

## PRINT-Building Resilience: An Anecdote for Childhood Trauma

You're hearing a new buzzword these days as the country experiences an increase in anxiety and depression in teenagers and young adults – resiliency. That's a person's ability to bounce back from significant life events.

Government health statistics show anxiety and depression in high school kids has been on the rise since 2012. OSF HealthCare Medical Director of Behavioral Health Services Doctor Samuel Sears points to [new research](#) that indicates traumatic childhoods involving verbal or physical abuse or neglect physically alters the brain. Those changes could leave victims more vulnerable to depression, addiction and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

So what's a solution? Trauma Informed Care is a treatment framework that involves understanding, recognizing, and responding to the effects of all types of trauma. Dr. Sears says social support is the biggest factor in resiliency which can help people better respond to childhood trauma.

“By getting them those additional supports; people that care, people to interact with and help them through things that is something that you can control,” he suggested.

Peer support can be just as important as a caring adult according to Dr. Sears. In fact, a new mental health triage center in Bloomington, Illinois will have a full-time triage specialist and a peer with lived-experience in mental health issues. The county's Behavioral Health Coordinating Council Supervisor Trisha Mallot says that's the way most centers around the country have some trained peers on staff.

### **It's Time to Talk**

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, offering a good reminder to help yourself or others struggling. Dr. Sears suggests an approach that views mental health and physical health equally. That's starting to happen culturally with the help of celebrities who have shared their own struggles such as Brittany Spears, Justin Bieber, Chrissy Teigen and even the British Royal Family.

But, the personal and social stigma of mental illness still prevents challenges so being willing to engage with someone who appears troubled can be a game changer. Sears says more of us should be willing to ask frank questions about how someone is doing and whether they're thinking about harming themselves.

“Asking these questions can save their life. And, being able to be open and honest with somebody to be there for you to help you solve the problem, that's a huge relief for people who are suffering with mental health difficulties.”

### **Social Media Influence**

Social support is the main buffer to the longer-term effects of trauma, but according to Dr. Sears, that does not mean *social media support* can replace true interpersonal communication.

“There is a very different level of connectedness and value that goes into the actual human connection versus just putting ideas out into space and having some ideas come back in a digital space,” he advised.

In fact, while teenagers often turn to social media to find community, Dr. Sears says their mental health can be negatively impacted by a variety of issues including cyberbullying, toxic comparisons, sleep deprivation and fewer face-to-face interactions leading to feelings of isolation.

This month, there will be depression screenings in many of the communities served by OSF HealthCare. Dr. Sears points out depression is a large umbrella that can represent dozens of mental health conditions.

“We put it under the same category because there are some shared traits of what they’re expressing. The way out of it is individual to every human being and we have to recognize that nuance and specificity to really help each individual achieve their best outcome.”

A year ago this month, OSF HealthCare also became the first health care system in the U.S. to offer free digital mental health services to individuals in all communities it serves. [SilverCloud](#) is an app and website that offers an anonymous, secure, and interactive platform that helps people manage the feeling and causes of depression, anxiety or stress.

If built-in screening tools exceed certain thresholds, the behavioral health navigator in the region will be notified to provide support which can include connecting users to the right services.

Check out our [Health Library](#) for more information about Mental Health Conditions.