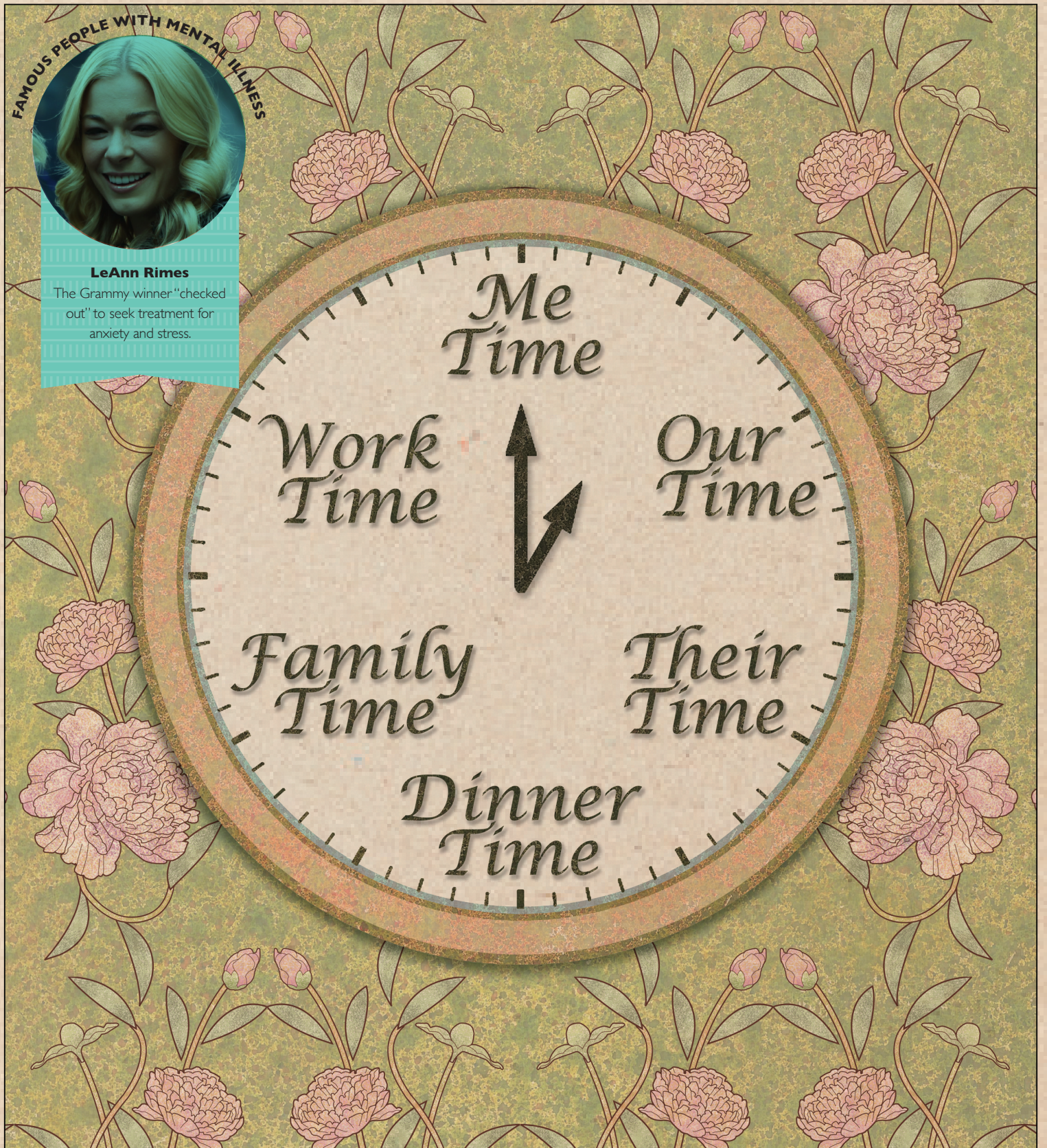


FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS



LeAnn Rimes

The Grammy winner “checked out” to seek treatment for anxiety and stress.



Practical Ways to Carve Out Time for Self-Care

It feels like there aren't enough hours in the day to dedicate to work, family and other obligations — let alone self-care. But it's easier to prioritize your physical, mental and emotional well-being than you realize, a local clinical psychologist says. *By Stacey Winconek*

In summer 2020, Elizabeth Muenk, a clinical psychologist at Horizon Counseling Services in Royal Oak and a mom of one, was dealing with her son's complex medical issues in the midst of a global pandemic. The combination of stressors was impacting Muenk in ways she wasn't completely aware — until one day when it suddenly hit her.

"I realized when I was making coffee that I was making coffee as if I was on a timer and it was a race to see who could make the fastest coffee on the planet," she says. "And that snapshot moment was really helpful for me to notice that my body was running as if it was an emergency all the time."

The stress was taking its toll and could have caused other issues. In fact, chronic stress can lead to chronic fatigue and irritable bowel syndrome, in addition to relationship and work complications, Muenk says.

"Honestly, I'm talking about the extreme when our un-wellness or lack of self-care affects every area of our life, but it's not hard to get there with all these stressors, especially as a parent," she says. "All of the support systems, all of those external places we used to find joy — those are not available for us right now."

That's why it's crucial to carve out time for self-care, which is a conscious act to impact physical, mental or emotional well-being. Guilt about prioritizing your own needs may be inevitable, especially if you're taking time away from family or a chore, but self-care is necessary, Muenk notes.

Investing in a new Peleton bike or fancy massage chair isn't the only way to achieve self-care. In fact, it's even simpler. Here's how to get started.

Sparkling joy and finding balance

Before you begin your self-care journey, it's important to define mental health.

"I think it just means living a life that brings us some joy and has some balance," Muenk says. "Those are abstract terms but I think it gives us an idea of where we're going, and even though that means something different to all of us, it means something."

Write it out. "A busy, stressed out mind is not a place that can have organized, orderly thoughts," she says.

Write down the things you think should change in your life. The physical act of writing things out slows you down and helps you observe what you've just written.

Chart it out. Draw a pie chart and separate it into slivers. Each sliver should be labeled as an area of life — work, marriage, social, parenting (you can make it specific to different children in the house), fun, pleasure, health (can include physical, mental, spiritual) and family. From here, do a simple check-in with each area, Muenk suggests. Rate the stress, imbalance or dissatisfaction in each area of your life from one to 10. In this case, one is "no stress" while 10 is the most stress. The goal, she notes, is to fluctuate around five or six.

Once you've done this, rate enjoyment, calmness and peacefulness in each category on a scale of 1-7, with 7 being the "most pleasure," which is the goal. Doing this allows you to see that areas of life can be both stressful and joyful at the same time. It also can demonstrate which areas are severely out of balance.

"This is a really concrete, logical way to start examining how can I increase my pleasure and my joy, how can I decrease my stress and get more balance in every area

of my life."

Start with the easiest 'sliver.' Start small, and ask yourself, "is it easier to reduce the stress or to increase the joy or pleasure?" Try to strike a balance between adding a self-care activity without adding stress.

Practice mindfulness. Notice if you're criticizing yourself, she says, and if you do, imagine treating yourself as you would treat your children.

"We love and encourage them while they are growing and making mistakes. We read books about not shaming when they are learning how to grow, and yet we do that to ourselves day in and day out without noticing," she says.

Turn that loving, gentle and compassionate behavior inwards, Muenk suggests.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by your toddler or you had a stressful meeting, practice box breathing. Breathe in slowly for four counts, hold in that breath for four counts, breathe out slowly for four counts and hold for four counts. Do this 2-5 times.

"Doing so engages the diaphragm, which engages the calming system. It is something to focus on so the mind can't wander to worrisome thoughts," she says.

If you need to step away, head to the bathroom to take some deep breaths and splash cold water on your face. Doing so creates new physical sensations and grounds you.

Other self-care techniques include turning off Google Maps and taking a different route home from work to experience new scenery or purchasing a new brand of coffee to try — anything to add some joy or newness to your day. For more help, Muenk suggests reaching out to psychologist or life coach.

MAKING SELF-CARE SIMPLE

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us all the importance of slowing down, yet many are still struggling with prioritizing self-care while balancing the demands of work and parenthood. Self-care is crucial, and it doesn't have to involve new gadgets or hours outside of the home. In fact, it's a lot simpler than that. In this month's installment of *Opening Minds, Ending Stigma*, we offer advice on how to prioritize self-care during even the busiest days. We hope you find it helpful and share it with others.



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