



Taking Care of Yourself While Living in a Rural Area

By Bradi Holy, M.Ed., LAPC, NCC | Village EAP Counselor

The COVID-19 pandemic means it is more important now than ever to ensure we are taking care of ourselves physically and emotionally. Most of us are experiencing changes to our regular lives, as well as stressors of many kinds. For individuals living in rural areas, these stressors and challenges are unique in nature, and at times can be a roadblock to properly caring for ourselves. Having grown up in a rural area, I understand the unique struggles that exist. As we navigate this difficult time, there are several ways to address these challenges.

Stigma and Access Issues

Although society has become more accepting, the stigma of seeking outside help during stressful times as a sign of “weakness” persists, especially in rural communities. For many people, there is an attitude of “pulling yourself up by your bootstraps” – to solve your issues on your own without any help from others. During stressful times, we may fall into the coping patterns of our families of origin or those based on attitudes we learned growing up unless we actively work to change these patterns.

Growing up, I often heard the Finnish word “Sisu.” Translated, this means a “second wind” of mental toughness that goes past perseverance, grit, and resiliency, and to have stoic determination. As a therapist, I’ve had to form my own ideas of coping and learn new techniques for getting through stressful times, such as the current pandemic. I now believe “Sisu” allows me to have the resiliency and strength to reach out during difficult times and bond with others. Despite the stigma that exists, know that you are not in this pandemic alone. I encourage you to find strength in the ability to connect with others.

Another barrier for individuals in rural areas is the lack of nearby community services, such as mental health agencies and addiction treatment facilities, as compared to urban areas. This can be a hurdle for those who are concerned about privacy issues and may result in longer wait times. Individuals may use alcohol or other drugs to negatively cope with current stressors. They may experience financial stressors due to job uncertainty.

The Village EAP offers mental health counseling and financial counseling, as well as chemical dependency assessments for those concerned with their substance use.

Coping Skills

It is necessary to focus on our wellbeing and take care of our physical and emotional health. Here are a few ways to care for yourself right now.

- Journal or get your thoughts down on paper to process any worries or fears. Ask yourself what you are worried about. What is the evidence or the facts for these worries? Explore the realistic outlook of the situation.

- Be aware of negative ways of coping that we may slip into (drinking, smoking, over-eating, etc.) and instead engage in pleasurable activities that are food for your body and mind.
- Exercise is vital in reducing our stress levels and engaging in some form of exercise, such as a walk, jog, yoga, stretching, etc., can be so beneficial. We may have to be more creative in how we exercise with gyms closed; even walking up and down your stairs at home is an option.
- Limit your intake of social media and news related to COVID-19.
- Reach out to friends, family, or co-workers and stay connected.
- Focus on what you can control.
- Stick to a routine, even if that means establishing a new routine for the time being.

For additional resources related to self-care and coping during this time, [check out our website](#).

Contact Us

Despite the hardships that rural areas face, especially during COVID-19, there are excellent opportunities to receive help in a **confidential, convenient** way. Employees covered by The Village EAP and their household members can access a set number of mental health sessions at no charge to you. Counseling sessions may be done confidentially online or over the phone. In-office sessions will be available again when The Village re-opens to the public. Several EAP counselors provide services in Fargo; my offices are located in Detroit Lakes and Perham, and I can provide services to both North Dakota and Minnesota residents.

To set up an appointment through your Village EAP, call 701-451-4900 or request an appointment online at TheVillageFamily.org.

