

The HOPE Connection

~a quarterly publication from Hands of Hope Resource Center
~SPRING 2023~



A message from the director ~

The month of April is significant in many ways. In the advocacy field, we recognize April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month as well as Child Abuse Prevention Month. It contains National Crime Victims' Rights Week and Volunteer Appreciation Week, as well as Denim Day.

All of these days, weeks, and months create an awareness for all, but a stark reminder to those who have experienced harm and victimization. It brings up memories and experiences that are not always welcome.

For those that are struggling with the memories, mental health counseling is one tool that can help you work through those traumas and assimilate them into your life. For some survivors going through this process, they are able to find ways in which the victimization has brought about positive changes in their life. This is referred to as posttraumatic growth. Struggle often creates opportunities where people can gain strength and perspective, which often results in growth. What kind of growth? The five most commonly identified are stronger relationships, awareness of new possibilities for the direction of their life, increased personal strength, spiritual enhancement, and a greater appreciation for life.

You have the power to let something destroy you or make you stronger. Read that again... **YOU HAVE THE POWER** to let something destroy you or make you stronger. Only you. Remember that! And please feel free to reach out to an advocate if you would like to talk about this more.

~ Stephenie Och

National Child Abuse Prevention Month *by Kim Cook*

National Child Abuse Prevention Month is an annual observance in the United States dedicated to raising awareness and preventing child abuse. April has been designated Child Abuse Prevention Month in the United States since 1983. In 1989, the Blue-Ribbon Campaign had its early beginnings as a Virginia grandmother's tribute to her grandson who died as a result of abuse. She tied a blue ribbon to the antenna of her car as a way to remember him and to alert her community of the tragedy of child abuse.



Child abuse numbers for the State of Minnesota in 2020:

- 31,258 child maltreatment reports were investigated.
- 4.8 of every 1,000 children in Minnesota will be subject to child maltreatment.
- 22 deaths and 23 life threatening injuries resulted from child maltreatment. Of the 22 children whose deaths were determined to be a result of maltreatment, five were involved in prior screened in child protection reports, and 17 had not.
- 61% of Minnesota children who experienced maltreatment experienced neglect, and 23% of children who experienced maltreatment experienced physical abuse.
- Children ages 8 and younger represented 58.4% of maltreatment assessments.

Consider the possibility of physical abuse when the child:

- Has unexplained burns, bites, bruises.
- Broken bones.
- Black eyes.
- Has fading bruises or other noticeable marks.
- Seems frightened of certain adults and protests or cries in the presence of this adult.
- Shrinks at the approach of adults.
- Reports injury by a parent or another adult caregiver.

Consider the possibility of neglect when the child:

- Is frequently absent from school.
- Begs or steals food or money.
- Lacks needed medical or dental care, immunizations, or glasses.
- Is consistently dirty and has severe body odor.
- Lacks sufficient clothing for the weather.
- Abuses alcohol or other drugs.

Consider the possibility of sexual abuse when the child experiences:

- Sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy.
- Unexplained injuries, especially to the genital area.
- Pain, bleeding, or discharge in the genitals, anus, or mouth.
- Persistent or recurring pain with urination or bowel movements.
- Toileting accidents unrelated to toilet training.
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches that cannot be explained.

Consider the possibility of emotional maltreatment when the child:

- Is withdrawn, depressed, and lacking empathy.
- Is clingy to anyone who gives attention to them.
- Acts out and seems like they have behavior problems.
- Has less fear than other kids of the same age.
- Sticks very strictly to rules of any adult in a supervisory role like teachers, doctors, and babysitters.
- Suffers from disorders related to sleeping, eating, and communicating.
- Develops self-soothing mechanisms like repetitive motions or rhythmic rocking.
- Wets the bed or struggles to potty train without persistent accidents.
- Shows a lack of interest in interacting or communicating with other people and lacks attention to detail.
- Makes comments frequently like, "Mommy/Daddy says that I'm always bad."

If you feel a child may be being abused:

- Trust your gut and don't ignore your feelings if something seems off.
- If a child tells you that someone makes them uncomfortable, even if they can't tell you anything specific, listen. You may be the only person that is able to help the child.

Children themselves may not be able to talk about the abuse they are suffering, According to kidhealth.org, many cases of child abuse or neglect go unreported or undetected because the children are afraid to tell somebody who can help. Children may have been threatened by their abuser that if they tell someone about the abuse something bad may happen or the child may feel trapped by the affection they feel for their abuser – so they stay silent.

To report suspected abuse or neglect of a child, contact the county social service agency where the child lives or the local law enforcement agency.

If you see something, say something.
It is our responsibility to keep all children safe.
Child abuse is preventable.



April is Stress Awareness Month by Barb Goodrich

We all experience stress, yet we may experience it in very different ways. Because of this, people have very different ideas with respect to the definition of stress. Most people consider the definition to be something that causes distress. However, stress is not always harmful since increased stress can result in increased productivity. Any definition of stress should also include good stress, or eustress. For example, winning a race or election is just as stressful as losing.

Unfortunately, the definition of stress for most people tends to focus on the negative feelings and emotions it produces including physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension. Stress is a reaction to a situation where a person feels anxious or threatened. Some common reactions include:

- Disbelief, shock and numbness
- Feeling sad, frustrated and helpless
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Headaches, back pains and stomach problems

Therefore, learning healthy ways to manage, along with proper care and support, can help reduce these stressful reactions and symptoms:

- Recognize when you don't have control, and let it go
- Avoid getting anxious about situations that you cannot change
- Take control of your reactions and focus on something that makes you feel calm and in control
- Develop a vision for healthy living, wellness, and personal growth

Stress is a natural physical and mental reaction to life events and everyone experiences stress from time to time. Learning to cope with your stress and finding healthy ways to deal with situations can go a long way in living a healthy and positive life.

National Youth Violence Prevention Week by Rocio Fernandez Lugo

National Youth Violence Prevention Week from April 12 to 16 is the time of the year when certain organizations place a great focus on preventing youth violence. Sponsored by the National Association of Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) and Sandy Hook Promise, the week looks at the different instances of youth violence that have taken place over the past few years. It also aims to encourage student involvement, so people of all ages are better prepared to tackle cases of youth violence before they occur. The end goal is to ensure no young lives are lost in horrifying acts of violence.



What is Youth Violence? Youth violence is the intentional use of physical force or power to threaten or harm others by young people ages 10-24. It can include fighting, bullying, threats with weapons, and gang-related violence. A young person can be involved with youth violence as a victim, offender, or witness.

What Causes Teen and Youth Violence? According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 13 youth die every day due to violence. Further, 1 in 5 high school students report that they have been victims of bullying. While the individual causes of teen and youth violence are varied, some of the key risk factors are: social isolation, being a victim of violence, and emotional distress.

What are the Warning Signs? *

1. Suddenly withdrawing from friends, family, and activities (including online or via social media).
2. Bullying, especially if targeted towards differences in race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.
3. Excessive irritability, lack of patience, or becoming angry quickly.
4. Experiencing chronic loneliness or social isolation.
5. Expressing persistent thoughts of harming themselves or someone else.
6. Making direct threats toward a place, another person, or themselves.
7. Bragging about access to guns or weapons.
8. Recruiting accomplices or audiences for an attack.
9. Directly expressing a threat as a plan.
10. Cruelty to animals.

* NOTE: This isn't a complete list of all warning signs. Exhibiting one of these signs doesn't necessarily indicate imminent violence. When concerned about troubling behaviors, contact an advocate at Hands of Hope Resource Center or call 911 if there is an immediate threat.

Some Facts of Youth Violence:

1. Over 200,000 homicides occur annually worldwide among youth between the ages of 10 to 29.
2. Roughly 1,150,000 high school students face an incident with a weapon at school.
3. In four out of five school shootings, at least one other person was aware an attack was about to happen.
4. Nearly 90,000 school children end up in the emergency room.
5. Threats aren't reported because students don't want to be called a "snitch."

Youth Violence is preventable when you know the signs and organize your community. No matter what your role is in the community, there are actions you can take to have safer schools and neighborhoods. For more information or to schedule a presentation on this topic, contact an advocate at Hands of Hope Resource Center by calling 320-732-2319.



National Crime Victims' Rights Week April 23 – 29, 2023

by Johanna Klinkner

Since 1981, National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW) has challenged the Nation to confront and remove barriers to achieving justice for all victims of crime. During NCVRW, we celebrate the accomplishments of the victims' rights movement and reflect on how far we have come.

Every April, the Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) leads communities throughout the country in their annual observances of NCVRW. We will observe the 2023 NCVRW between April 23–29.

The 2023 theme Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change. calls upon communities to amplify the voices of

survivors and commit to creating an environment where survivors have the confidence that they will be heard, believed, and supported.

Prom Safety by Lyndsey Dimateo

In honor of April being Sexual Assault Awareness Month, we'd like to discuss safety during prom season. Why prom season? Well, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1 in 5 female high school students is the victim of physical or sexual abuse at the hands of a date. And, as stated in a survey by AAA, 41% of teens, aged 14 to 19, reported they would most likely use drugs or consume alcohol the night of prom. Of the teens who do drink at prom, 54% of them consume four or more drinks. Although there aren't specific numbers of sexual assaults occurring on prom night, the risk of being victimized heavily increases with the use of drugs or alcohol.

Here are a few tips to remember for teens to have a fun and safe prom:

- Plan your entire day ahead of time and share these plans with a parent or trusted adult. Keep this person updated on any change of plans.
- Make sure your cell phone is fully charged prior to your events and take a phone charger with you.
- Make a plan/agreement, with your friends to check in with each other throughout the night.
- If going to an after party, take at least one trusted friend with you.
- Use good judgement of the photos and videos posted to social media.
- If faced with pressures, such as drinking, doing drugs, or having sex, know that it is OK to say no. "No" is a complete sentence.
- Respect yourself and your boundaries—think about what your boundaries are BEFORE the festivities to reduce risk of peer pressure.
- Remember, just because your friends or classmates are participating in these things does not mean you have to. It also does not mean it is a good idea or the right thing to do.
- ALWAYS wear a seatbelt in a vehicle!
- NEVER get in the car with a driver who has been drinking or using drugs!
- Prearrange your transportation for the day and night.
- Travel in groups.
- Have a plan in place in case your transportation falls through.
- Don't ever accept a drink, alcoholic or not, from anyone if you did not watch them pour it.
- If engaging in consensual sex, use protection and communicate your expectations and boundaries.
- Trust your instincts!

If you are a parent, have a talk with your teen about safety during this prom season!





National Teen Self-Esteem Month *by Taylor Hernandez*

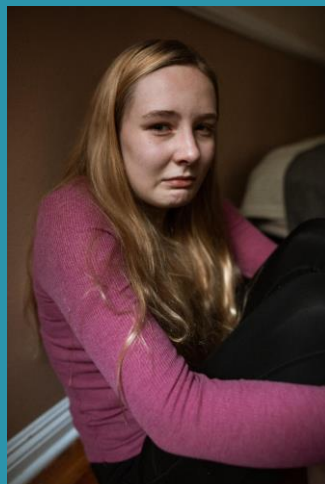
National Teen Self-Esteem Month is sponsored by I Am Worth More, a nonprofit that connects teens to resources and helps them increase their positive entertainment intake. National Teen Self-Esteem Month unites teens, parents, and teachers all around the country, and is designed to focus attention on the importance of teens having a healthy outlook of themselves. Self-esteem by definition is a confidence in one's own worth or abilities and self-respect. It can be a very fragile part of our mental health and it is fitting that May is both Mental Health Awareness Month and National Teen Self-Esteem Month (NTSEM).

There are ways to encourage healthy self-esteem in teens, below are just a few:

- **Being heard.** Wanting to know what your teen thinks is important, because the less people want to hear what teens have to say, the less teens will value their voices.
- **Catching them when they do things well and tell them.** Sometimes people have a hard time seeing what they do well. Don't assume your teen knows—tell them.
- **Supporting them in their passions, especially when trying out new things.** Trying a new haircut, clothing style, etc. is a big deal. Supporting teens during their struggles to figure things out, and the self-expression struggles that go along with that helps them feel loved.
- **Don't blame/shame them for opinions/preferences that differ from yours.** Don't use shame as a teaching tool. Shame is never a good strategy.
- **Mean what you say.** Mean what you say and say what you mean. Don't talk down to teens. Treat them like human beings.

Self-esteem is something that can be struggled with late into adulthood if not all the way through it. A little bit of kindness, compassion and empathy can go a long way in supporting others and ourselves.

<https://www.iamworthmore.org/>



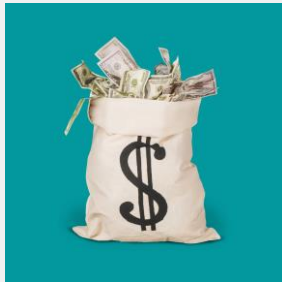
June is National PTSD Awareness Month

by Connie Nelson

Many have heard of or have dealt with someone suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. For most the awareness came because of military service and war experiences. However, PTSD is also a response after experiencing a shocking, scary, dangerous, or life-threatening event, with symptoms that tend to linger beyond a month. According to the National Center for PTSD Awareness, women are more likely to suffer from PTSD, {other than Veterans}, due to the intimate nature of their traumatization, usually caused by sexual or domestic assaults.

Symptoms of PTSD include ongoing nightmares, inability to sleep, abnormal sweats, mental and physical exhaustion, fear, a sense of a hyper alert state, uncontrolled sadness or crying, and disruption to daily living and relationships.

The good news is that there is treatment available. Starting with your personal physician, have a screening done to see what the issues are to get proper treatment and medication. You may also want to get a referral for a mental health provider. If military, perhaps start with your local Veteran's office. There are also PTSD and mental health hotlines available 24/7. Veterans can call **800-273-8255**, and others can call the local mental health crisis line at **800-462-5525**, or text or call **988**. You can also go online to the National Center for PTSD for much more information about PTSD, symptoms, and treatments.



Our **2nd Annual Denim Day Raffle** will wrap up on Wednesday, April 26, 2023 at 4:30pm - Hart Mall Conference Room in Long Prairie.

The drawing will also be livestreamed on our Facebook page. Reach out to a board member or employee if you still need to get your ticket. Only 500 tickets sold!

Tickets are \$20 each. **Prizes:**

- 1st prize: \$2,500.00
- 2nd prize: \$1,000.00
- 3rd prize: \$500.00
- 4th prize: (2) \$250.00
- 5th prize: (5) \$100.00

Thank you to the businesses that assisted in selling tickets in their store or at their counter.

Proceeds from the raffle will go to cover the cost of services that grants do not fully cover.



National Volunteer Week

National Volunteer Week is recognized from April 16-22, 2023. This is a time to spotlight our volunteers, celebrate the impact that volunteers have on our lives, and encourage active volunteerism for generations to come.

In our last completed fiscal year, our hotline volunteers donated 3,746 volunteer hours. We would like to take this moment to sincerely thank them for their time and dedication to making a difference in the lives of victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. Our hotline volunteers are often the first soothing voice that someone hears when reaching out. Thank you for being so amazing! We could not do this work without you.

~with sincere appreciation from all of us~

