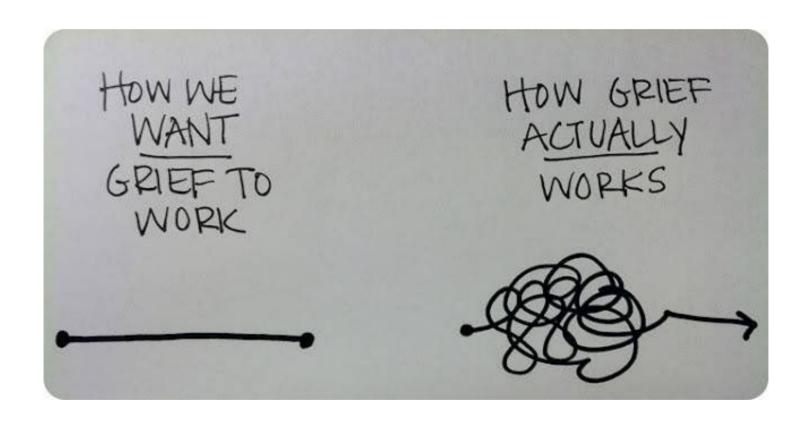
overwhelmed, helplessness, hostility, flight







A note about stages











After one year...

- Burnout emotional, physical, mental exhaustion caused by excessive & prolonged stress (Mayo Clinic)
- Multitasking + stress cognitive impacts (Mikolajczak, 2020)





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What do we need right now?

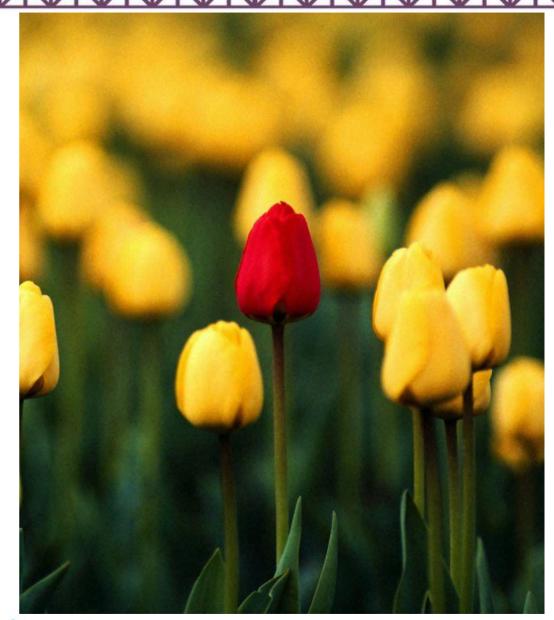






Accept life is different right now

- Validate
- Allow yourself to have tough days (Michael Maddaus)
- Acceptance does not mean giving up

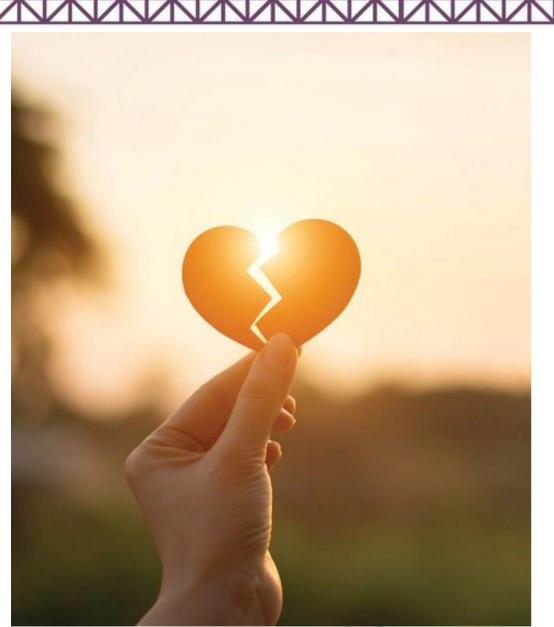






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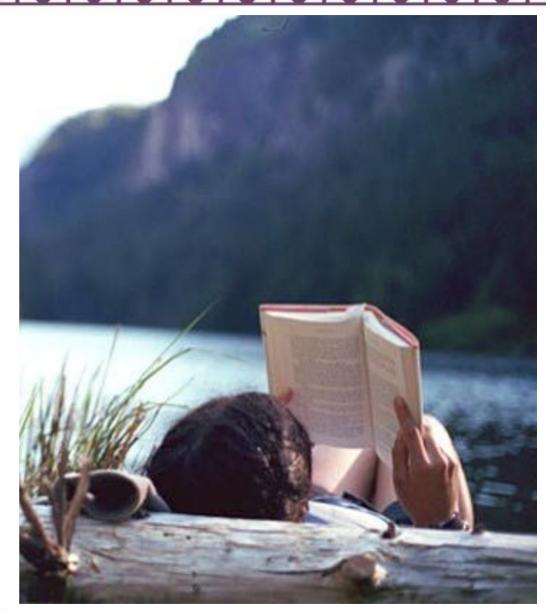


Recognize your grief

- What does grief look & feel like?
- "Name it to tame it" (Dan Siegel)
- Permission to feel your feelings
- Honoring the uniqueness of your grief

Except LESS from yourself

- (Re)assess responsibilities
- Limit multitasking
- "This is a once and a lifetime experience. It's expecting a lot to think we'd be managing this well." (Maddaus, 2020)



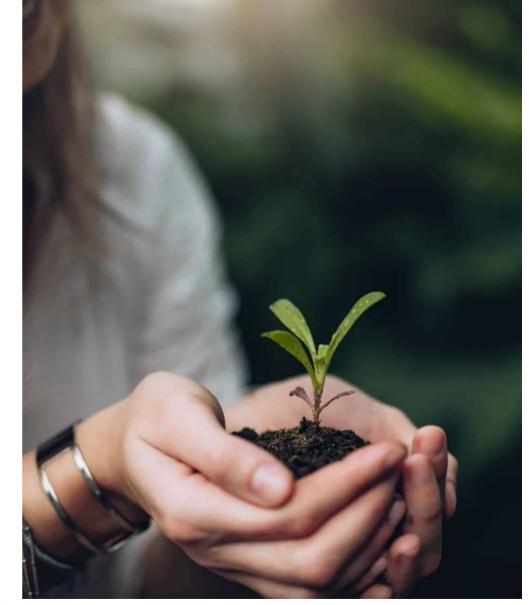






Nurture MORE

- BODY: eat, hydrate, move your body, rest
- MIND: focus on the positive
- SPIRIT: maintain & sustain important relationships
- HEART: self compassion, daily pleasant event











Activities that fulfill you

Two ways brain deals with world (Maddaus, 2020)

- future things to solve
 & go after
- 2. here & now seeing, touching







Embrace both/and thinking

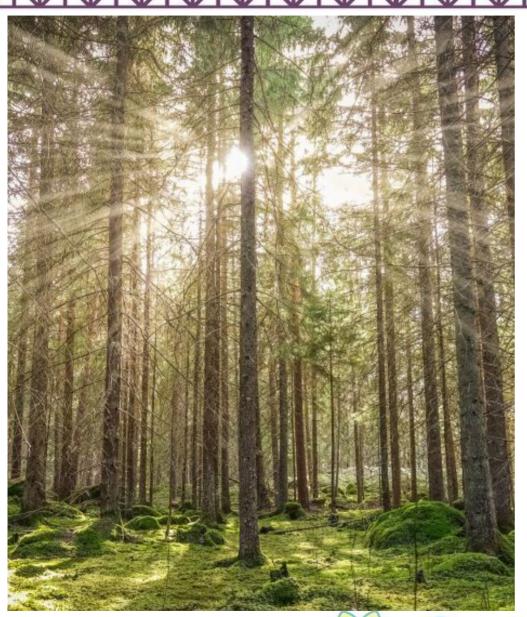
- When we can't change situation, we can change perception of it (Pauline Boss)
- Reframe reality











Spend time in nature

- Pictures of nature count! (Bratman, et. al., 2015)
- Improves cognitive functioning & memory
- Decreases anxiety





Reflection

What are some strategies you would like to start, or continue, based on these suggestions?

Write down, think over, or write in the chat!

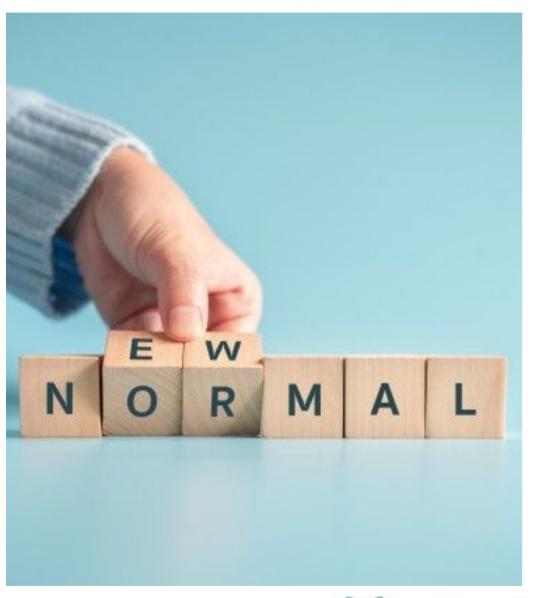












Going back to "normal"

- We are all in different stages
- Making meaning: how then shall we live?
- Be gentle with yourself. This wasn't a vacation!







Resources

COUNSELORS/SUPPORT GROUPS

- o Betterhelp.com
- Psychologytoday.com
- Zencare.com
- Center for Chronic Illness

RESOURCES & HOTLINES

- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 800-273-8255
- Crisis Text Line: Text "HEAL" to 741741
- Addiction hotline (SAMHSA): 800-662-4327
- Trevor Project: 866-488-7386

WEBSITES

- www.grief.com
- o <u>www.ambiguousloss.com</u>
- o <u>www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/</u>

BOOKS

Ambiguous Loss by Pauline Boss Finding Meaning by David Kessler Grief Recovery Handbook by John James







Center for Chronic Illness Support Groups

- Living with Chronic Illness
- Living Mindfully with Chronic Illness
- Rare Chronic Illness
- Parenting Chronic Illness
- COVID-19 Long-Haulers
- Creativity & Chronic Illness
- Supporting African Americans Living with Chronic Illness
- Teens Living with Chronic Illness
- Illness Specific Groups
 - Cystinosis
 - Urea Cycle

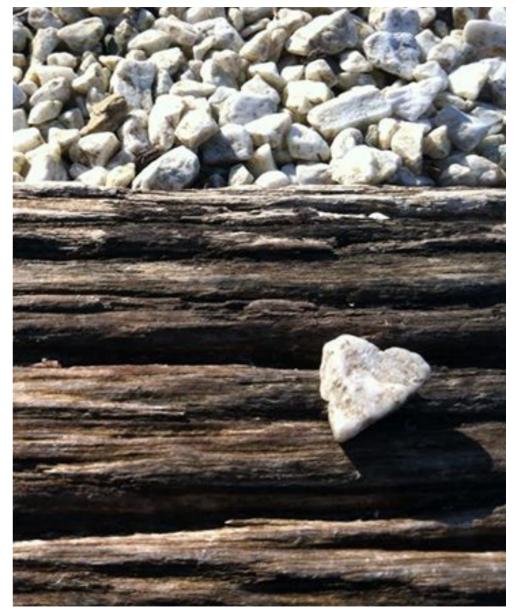






What can you do today:

- Acknowledge and feel your feelings
- Nurture yourself! Pick one thing you will do for yourself after this
- Connect with others that can offer support













Questions?







Thank you for joining us!

Check you email next week for our post-event survey.





