Four-Part Webinar Series

Mental Resiliency in Challenging Times

Mondays, 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.
June 1 – Session 1
June 8 – Session 2, Day 1
June 15 – Session 2, Day 2
June 22 – Session 3

Overview

This four-session webinar series is hosted by California HOSA and the California Department of Education. Mark Ragins, M.D., psychiatrist, trainer, consultant, speaker, author, and transformation leader in the mental health recovery movement, will facilitate discussions that highlight the central role that schools play in the wellness of young people, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants will recognize and explore their personal assets and strengths to initiate their recovery and sustain their well-being.

Session 1: Schools, mental health, and corona virus – hope in the maelstrom

Even before the COVID-19 shutdown, unparalleled rates of depression, anxiety, ADD, autism, and even suicide may be signaling a mental health crisis among our young people. Educators have increasingly received training in a medical model that lacks necessary professional resources, rather than a person-centered, developmental, resilience-building approach within families and schools. Now we have the added risks of spreading COVID-19 infections, multiple family pressures, and considerable additional mental health stresses. However, school districts likely will experience large funding cuts precisely when they need more staff and resources.

We need to focus on ways to prevent large numbers of children and youth from developing mental distress, and emphasize personal identity, self-confidence, and connectedness. This shutdown will affect each of us differently depending on where we are in our psychological and emotional development. Discussion topics in this session will include approaches to build protective factors to reinforce the emotional well-being of the children and youth in our schools.

Session 2, day 1: COVID shutdown mental health struggles and strategies

Session 2, presented over two days, will focus on understanding the subtle, quietly pervasive changes from the shutdown that have been the most disorienting and difficult, including practical strategies to cope better. We can build our expertise from past isolation examples from a variety of cultures. This session will address: (1) time disorientation, (2) sleep disturbances, (3) physical inactivity, (4) practical, economic difficulties, (5) medical risks and fears, (6) social isolation and emotional isolation, and (7) emotional depletion and pleasure-center stimulators.

Session 2, day 2: COVID shutdown mental health struggles and strategies

This practical session will continue in its second day with discussion about six additional components of pandemic-induced isolation: (8) feeling trapped in detrimental family dynamics and being subject to trauma, (9) feeling overwhelmed and helpless, (10) loss of events and opportunities, (11) erosion of life roles, (12) pursuit of personal growth amid a crisis, and (13) finding meaning amid suffering.

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Session 3: Coming back stronger

Young people need to identify and develop their core gifts, often connected to their wounds, to strengthen their personal identity and energy. At the same time, they must learn how their gifts connect them productively to our communities. Increasingly, conventions and rituals are being challenged and broken down as people “write their own life vows.” Young people need inclusive welcoming, creative guidance, and mentoring to avoid becoming stuck practically and mentally. This time of unprecedented crisis and loss exposes the underlying serious issues and conflicts that threaten both our mental health and our planet’s health, and gives us an opportunity to promote serious changes to save ourselves.

Reliance on an army of mental health professionals to relieve our mental symptoms may not necessarily help us emerge stronger from this crisis. Perhaps instead, we need an army of peers, teachers, parents, artists, and even elders to guide us in developing self-identity and connectedness, accepting and learning from all parts of ourselves and each other.

Mark Ragins, M.D.

Dr. Mark Ragins is an award-winning psychiatrist and distinguished fellow of the American Psychiatric Association. For 27 years he was the medical director of The Village in Long Beach, California, through which Mental Health America of Los Angeles offered integrated services; The Village was among the most prominent community mental health programs in the world. Dr. Ragins counseled people with severe mental illnesses, psychosis, homelessness, incarceration, substance abuse, and lifelong trauma, focusing on helping them find their strengths to rebuild their lives and reconnect to the community as they engaged in their own journeys of recovery. He has lectured around the world and written extensively on the recovery process and how to support it. Three years ago, he became the only psychiatrist on the staff of the Counseling and Psychological Services unit at CSU Long Beach, where he has adapted his person-centered recovery approach to guide and mentor students in severe distress. Now, along with the rest of us, he is entwined in the destructive global pandemic, helping to make sense of it all while we fight through this together.