

PRINT-OSF HealthCare Expands SilverCloud to Southwest Chicago for Mental Health Support

Users Report Platform as Helpful as In-person Therapy

You're working from home. The kids are out of school. Your favorite places are closed. And you're stuck indoors. Everyone is challenged by changes because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations, but when there's uncertainty, people can respond emotionally and don't always make good decisions says OSF HealthCare Behavioral Health Manager Luke Raymond. Panic itself can be contagious.

"When people are in the grocery store and you see other people panicking and grabbing all the toilet paper, milk, and eggs, that's very contagious, so you feel some of that, too, and begin to exhibit some of those same behaviors," according to Raymond.

Without accurate information, it is easy for thoughts to immediately go to a worse-case scenario. Raymond suggests seeking accurate sources of information such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). He also recommends taking breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories - including social media - because hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.

As part of the OSF HealthCare Ministry, the neighborhoods of southwest Chicago surrounding OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Evergreen Park, Ill., are now able to access [OSF SilverCloud](#), a user-friendly, mental health digital support tool that has been available since 2018 in communities served by OSF.

"One of the best things for some of the folks experiencing increased anxiety or stress right now is access to our online platform for behavioral health, OSF SilverCloud. SilverCloud provides access to online behavioral health tools, as well as an integrated live-person supporter who can provide them with connectivity to in-person resources or telehealth services if they need it," he said.

The secure, anonymous platform is available 24/7 to anyone 18 and older. Raymond says people who have never received professional mental health support should consider this a "soft entry" into getting help.

"The really great thing about SilverCloud is you don't need to have a referral. You don't have to be an OSF patient, just go to www.osfhealthcare.org/silvercloud to sign up at no charge."

Studies of OSF SilverCloud users show a reduction in symptoms equal to those who've experienced traditional face-to-face therapy.

Workers on the front line of COVID-19

For front-line workers, Raymond believes it's important for loved ones and individuals dealing with the pandemic to acknowledge the impact it is having. He says many in professions that focus on helping others, such as health care, law enforcement, and other support personnel, are usually strong, independent, well-meaning people who will say they are 'fine' when they're really not.

Raymond recommended, "It's important for them to have a buddy system so that they can check in on each other and make sure they're doing the things they need to do to take care of their own internal and interpersonal wellness, because it's times like this we really need to rely on them and then we also need to be providing them with the support they need to be successful."

Raymond emphasizes those still working to support critical services should have a communication plan with loved ones that sets realistic expectations about how often they'll be available.

Keep calm and carry on

Look for ways to keep connected with friends and family through video chats or texts options. Raymond challenges people to talk about something other than COVID-19.

Simple deep, cleansing breaths and mindfulness is important. Raymond suggests using this time as an opportunity to reconnect without the usual daily distractions – check items off your To Do list, enjoy playing board games or binge-watching something on TV.

Self-care is important, including taking care of your spirit so find time to [relax, pray and/or meditate](#).

Try to [eat healthy, well-balanced meals](#), [keep up regular exercise](#), and [get plenty of sleep](#).

And, perhaps most importantly says Raymond, while the situation is unprecedented, it is temporary.

“There really are some silver linings to this cloud. The important focus is to keep calm and carry on with the things that we can do and focus on some of the positives.”

In times of uncertainty, Raymond says it can also be rewarding to help others. If you are not in a risk group, ask older neighbors or loved ones if they need help picking up groceries or medication.

Finally, if you or someone you care about are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, or anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or others, call 911; The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255; or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrative Disaster Distress Helpline by phone at (800) 985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.