

## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

To all Ashland families & community members:

In 1949, Mental Health Awareness Month was established to increase awareness of the importance of mental health and wellness in Americans' lives, and to celebrate recovery from mental illness. Each May, communities across the U.S. observe Mental Health Awareness Month through programs, education, and events that seek to reduce stigma around mental health and promote opportunities to celebrate health and wellness.

Ashland's Human Services Department, Ashland Public Schools, and Ashland's Decisions at Every Turn Coalition are joining efforts to share supportive resources and bring attention to mental health.

This past year has presented many different challenges and obstacles that tested our strength and resiliency. The global pandemic forced us to cope with situations we have never imagined, and many of us struggled with our mental health as a result. The good news is that there are tools and resources available that can support the well-being of individuals and communities.

That's why this Mental Health Month, we are working together to highlight #Tools2Thrive, created by Mental Health America, to provide tools and strategies that individuals can use throughout their daily lives to prioritize mental health, build resiliency, and continue to cope with the obstacles of COVID-19. During the month of May, we will be sharing resources on different topics that can help process the events of the past year and the feelings that surround them, while also building up skills and supports that extend beyond the pandemic.

Throughout the year, people who had never experienced mental health challenges found themselves struggling for the first time. Many of us faced challenging situations that we had little to no control over. If you found that it impacted your mental health, you are not alone. In fact, of the almost half a million individuals that took the anxiety screening at [MHAScreening.org](https://MHAScreening.org), 79% showed symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety.

There are practical ways that we can all use to help improve our mental health. By focusing on small changes, we can move through the stressors of the past year and develop long-term strategies to support ourselves on an ongoing basis.

A great starting point for anyone who is ready to start prioritizing their mental health is to take a mental health screening at [MHAScreening.org](https://MHAScreening.org). The screening is a quick, free, and confidential way for someone to assess their mental health and begin finding hope and healing. We want to remind everyone that it is OK to ask someone for help. There are local resources available to anyone needing this additional support. Jennifer Wuelfing, MSW LICSW, Ashland's Director of Human Services/Town Social Worker can be reached at 508-532-7942 or [jwuelfing@Ashlandmass.com](mailto:jwuelfing@Ashlandmass.com). Jen Cutler, MS, CAGS, M.Ed, Director of Counseling and Social-Emotional Learning for Ashland Public Schools can be reached at 508-532-4015 or [jcutler@ashland.K12.ma.us](mailto:jcutler@ashland.K12.ma.us).

Mental health is an important part of our overall health. Recognizing a pathway to positive mental health and wellness is unique to each of us and can be a lifelong journey. By developing your own #Tools2Thrive, it is possible to find balance between life's ups and downs and continue to cope with the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Tools2Thrive Tools & Resources: <https://ashlanddecisions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Tools2ThriveToolkit.pdf>

Mental Health America: <https://www.mhanational.org/>

Yours in health,

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