



FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS



Monica Seles

The professional tennis player overcame the trauma of being stabbed during a tennis match in the early '90s.

Making Mental Health a Priority During a Crisis

Families are struggling to adjust to the new normal brought on by the coronavirus pandemic, but there's hope. Here, two local psychologists offer insight and advice for coping with the changes.

By Stacey Winconek

The landscape of our lives has drastically changed since the coronavirus outbreak hit in Michigan in mid-March. The stay-at-home order led to business and school closures, along with safety concerns about simple tasks like grocery shopping. Children lost the ability to see their friends, participate in sports or after-school activities. For parents, the spread of COVID-19 resulted in job loss or balancing working from home with caring for, and teaching, their children.

"I think what's happening is parents have been thrown into this situation where they've experienced a major life stressor and their kids have, too, and all of a sudden they are responsible 24/7 for their kids' well-being, and they're just not used to it," says psychologist Michele Wolf, MA, Psy.D., owner of Wolf Psychological Services, PLLC, in Ann Arbor.

Parents are used to having a community, family members, teachers and friends, to help, but now everything is falling on the individual parents as they are grieving huge losses.

And it's all taken on toll on families.

A shared trauma

"I think one thing we're all going through is a trauma. I would definitely call our experience right now with this pandemic a trauma," Wolf says. "We've all shared these common experiences, which are significant losses.

"Not only do we have our individual losses," she adds, "but then we have the losses of our friends and neighbors, and then we have this uncertainty about the future, which could have more loss and more grieving."

People are in shock, struggling to make decisions, feeling a sense of numbness and questioning their identity and purpose, Wolf notes.

When something is stolen from you

— like your freedom to see family on the holidays or the ability to grab a drink with friends, or, for children, the chance to have playdates — all the disruption causes people to question, "Who am I without all these things that have given me my identity?"

And, of course, there's also the fear of what's to come and the possibility of losing a loved one during this unprecedented time.

While all the changes and stressors are challenging, though, there is hope.

Coping tips for kids

It's important for parents to care for their own mental health, Wolf says. Here's how:

"The most important thing is to establish a routine and a schedule. It's crucial," says Kimberly Parkin, a child and adolescent psychotherapist with Crossroads Counseling in Ann Arbor. "Kids thrive on that and it's really important, so a lot of therapists recommend some kind of a morning family meeting and, at the very least, an evening check-in."

Doing so, Wolf adds, gives parents a chance to check in and see how kids are doing — and give them a chance to communicate their feelings. For help, Parkin suggests families consult the Make Social & Emotional Learning Stick website at makesociallearningstick.com.

Physical activity is important, Parkin notes, in helping all ages cope with crisis. Try Cosmic Kids Yoga on YouTube, have a dance party, do an obstacle course or scavenger hunt — anything to blow off some steam.

Practice ways to calm down, focus and regulate emotions through yoga, meditation or mindfulness, or by expressing gratitude.

To practice mindfulness, use Headspace for free, thanks to a collaboration between Headspace and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Visit [headspace.com/MI](https://www.headspace.com/MI) for a collection of science-backed, evidence-based guided meditations and more.

Practicing self-regulation is important for both children and parents.

"A way to do co-regulation with kids to set up a regular 'special time' of 10 to 30 minutes where the child gets to choose how they spend the time. Parents follow their lead to focus on enjoying their child rather than being distracted or correcting or teaching their kid," Parkin says.

Kids need to feel that they do have control over some things and that they do have choices.

Coping tips for parents

As parents, we are always putting our children's needs first, but it's important for parents to care for their own mental health, too, Wolf says. Here's how:

1. *Recognize the trauma.* What is happening is really bad, Wolf says, and it's important to own that fact. "This is a really big deal — you're not making it up."

2. *Keep your expectations of yourself very low.* You do not have to produce anything, perform anything or create anything right now. "We don't know what to do with freedom or down time. That causes anxiety for people," Wolf says. However, give yourself a break as you're processing your feelings.

3. *It's OK to allow yourself to think about the world.* But the important thing is to limit those thoughts, she says, because you can't control everything that's happening. Ask yourself questions such as, "What do I have control over right now? What can I do with my body? What can I do with my child?"

4. *Take time to reflect.* It's good to reflect on things you are grateful for and what things really do have meaning in your life, she says. Loss can be an opportunity to contemplate gratitude, meaning and purpose.

COPING WITH A CRISIS

The spread of the coronavirus has changed the lives of people around the globe, and here, in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, we take a closer look at the impact this unprecedented time has had on families.

For children, that has meant an early end to the school year; organized sports, after-school clubs and time with friends. For parents, job loss or adjustments to working at home while caring for their children has led to additional stress.

But you're not alone. We are in this together, and we are committed to helping families cope with this crisis.



Andrea M. Cole
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