

## Supporting Mental Health and Emotional Wellness During a Pandemic

This document is provided as a starting place for addressing emotional and mental health. It does not and cannot address everything that may be needed at this time, nor does it speak into specific situations and circumstances. Take into consideration your own circumstances and individual need. Please be guided by the government issued pandemic restrictions in your area.

### How Can We Support?



- Offer suggestions of how you could help or support, acknowledging that not everyone will voice their needs or ask for help.
- Ask the individual what they think they need in the pastoral relationship. Outline boundaries if some needs cannot be met.
- If possible, offer resources for needs that may not be able to be met.

### Emotional and Social Needs



- Understand if a person's responsiveness changes based on how they are feeling at the time you connect with them.
- Some people may not know or be able to respond to what they need.
- Have virtual "coffee" and talk about everything and anything! Talk about pets, good memories, a gratitude list, what brings joy, and what is going well as opposed to what is not.
- Acknowledge that wellness looks different for each person. Ask: What does it look like when you are well? What does it look like when you are not well/going into a crisis? Establish a wellness plan.

### Physical and Practical Needs



- Health and energy levels may impact people's ability to communicate.
- Offer to support people with grocery shopping, dog walking, picking up prescriptions, etc.
- Ask if people are up-to-date on latest restrictions and information on vaccinations. Talk about what we are allowed to do, e.g., people living alone can form a bubble with another household; outdoor activities; take out; order in.
- Encourage people to:
  - regulate their exposure to news and social media.
  - engage in activities of well-being.
  - maintain routines and sleeping patterns.



## Spiritual Needs



- Offer to pray and read Scripture with people (via phone, Zoom, etc.).
- Encourage people to watch online services and to stay involved virtually.
- Ask about spiritual health (e.g., “How is your relationship with God at the moment?”).
- Provide prayer cards or tangible spiritual care items/resources to use in personal reflection time.
- Encourage people to maintain spiritual and family traditions.

## Virtual and Reopening Considerations



- Encourage people to return to worship and gatherings when it is safe to do so.
- Consider continuing to offer a virtual option for those who may be immune compromised, have not yet received a vaccine, or who experience anxiety, etc., so they are not excluded.
  - Communicate what has been done as a precaution/safety for people returning. Be prepared to explain church closures/limitations of services in a variety of communication styles (e.g., words, pictures, videos, social stories, sign-language).
  - Consider accessibility when planning worship services and other events. Watch videos produced by MAGA for reference (see link below).
- Consider the needs of your audiences (e.g., hearing loss, visual impairment, literacy).
- Allow people to express their levels of comfort.
- Name the situation from the pulpit and affirm and acknowledge how people are feeling. Bonus: This opens the door to start talking about mental health more openly in general in support of people who experienced it throughout their lifetime and those who are experiencing it now.
- Offer an in-person walk through the church building in advance. This might be helpful for some people so they have a personal reintroduction to the church.
- Assign “safe” people to talk to. Consider having a volunteer peer support working with the pastoral team to provide perspective on issues people have faced during the pandemic from the lens of lived experience.

## Reopening Questions for Local Leadership



- Are people reluctant to regather and interact?
- What are people’s fears about being back in person?
- Are there spaces that can be made available away from the congregation, perhaps in a quiet room or corner within your sanctuary?
- How can you create a video or photo presentation to walk individuals through the regathering process? What pieces should be included to help ease the concerns of people as they return?
- Who will be identified as “safe” people within your congregation? How can you communicate their availability?
- What grounding/coping techniques would be helpful to individuals?
- What are some of the local mental health and disability supports available in your community? How can you communicate these to your congregation?



## Resources



- Our Doors Are Open  
<https://opendoors.idrc.ocadu.ca/guide-for-accessible-congregation/>
- Joni and Friends  
<https://www.joniandfriends.org/>
- Building Church from Home: Ensuring Accessibility in Online Services  
<https://salvationist.ca/music-gospel-arts/home/>
- Disability Concerns  
<https://www.crcna.org/disability>
- Kay Warren: Mental Health and the Church  
<http://kaywarren.com/mentalhealthandthechurch/>
- Creative Strategies for Inclusive Digital Worship  
<https://www.stonebelt.org/index.php/programs/spiritual-support>

