



MAY IS NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

Each year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. Since 1949, the month of May has been observed as Mental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of mental health and to reduce the stigma associated with mental health disorders. These illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States.

- More than 50% of Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness or disorder at some point in their lifetime.
- 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year.
- 1 in 5 American children, either currently or at some point during their life, have had a seriously debilitating mental illness.
- 1 in 25 Americans lives with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

With such overwhelming statistics, the time is now to de-stigmatize mental health issues while providing and promoting services for those in need. There is no need to "hide" mental health concerns, nor should employees feel alone in their struggle. At SBU, we have a variety of programs and services to support employees who may encounter mental health issues.

Mental health is an important part of overall health and well-being. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.*

*Mental health information and statistics provided by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

Leading the Charge

Danielle Merolla, Pys. D

Assistant Director for Outreach and Community Based Interventions, Center for Prevention and Outreach (CPO)



Q: Why is mental health awareness important?

A: The mind and body connection cannot be disputed. Just like our body provides signs that it needs care (sore throat and runny nose signals we must attend to a cold before it gets worse), our mind provides signs that it needs care. If our body is not well it can impact our mind and vice versa. The difficulty is that we are not always aware of what or how our mind is communicating. In conjunction with this, the way in which our mind communicates stress or struggle may influence our perception furthering the difficulty in recognizing our signs. Furthermore, our culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and all our inter-sectional parts influence our view of mental health and help seeking which can sometimes get in our way of reaching out and obtaining the care that we deserve - care that we would give to any other part of our body that was expressing signs of illness. Due to this it is of utmost importance that we heighten our awareness of mental health. We tend to fear that which we do not

talk about or understand. When we remain silent on a subject we can engender feelings of shame and perpetuate ill-informed beliefs (stigma). Knowledge is power. The more we know the more informed choices we can make regarding how we care for ourselves. The more we connect and open up authentically the more we can recognize that we are not alone. There is nothing shameful about mental illness. The brain is an organ, and like any other organ it malfunctions. We need to heighten our awareness of mental health because if we take care of our mind our mind will take care of us.

Q: What do you like most about your work?

A: It is a true honor to be a part of someone's journey through enormous challenge, trauma, loss, joys, achievements, healing and recovery. In conjunction with the clinical work with individuals, I am grateful that my role affords me a wealth of opportunities to explore ways to support a healthy, connected, safe and inclusive community at SBU. I enjoy supporting safe spaces to have open and honest conversations that educate, connect and empower. At SBU we are surrounded by incredible human beings. Our students and staff make me hopeful for our future.

Q: What do you do for self-care or to unwind after a busy day at work?

A: This may not be the Stony Brook way, but for my own sanity, once I am home, I turn off my electronics completely and make sure I am in my moments with my kids. There are days when I feel like I will never get from underneath the emails, but it does not change how nourishing it is for me to just be in my moments, especially with my kids. Exercise is also huge for me. I have taken to exercise in the early morning hours instead of sleeping in which has helped in so many ways. I also really enjoy going on runs with friends or on my own. Running was never my thing until recently and I am enjoying the accomplished feeling I experience when my body and mind align. At times running feels meditative. When I am not falling asleep with my kids, a guilty pleasure of mine are BRAVO shows. I like that the Real Housewives DO NOT engender any strong emotions for me, it is like it shuts off a part of me that is usually quite active.

Q: What should you do if you think a co-worker or family member is depressed?

A: If you feel comfortable find an opportunity in a private setting to check in with that co-worker. Afford yourself time to open up a conversation that is not intended to fix or give advice, but allows space for that co-worker to express their thoughts and feelings. It can be helpful to identify very specifically what you may have noticed and express your care and concern. This acknowledgement in itself can go a long way. If you do not feel comfortable, make sure to speak with someone that will connect with this co-worker and afford resources if the co-worker is not connected or have support systems in place. It is strongly encouraged not to wait to have these conversations. Early intervention is key. Question Persuade Refer (QPR) is a bystander intervention training offered at SBU and it supports recognition of signs of distress and suicidality in order to have the tools to ask the question and be the bridge to resources. We often think if we ask directly about suicide we may put the thought in someone's mind. The opposite is true, asking directly about if someone is feeling suicidal can mitigate shame and anxiety for the individual and save a life.

Q: Who has been a major influence in your life or career?

A: When I think about major influences in my life, I think of the many women who have made indelible marks on me from my grandmother, to my mother, to my mentor in graduate school, to my colleagues at SBU. Women that have been supportive and empowering. I am grateful for all the smart, strong, resilient, honest and authentic women that have and are gracing my life.

Q: What is your favorite book or recommend reading?

A: Awakening Loving-Kindness by Pema Chodron was a book that was grounding for me during a difficult time. I am currently reading a fantastic book, Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst by Robert M. Sapolsky.



Colleen's Corner

EAP for a Happier U

By Colleen Stanley, MFT, CEAP
Lead Coordinator
Stony Brook University Employee Assistance Program

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month

Spring is a time for new beginnings. It is a perfect time to let go of the things, relationships, and situations that no longer serve you. Now is time to vision the life you want, and to plant the seeds. Be grateful for all that is.

Even the most challenging events can bring the gifts of building compassion and opportunities to know

yourself on deeper levels. What is your intention this spring? We are creating, consciously or not, all the time. Choosing a healthy lifestyle including eating right, exercise, sleep, social connections and meaning and purpose will help you feel your best.

We may never know what challenges the person working next to us might be going through. Even behind a smiling face, there can be tremendous hardship. I am continually amazed by the resilience of Stony Brook employees. People who show up and do good work while grieving a loved one, battling an illness, or dealing with anxiety or depression exasperated by overwhelming financial pressure. You are not alone, there are resources at Stony Brook to help. As we make an effort to be kind to one another we create a Stony Brook community that cares, a better place for employees to work and for patients to heal.

If you are in great distress and feel you are in urgent need of services, please contact: The **Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP)** at Stony Brook Hospital at (631) 689-8333, or **Response Crisis Hotline of Suffolk County** at (631) 751-7500 (or text <https://www.crisistextline.org/>).
All of these services are available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.

Additional Resources for Depression and Suicide Prevention

- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) - Provides voluntary and confidential assessment and referral for a broad range of concerns including mental health and emotional issues, substance misuse, family issues, bereavement, child and eldercare, financial issues, health and wellness. EAP services are available at no cost to Stony Brook employees and their family members. The EAP is also available for supervisor consultations, and departmental EAP orientations. For information on self care, mindfulness, stress management, resilience, and resources to assist with life challenges visit the Stony Brook EAP...because life brings you what it will.
- [National, State & Local Depression & Suicide Prevention Links](#)

Stony Brook University Presents...

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction



**Are you ready to be more active in your own well-being and health?
Would you like to strengthen your resilience, improve coping with stress, and
gain a sense of greater ease and balance in your life?**

Then the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) course might be for you!

The EAP is thrilled to once-again offer the full 8-week MBSR course developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts' Medical Center that has been featured in countless media segments, hundreds of research studies and is now offered all over the world in hospitals, schools, business, and sports. The program is described in Dr. Kabat-Zinn's best-selling book, *Full Catastrophe Living*, and is featured in the Bill Moyers' PBS documentary *Healing and the Mind*.

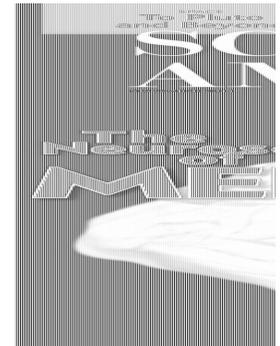
It seems that every day new articles are published detailing the benefits of mindfulness meditation. Time magazine and Scientific American devoted two whole issues to mindfulness! But what is mindfulness? And would it be worth your while to learn more about it?



Mind-ful-ness. It means to pay attention, to be aware. To notice our experience without judging it. The concept is simple enough, but it turns out that staying with our experience in the present moment can be challenging. Our attention is constantly fleeing away from the moment. We may be watching a movie, listening to a friend, or driving and pretty soon we are gone! Caught up in obsessive thoughts about something that may have happened in the past, perhaps what someone said or we may be thinking about a mistake we may have made or we are shot into the future, worrying about something that may or may never happen. And so we miss the moment. And of course, rumination and worry can spiral into depression and anxiety and burnout and ill health. When we are mindful, our mind is fully attending to what is happening, while it is happening, without being overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on around us. Mindfulness is not foreign or exotic. It is an innate human ability we all have and that can be cultivated, developed, and strengthened.

What is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)? MBSR is a structured 8-week course that helps cultivate, develop, and strengthen one's ability to be mindful. Rather than mindlessly running from task to task, we learn to pay attention and gain access to our own innate capacity to meet the challenges and demands of our lives. Instead of reacting to stress in habitual ways, we can learn to respond to stress with new and constructive solutions and we learn to take better care of ourselves so that we can live healthier, more adaptive lives.

"Research over the past 35 years has consistently shown that people who complete the MBSR course and develop a mindfulness practice experience emotional and physical health benefits. These include improved immune and cardiovascular function, decreased blood pressure and migraine frequency, decreased systemic inflammation, and improved coping with illness and pain. Other benefits include quick recovery from stressful events, decreased anxiety and depression, improved sleep, and enhanced ability to relax. Practicing mindfulness decreased rates of burnout, improved concentration, and attention, and thus work performance, and increased a sense of balance, self-esteem, and enthusiasm for life!" - Gabrielle & Cheryl



What is the format of the MBSR course? There are 8 weekly 2 ½ hour classes and one 7-hour practice day. MBSR groups are supportive and experiential. Classes include instruction in a variety of mindfulness practices and group discussions enhance the experiential component. Consistent class attendance and a commitment to daily practice and weekly practice assignments are an essential component of the course, helping participants develop mindfulness skills and bring mindfulness into everyday life. Participants receive a course manual, guided meditations on CD's (or downloads), and weekly handouts. An extended retreat day mid-way through the program provides the opportunity to synthesize and deepen the mindfulness practice.

Who is the class for? The course is for **anyone** who is ready to be more active in their health and well-being, who wants to improve their ability to cope with stress, and who wants to increase their sense of ease and peace of mind. At SBU, the course is open to faculty, staff, students, and alum on a first come, first serve basis.

Want to know more? When available, attend one of the free orientation sessions where you will meet the instructors, learn about research, and get a first-hand experience with mindfulness so you can decide whether the MBSR course is right for you. Advance registration is required for both the orientation and MBSR course.

- **Orientation Dates**
 - To-be-offered complimentary in September
- **MBSR Course Dates**
 - Fridays, 10/4 - 11/22 (3:30 - 6:00pm)
 - Retreat Day: TBD - Saturday or Sunday (9:30am - 4:30pm)
 - SBU fee for the 8-week course is \$400



The instructors. The upcoming course is offered by Gabrielle R. Chiamonte, Ph.D. and Cheryl Kurash, Ph.D., clinical psychologists with extensive experience teaching MBSR. Both have completed the highest level of professional training through the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts' Medical Center, under the auspices of Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Please note, class size is limited to 24 participants. For more information and to be added to the waitlist for notification of the free orientations, [email](#) Stony Brook EAP or call Colleen Stanley at 631-632-6085.

Upcoming & Ongoing Mental Health & Positive Psychology Events

SBUH Meditation

The Department of Spiritual Care Chaplaincy Services offers Music & Meditation at the Hospital Chapel (Level 5) each Monday from 3:00 - 3:30pm.

"We have medical staff, doctors, support staff and visitors attend these sessions. Last year I took the 8 week course in Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) through the EAP at Stony Brook University. I bring that training to my personal and professional spiritual practice and it helps to provide guidance for the weekly sessions. I also use MBSR techniques in my patient care for our Palliative patients. Dr. Grace LaTorre, Director of Palliative Care requested mindfulness be integrated into our patient care for the consulting service." - Rev. Kate Hudelson

Also, Wanda Diane Gardner-Slater, Director of the Department of Spiritual Care Chaplaincy Services, offers **Centering Meditation** at the Hospital Chapel (Level 5) each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8:00am.

Employee Wellness Fair

May 15 (12:00 - 4:00pm) - HSC Galleria (Level 3)

Sponsored by Employee Health & Wellness

"Stony Brook University Hospital's Employee Wellness Department is hosting an Employee Wellness Fair for hospital employees on May 15th from 12pm-4pm. The Fair will be held in the Galleria on level 3 of the HSC. All hospital employees are invited to attend the Fair to learn about our many employee wellness services including those focused on financial wellness, physical wellness and fitness, nutritional wellness, social wellness, preventative health services. Please bring your employee ID badge to enter. We hope to see you on the 15th!" - Mary Paciella, Director of Employee Health and Wellness

Question, Persuade and Refer Training

May 15 (12:00 - 1:30pm) - SAC Room 311

Offered by Danielle Merolla, Psy. D

QPR stands for Question, Persuade and Refer-- the 3 simple steps anyone can learn to help prevent a suicide. After completing QPR you will:

- Know some of the causes of suicidal behavior
- Recognize the warning signs that someone needs help
- Know connect people with appropriate mental health care

Are you interested in learning how to recognize and respond to a suicidal crisis? Sign up to be QPR trained [here](#).



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