

THE TURNINGPOINTCT.ORG COLLECTION

COPING WITH A COVID HOLIDAY SEASON

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THE TURNINGPOINTCT.ORG COLLECTION

A PEER SUPPORT MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CT

DECEMBER 2020 • ISSUE 1 • VOLUME 1

COPING WITH A COVID HOLIDAY SEASON

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR AND PROJECT COORDINATOR, ELLA MOORE



I am not the first to say that this year has sucked in more ways than just one, and with the Winter season already upon us there are no signs of improvement. Now more than ever we need to be supporting and empowering one another to stay physically and mentally well.

The TurningPointCT team of young people wanted to put together the first newsletter in our projects history to share our stories, interests and how we are coping this Winter in order to help our peers who are struggling.

TurningPointCT.org is a peer organization funded by the Connecticut government to provide teens and young adults with peer support and mental health resources. This means that everything on and associated with our project is made by and for young people in Connecticut who get what it's like to struggle with their mental health and/or substance misuse. Using our personal experiences allows us to model one method of recovery and offer guidance and support to empower others to find the right path to recovery for themselves.

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THE FALL 2020 SEMESTER: A COLLEGE STUDENT'S STORY OF RESILIENCE

BY JENNA GEFFERT

I spent many days between August 26 and November 19, trapped in my dorm with no access to the outside world other than the twice daily meal delivery from campus. I tried all of the hobbies, painting, coloring, watching tv, and exercising, but at the end of the day, I woke up feeling just as groggy and unmotivated as the day before. At first, I thought it was just me. My professors did not talk about the looming dark cloud above us and neither did my classmates. At my university I am a pitcher on a Division I softball team, which is a lot of pressure, but it was one of the only ways I was able to have an outlet for the anxiety I was feeling about COVID as well as the upcoming election. My teammates and my coaches were very upbeat about the situation even though in the spring before, we all lost our seasons, as well as many seniors, such as my sister lost their graduations and final memories as a college student. I did not know why I was the only one feeling this way, but I was not. I think it all stems from social distancing. The lack of communication. The social gatherings only include pairs instead of whole families.

The many memories and moments that are not shared because of a pandemic, never seen before. So I thought it was just me, but it was not, it was my entire campus: professors, peers, janitors, staff, and even the dean of the college. I was not alone, just afraid to reach out past the 6 feet between my resources and I. Yet, eventually I did. I began going to my campus counseling center once a week until I was able to return safely home. I made an active effort to attend the socially distanced activities my school planned such as movie nights or campfires. I began seeing what the world was offering as an opportunity to learn more about myself as it pushed my limits, instead of the giant obstacle it had been presenting the majority of the semester. And that is my best advice, if you are able, and you are healthy, take each new day as a chance to accomplish or learn one new thing. It does not have to be life changing or even something you will remember the next day, but appreciate the small things and the fact that even if it is a terribly unprecedented time, we are a part of history.

SEASONAL DEPRESSION SELF CARE (& INCIDENTAL PLANT CARE GUIDE)

BY ELLA MOORE

I know I'm not alone in this sentiment, but the way I perceive time has changed this year. I had the great fortune to keep my job during the pandemic so my personal life changed relatively little in March, except for the fact I was house-bound. My days were all almost identical and as a person who is in recovery for mental health conditions I was on high-alert for the toll that these massive global changes were taking on me. So, I decided to take matters into my own hands. After I started to see a connection between my mental wellness and the habits and routine I practiced, I wanted to set myself an experiment. Everyday being consistent provided the stage to really see what habits I practiced would help my mental health. Spring soon bled into summer and my mental health was stronger than before even though everything in my external environment was out of my control. My boyfriend of 2 years was deployed with the army in a combat zone and the world was falling apart. However, the control I felt over my own personal life was grounding.

So much of my healthy routine has centered around integrating exercise, early mornings, and sunshine into my daily routine, however all three of these habits rely on me having the motivation to even get out of bed. I affectionately refer to myself as a houseplant because of my basic needs of having sunlight, water, food, and the right environment to mentally thrive. So, the cold and gloomy days of the winter season my energy feels sapped and my depression keeps me chained to my mattress. I feel anxious for this upcoming season. I know that left unmanaged, my mental health will deteriorate and my hard work and progress will have been for nothing.

Perhaps it's just because my algorithm has identified me as an amateur plant owner, but I have seen far more social media posts about how to prepare a plant for winter than posts about how to prepare our own bodies and minds. Like plants, humans are made up of organic matter and as such humans are not immune to the effects of the seasonal changes: the days get shorter and darker and the weather is cold and gloomy making time outside harder. So much of the way society is set up does not take into account or allow for the natural ebb and flow of life. It makes sense that during this time our mental health might get worse, lose motivation, or feel more tired and fatigued. So what good does it do to know this other than to be anxious about how it is looming overhead? We can prepare.



ILLUSTRATION BY ELLA MOORE

My Winter mental wellness routine may not come as naturally to me as my Spring mental wellness routine but it is equally, if not more, important for me to start anticipating the toll this winter will take and paying attention to what will be beneficial to my mental and physical wellness this season. To take some inspiration from the plant guides I have seen over the past few weeks about how to care for a plant during the winter months, I'll share some of the basic needs that I believe will help you stay mentally well over this winter:

- **Adjust your environment to support your healthy winter habits and routines.**
 - This could mean making your personal space cozier and more festive, removing temptations for problem behaviors, or setting up a space for an indoor gym/yoga studio.
- **“Pruning” - focus on life priorities and goals to lessen your mental load.**
 - Allocate your limited energy resources into the people and things that are most important to you. Add and subtract extras according to energy levels (don't try to do it all!)

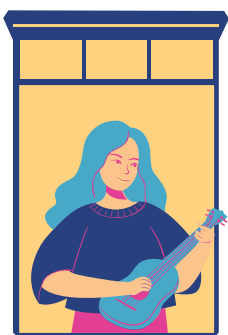
- **Practice mindfulness when able to get fresh air and sunlight.**
 - Time outside, especially in the sunshine, can be limited during the winter so practicing mindfulness during those moments can help to bring focus back to the present moment.
- **Be gentle with yourself.**

Even though well intentioned, setting myself these goals and habits can still be overwhelming for me, which is why I feel it's important to mention that it is a process that has to be taken day by day. Somedays the greatest act of self care could be making yourself

a sandwich before getting back into your depression nest and that is valid, while others it might be completing all of your tasks and going for a run. We have to respect our energy levels and not beat ourselves up when we're not able to meet our own or other people's expectations. When I try and think of healthy habits to integrate into my routine I break them into categories: for when I am mentally strong and well, when I need to push myself, and when I need to rest. All of the habits might not be conventionally productive, but taking time to rest should also be considered productive

"I cope with seasonal depression by doing things that bring joy during cold and gloomy days such as reading a nice book, making hot cocoa and bundling up to watch a good movie with a friend! Trying to keep in touch with family or friends is also a good way to cope and escape from certain feelings" - Reece, student at University of New Haven

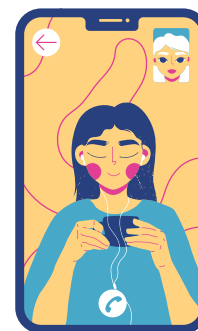
Serena's Tips for Winter Self Care



find a new inside hobby



**practice self care
(exercising, yoga,
journalling)**



**stay socially connected
by attending virtual
clubs/groups**

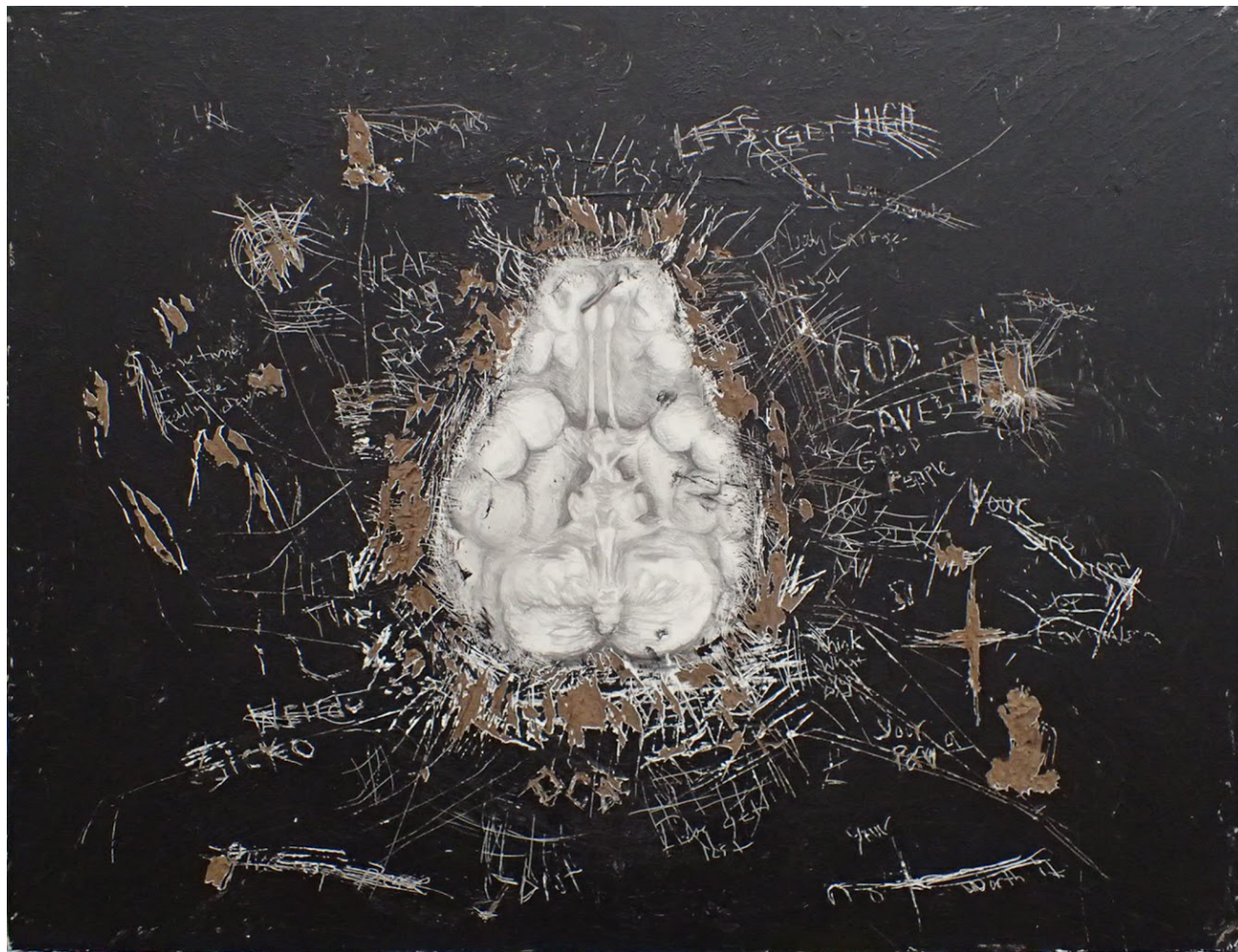


keep your space clean



**get enough sunlight
(take Vitamin D supplements/use
light therapy)**

JOHN'S STORY OF COMING TO TERMS WITH OCD DURING THE HOLIDAYS



ARTWORK BY JOHN

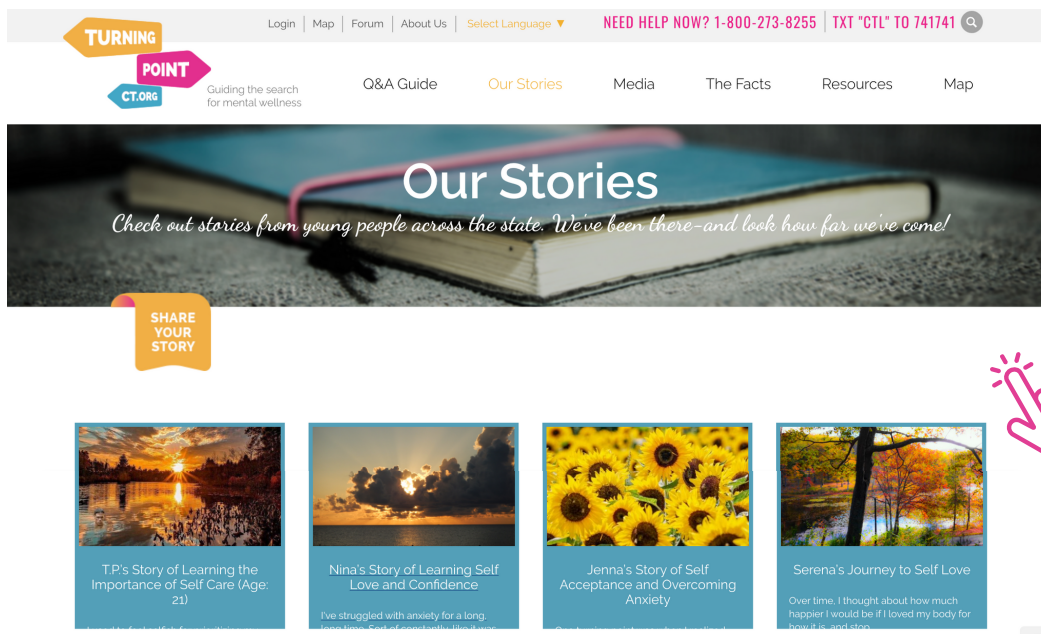
It's November thirtieth in the year two-thousand and eight. My family just got back from church. It's the first week of advent and the priest was adorned in some sort of a purple fabric. He gave a boring and almost incomprehensible homily on the power of giving. I'm staring blankly out the sliding backdoor window of my family's one story home. My hot breath is creating condensation on the glass and there is a thin layer of frost coating the leaves that are sprinkled about the lawn. I'm tired. Well, maybe tired isn't the right word. My mind is moving at a million miles a minute and yet my body is static. I must look like one of those creepy child mannequins. My Dad creeps up and asks me what's wrong? Why am I acting so weird? I tell him I'm feeling melancholy. I don't even think I know what that word means. I know Mom and Dad will be taking out all the Christmas decorations soon and this creates a sense

of horror within me. Buried within the numerous seasonal baubles rests a vintage doll cheaply made with a purple synthetic polymer. To the naked eye this doll would be seen as completely unremarkable. Not to me. The doll is a representation of the character the Purple Pie Man from the children's show Strawberry Shortcake. He is about eight inches tall and its arms are bent at the elbows, outstretched as if it's about to grasp at something. At the top of his head lies a chef's hat that plumes into the air. The doll has a hunch at the intersection between his neck and back that makes him look like he is trying to sneak around or hide. All these terrifyingly distinctive features pale in comparison to the one that really paralyzes me, the dark cavity in the middle of his face. You see he was supposed to come with a plastic mustache that is carefully inserted inside this entrance, but it

must have been lost, so it is now empty. This small naked hole frightens me and makes my heart pump blood through my preadolescent veins. My Dad continues to pester me about my mood. He just wants to know why I seem so preoccupied? What could I possibly be "melancholy" about? I tell him I don't know and continue to look out the window. I've seemed to have developed a couple strange avoidance behaviors around the color purple. I can't watch characters on television who wear purple costumes without significant distress and every time I even think about purple I have to "unthink" it or else something devastating will happen to my parents. Which I can recognize makes no sense. Unthinking, as I call it, involves running through three Hail Mary's in my head in quick succession. It's stupid but I've started to use this private ritual in other situations too. For example, on the way home from church, in the car, I had the startling idea to reach in the front seat and steer my family's sedan into oncoming traffic. I don't even think I can reach over the seat to make this happen, but I can picture it. I see my little hand grasping the wheel and the ensuing flames and blood.

So I do my prayers, and it is absurd, but this seems to pacify my thoughts for the time being. I don't mind church, sometimes I even like it. It's just a place we go every Sunday before the football games. The name of the church is Our Lady of Sorrows. Most of the year I enjoy it. It is a punctuation mark at the end of the week. Lately however, my mind has turned sour. All the things that once excited me about it have changed. The music is discordant and the slightly wine stained teeth of the parishioners disgust me. I feel sinful thinking this way. Everything transfigures when the seasons change and that doll comes in the picture. Except instead of turning a beautiful bright white it switches to the color of a bitter bruise. This filter covers everything up and makes it impossible to move. This isn't the first time this all encompassing feeling has infected me and it won't be the last, but it seems each time it loses its sting. The purple of the doll will fade and the thoughts will change, but I now have an almost ecclesiastic duty to keep an eye on myself. This isn't a cross to bear, it's more like an advent candle I have to keep lit.

WANT TO SHARE YOUR OWN STORY AND HEAR FROM OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLING WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH? CHECK OUT "OUR STORIES" ON: WWW.TURNINGPOINTCT.ORG/OUR-STORIES





CRACKING THE "BUSY WORK" CODE: A WEST HARTFORD HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT INVESTIGATES

BY NINA MCINTYRE

"It might seem like what you're working on is pointless, but whether it's to help you achieve future goals, or simply to form a bond with others, you can definitely find a way to give it all meaning"

COVID-19 has been a big force influencing mental health during the last eight months of our lives. As students, the pandemic weighs heavy on our consciences, however now that we have re-entered school buildings (and some have left schools for the second time) and begun the hefty workload with the anxiety of time management, we have double the stress. As a student, the stress isn't as much the workload as it is the meaning of the work. Though teachers claim to want to lower stress for the kids, it feels to me that teachers only assign work to assign us work. For some, it's hard to complete work knowing that it's only getting done to get done. We need to know that the work is going to benefit us, and present something to keep with us.

I asked some students from West Hartford what their opinion was on the meaning of schoolwork and whether they believe they're getting benefits. All students that were asked responded that the work is a large percentage busy work that is getting assigned just to give students work. Lia Nichols, a sophomore at Conard went straight to the point with her response, "No [school assignments don't benefit me]. Absolutely not. School assignments rarely have any meaning to them in the first place, and especially not during COVID." She alludes to teachers wanting to lower stress but assigning hours of pointless busy work in addition to the stress of the pandemic. Another interesting response I received was from Afaf Albur, another sophomore from Conard. Afaf said, "I

would definitely say that homework, at this point feels like an assignment with a due date" she continues on with a most intriguing point, "the point of homework is to finish in time and not really to understand what the topic is fully." This is giving her a lot of stress. It's more like a race to the finish line to get full credit than fully absorbing the new information. Marlena Pegolo, another sophomore at Conard said something similar to Afaf, "[I feel like I get the fairest amount of work in English] a lot of the curriculum, not just in English, has real meaning but in a lot of subjects we are not asked to extract and apply them since there is new content hurled at us left and right." Marlena suggests that the lack of explanation of what the benefit is is stressing most students out as well. In some cases, the work does have benefits, but the class pace is moving so fast that students don't have a chance to actually get the benefit out of the assignments. Overall, students don't feel that they're getting much aside from points to a grade from their assignments.

I then asked the same students whether they have a way of finding a benefit of doing the work, and what they do to feel like their work has meaning. Marlena

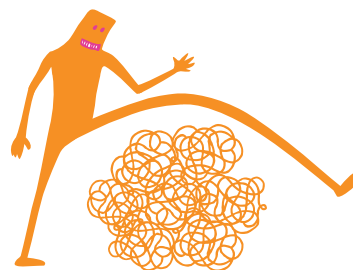
Pegolo had a thought provoking response, "I guess I would say my way of feeling gratified is submitting all of my work, but in the long run, I feel like we should maybe slow the pace of some classes and focus on how we can personally benefit and learn from [these assignments]." She offers a suggestion to schools in general on how this stressful issue can be resolved, but she thinks that simply crossing the finish line and seeing the 100/100 in Powerschool is the most gratification that she'll get. Afaf Albur said, "It's really stressful sometimes to have to deal with assignments I'm going to forget about by next week,



but I guess I keep reminding myself that it's the only way I'm going to get into schools [and eventually jobs and career paths]." The prospect of an "academic finish-line," to coin the term, is promising but it also poses the question: how do we really get to keep the knowledge and not-- like Afaf said-- "forget about it by next week?"

So, how can we get benefit from schoolwork without the assignment really being for the purpose of benefiting the kids? I am lucky enough to have a few subjects that I really do enjoy, so I'll share what tactics work for me. I try to think of how exactly what I'm doing will benefit me in the near-- or far future. For example, I try to practice Spanish after I finish my Spanish assignments rather than just leaving it at the original assignment because I'd like to move to a Spanish speaking country, so learning the language will benefit me in the future when I do. In addition, for any World Language class, you can find a music artist (or many artists) from that region or country that speaks that language, and you can learn from them! Hey-- that's how Selena Quintanilla learned Spanish, so if she can do it, so can you and me! It makes learning languages fun! Or with my history class, I find someone I can talk to about what I learned, to form a connection with the person over the topic, or also to make sure I fully understand it. English is another good one, talk about the book you're reading with someone to bond, and use new words you've learned in real life to give all those vocabulary quizzes meaning! It might seem like what you're working on is pointless, but whether it's to

help you achieve future goals, or simply to form a bond with others, you can definitely find a way to give it all meaning.



**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BEING FEATURED IN OUR
NEXT NEWSLETTER / BEING INVOLVED IN THE
TURNINGPOINTCT.ORG PEER PROJECT?**

EMAIL ELLA: EMOORE@POSITIVEDIRECTIONS.ORG

ONLINE & VIRTUAL OPPORTUNITIES

BY ELLA MOORE

Just because it is COVID does not mean that our lives have to be on stand-by. There are multitudes of virtual experiences popping up so that life can continue: musicians are hosting virtual concerts on social media, nail salons are offering online nail art tutorials, and restaurants are releasing recipes so that customers can cook signature dishes at home. But what about professional/educational opportunities? Well, like the rest of the world, trainings and classes have had to find a way to adapt too. Let me briefly tell you about a really cool experience I just had in Advocacy Unlimited's Recovery Support Specialist training.

To give you a little background, I am the Project Coordinator of TurningPointCT.org. Despite getting this position a year ago, I do not have a wealth of experience working in the mental health field professionally. What I do have is a wealth of personal experience of mental health conditions and the mental health system. One of the reasons I was hired was because of my willingness to share my personal experiences to help others. This is a key tenet of peer support. If you are like me, you might be unfamiliar with what peer support is. Peer support is a type of therapeutic treatment in which a person in recovery shares skills and supports with a peer to help both parties achieve long-lasting recovery goals. This means that you can have no actual professional or educational background in psychology and still be able to use your personal experience help people. You might be thinking that this sounds like what you do already for your family and friends, which is probably true! The difference between what you do now and the work of a Recovery/Peer Support Specialist is having the practical framework of trainings and principles

The class consisted of 8 weeks of 2x 5 hour classes a week. The course was hosted on Zoom and was facilitated by a group called Advocacy Unlimited. During this class I was able to bond with my



classmates over our shared experiences and grow through our differences. I learned about a Recovery-Oriented and Person-Centered treatment plans, which has completely changed the way I view my own recovery and the way I should be treated by the mental health system. I learned how to be a better listener and how to hold space for someone else. But, most importantly, I learned the importance of human connection and its healing powers. Going through AU's RSS course was a life changing experience for me. Suddenly, my mental health conditions went from barriers to me finding employment to a prerequisite for my job! Being able to feel confident helping others based on my personal experiences has made me feel so fulfilled and has definitely helped with my own mental health recovery. Despite living in a COVID-world there are still so many opportunities open to us to further our education, careers, and passions. In March 2020, I never would have dreamed that I could continue growing professionally and personally as much as these classes and trainings have allowed!

**"The RSS Training was LIFE CHANGING for me!" - Charley,
a young adult from Stamford, CT**

NEED TO TALK?

***CT ONLY* Young Adult Warmline**

- (Mon-Sun 12-9pm)
- 1-855-6HOPENOW

SMART RECOVERY GROUPS (FREE PEER THERAPY)

- FULL MEETING SCHEDULE VISIT:
 - <https://www.smartrecoveryct.org/meetings/>

ONLINE PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

- **NAMI YOUNG ADULT CONNECTION** (Contact Val for meeting passwords: vlepoutre@namict.org or call 860 882-0236)
 - **Young Adult Connection Community Check-In**
 - Monday - Wednesday - Friday 3:30PM (EST)
 - **Mending Minds: Student Community Check-In**
 - Monday 7:00PM (EST)
 - **Rainbow Connections - an LGBTQ+ Community Group**
 - First and Third Tuesdays 6:00PM (EST)
 - **Creative Expressions Group**
 - Second and Fourth Tuesdays 6:00PM (EST)
 - **Self-Discovery: Young Adult Connection Community Group**
 - Thursday 6:00PM (EST)
 - **Out of the Abyss: Young Adult Online Adventure Program**
 - Thursday 7:30PM (EST)
 - **Young Adult Game Night**
 - Friday 6:00PM (EST)
 - **Coffee Break**
 - Every Fourth Saturday 1:00PM (EST)

WAYS TO GET INVOLVED

- **NAMI Virtual Talent Show**
 - Submissions: January 1, 2021 - Jan. 23 (Winners announced Jan. 31!)
 - Contact: schar3@unh.newhaven.edu
- **Virtual Young Adult Summit, "Exploring the Abyss"**
 - January 22, 2021
 - Contact: PYoung@JoinRiseBe.org
- **TurningPointCT Contributor**
 - Submit Art, Poetry, Podcasts, Videos. Volunteer/Intern with us!
 - www.TurningPointCT.org
- **Recovery Support Specialist Training**
 - <https://advocacyunlimited.org/program/rss-training/>
- **Recovery Coach Training**
 - <https://addictionrecoverytraining.org/recovery-coach-academy/>
- **NAMI Connecticut Young Adult Connection Facilitator Training**
 - <http://ow.ly/d1co50Be5ozNAMI>
- **End The Silence (ETS) Training**
 - <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Mental-Health-Education/NAMI-Ending-the-Silence>
- **CT Youth Leadership Project**
 - <https://www.ctylp.org/>
- **MyFriendAbby Youth Committee / Grant Projects**
 - <https://www.myfriendabby.org/>

IN A CRISIS?

- **National Suicide Lifeline (24/7)**
 - 800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Crisis Text Line (24/7)**
 - Send text to 741741
- ***CT ONLY* Child (<18yo) Psychiatric Crisis (24/7)**
 - DIAL 2-1-1, OPTION 1



NEW YEAR, SAME ME

BY NAKEISHA LITTLE

Creating resolutions is part of many people's New Year's traditions. Come January, you see "new year, new me" littered across social media. People make goals of weight loss, saving money, getting promotions, or traveling. While making resolutions isn't necessarily a bad thing, they can often lead to negative feelings of self-worth. For those who live with mental illness, it's easy to spiral when the negative feelings begin. Many resolutions get abandoned or forgotten, whether it's because they are too difficult to achieve, not compatible with a person's lifestyle, or too broad that one doesn't know where to begin. At the end of the year, people reflect on the resolutions they made and vow to do better the next year. Resolutions can be an awful cycle. The world is uncertain and as humans, we are ever changing. The goals you make at the beginning of the year may not be compatible with where you end the year. Here are some tips for making New Year's resolutions work for you:

- **Replace resolutions with SMART goals.**

- Do plans help you stay on track? A SMART goal is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based. The major difference between a resolution and a SMART goal is that is a plan, rather than a statement. For example, a resolution would be "I want to run a marathon". A SMART goal would include making a detailed plan for how you plan to run a marathon. You would have a time-frame of when you hope to achieve it, and it would be realistic. Perhaps your SMART goal would begin with running a 5k, then a half-marathon. SMART goals can be easier to stick to because there aren't unrealistic.

- **Reframe resolutions.**

- It may seem contradictory from the above technique, but different things work for

different people. Setting goals with concrete numbers may feel overwhelming, especially those prone to obsessive behavior, and that's OK. Something I have found that helps me is setting up a chart that has a side that says "more of" and another side that says "less of". Rather than saying, "I am going to read 52 books this year", I put that I want to read more. Instead of "I am going to stop getting takeout", I reframe it as "I am going to order less takeout". If you are a visual type, you can track the amount you do these things in a journal or use a habit tracking app.

- **Understand the resolutions you want to make.**

- When you go to write down what you want to achieve in the coming year, consider why these are your goals. Are these things you want to achieve or is it something you feel like you have to do? When your goals are centered on your true-self, they can be easier to achieve. Your goals don't need to look like everyone else's. Focus on what you need and what works for you.

- **Know when it's time to pause or stop on a goal.**

- I'm familiar with depression and it's friend lack of motivation. Sometimes, I see my goals and they are the last thing I want to do. I'm here to tell you -- it's okay to take a break. It's okay to sit down and realize that the goal you set is no longer compatible with where you are. If you are depressed and can't get out of bed, trying to run a marathon is not going to happy. Instead, try to make yourself attainable goals that work with where you are. For example, you could start with "today, I am going to go outside of five minutes" and do that until you feel ready to do the next step, which could be "today, I am going to take a 10-minute walk".

END OF YEAR REFLECTIONS

Peer Connection Activity

by Perry Wu

We are nearing the end of 2020. Many of us are still processing what has occurred this past year collectively and personally. The activity below is meant to foster reflection and connection with yourself and with those you feel comfortable sharing with. Use these questions to gain a deeper understanding of what this past year has meant to you and those around you.

Either by yourself or with others, answer the questions however you see fit. You can write or type your answers or discuss them out loud. To make this activity more interactive, you can cut each question into squares and toss them in a hat to answer, one at a time.

In what ways did you grow emotionally?	What 3 words best describe this year?	Best books read this year?	Who were your most valuable relationships with?
In what ways have you expressed yourself?	Biggest thing you learned?	Create a statement or phrase best describing this past year for you	Best way you used your time?
Most challenging thing that happened?	What have you learned in your relationships with others?	In what ways did you grow physically?	In what ways did you connect with others?
Single biggest time waster?	In what ways did you grow spiritually?	What was something meaningful to you that you experienced?	Single best thing that happened?
In what ways did you connect with yourself?	Biggest personal change?	What ways did you take care of yourself?	What song/artist resonated with you this year and why?