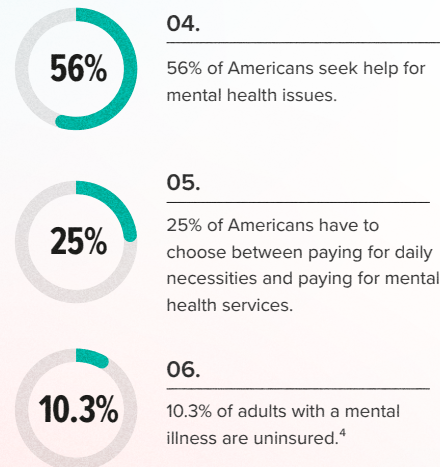
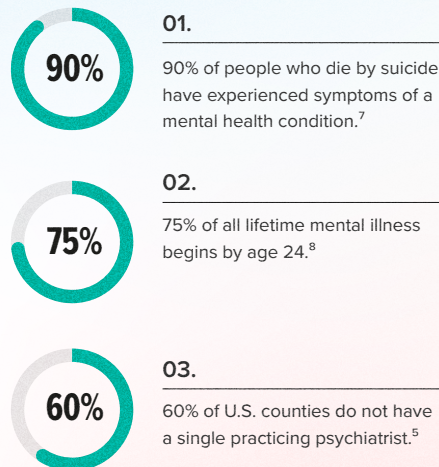


REPAIRING THE SOUL: A GUIDE TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

Over a year into the **COVID-19 pandemic**, social isolation and its effects on mental health are being exacerbated further. As we continue our work to help repair the world, we must first look inward. Tikkun HaNefesh, or repairing the soul, suggests that we must be responsible for ourselves in order to be responsible to others. This dinner guide provides tools for thoughtful and productive conversations about mental health. Its purpose is to help us understand the origins of stigma against caring for our mental health and take steps to break the stigma.

01. MENTAL HEALTH CARE: Important Facts to Know



02. WHY #QUIETINGTHESILENCE?

The Blue Dove Foundation's platform, #QuietTheSilence, aims to help individuals and organizations create programs and events centered on mental health and substance use. By sharing individual experiences and quieting the silence on these issues, we hope to empower more individuals to ask for help when they need it, speak up about mental health and take action towards eliminating the shame and stigma felt by many.

A number of obstacles to mental health treatment remain aside from stigma, with many being especially prevalent in marginalized and oppressed populations. These can include a lack of available resources; racism; discrimination in treatment settings; language barriers; and financial hurdles such as inadequate health insurance. Despite lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults being two times as likely as heterosexual adults to experience mental health conditions, and transgender adults nearly four times as likely as their cisgender counterparts,⁶ there remain relatively few mental health care providers from these populations. This lack of representation extends to other marginalized

groups, such as folks with disabilities as well as racial and ethnic minorities. Diversity among mental health care professionals is essential to making treatment accessible for every population. There is plenty of work to do toward making sure every individual, regardless of background or identity, has easy access to quality mental health care.⁷



Mental illnesses are conditions that may affect a person's emotions, thinking, or behavior. They tend to involve significant changes in a combination of these and can have a negative impact on a person's daily functioning and well-being. Approximately one in five adults in the United States lives with a mental illness, with only about 44 percent receiving treatment.¹ One significant reason for this is the stigma associated with mental illness: In a 2018 survey, 25 percent of adults indicated it was their primary barrier to seeking treatment.²

As former First Lady Michelle Obama once said,

"Sadly, too often, the stigma around mental health prevents people who need help from seeking it. But that simply doesn't make any sense. Whether an illness affects your heart, your arm or your brain, it's still an illness, and there shouldn't be any distinction. We shouldn't treat mental health conditions any differently. Instead, we should make it clear that getting help isn't a sign of weakness—it's a sign of strength—and we should ensure that people can get the treatment they need."



SETTING THE SCENE

01. INSTRUCTION

When talking about mental health, it is important to create an atmosphere of trust and respect. Prepare to lead by reading through the following instructions for setting intentions and guide for respectful conversation. Feel free to discuss any additional guidelines, with your group, that are not listed.

02. SET AN INTENTION

Kavanah is the Hebrew word for intention. It involves a concentration of the mind on a certain act so it has purpose and direction, as opposed to being performed in a meaningless or unconscious way. In Jewish tradition and other faiths, it is often viewed as an essential element of prayer and reflection.⁸ With this in mind, set an intention for yourself going into this conversation. Focus on this intention throughout the discussion, bringing your full self and attention to this conversation.

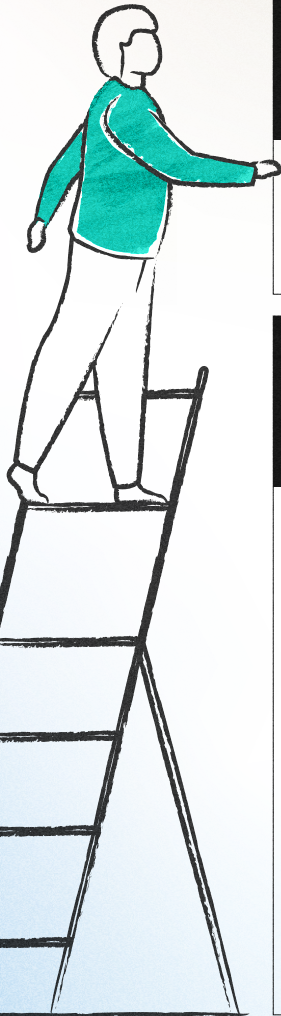
03. GUIDE TO RESPECTFUL CONVERSATION

- 1 Acknowledge the courage it takes to share. It's OK to take a break if you feel overwhelmed. Just be sure to stay mindful of what others might be feeling as well.
- 2 Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. The purpose of this conversation is to talk, listen, and remain open to different perspectives.
- 3 Speak from personal experience. Everyone has a different level of understanding and connection to these issues, and individuals can only speak for themselves.
- 4 Maintain confidentiality. Allowing yourself and others to be vulnerable requires complete trust that personal information will not be shared outside of this conversation.
- 5 Create a space for everyone to have a voice, but be respectful of those who choose not to share. All voices should be welcomed and listened to, but no one should feel pressured to speak.⁹

04. SHARING STORIES

Take a moment to reflect on a mental health issue you or someone you know has experienced or is living with. If you feel comfortable, share this story with your group. If you don't feel comfortable, listen to others with compassion and an open mind.

DIVING DEEPER



01.

DEFINITION: Stigma

A set of attitudes that leads people to shun, reject, or mistreat others they perceive as being different or "other".



02.

SOCIETAL ORIGINS OF STIGMA

The following excerpt addresses cultural factors related to the stigma of mental illness. With a partner, read the excerpt and discuss the accompanying question.



"Cultural Influences on Mental Health" by Sofia Andrade:

Every culture has its own way of making sense of the highly subjective experience that is an understanding of one's mental health. Each has its opinion on whether mental illness is real or imagined, an illness of the mind or the body or both, who is at risk for it, what might cause it, and perhaps most important, the level of stigma surrounding it.¹⁰

BLESSING AFTER A SNACK

Blessed are You, eternal, sovereign of the universe, creator of numerous living beings and all that they lack, for all the things You have created with which to sustain the soul of every living being. Blessed is the life of the worlds.

Chofetz Chaim Commentary: *We say it because of the deep and essential importance of acknowledging that God did not create people to be self-sufficient. Rather, we need to remember that everything with a soul is in need, and that this is a good thing, because it means that we must reach out to one another, thus building into the very foundation of society the need for us to help one another, and for society to build "passing it forward" into its very structure."*



03.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 How has mental illness been stigmatized in your community?
- 2 What impact might this have on the treatment of people in the larger society?
- 3 When considering Chofetz Chaim's commentary, how can we uplift ourselves and members of our communities?

****When your group is ready, come back together to share any takeaways. Then find a new partner to work with for the following exercises.**



SHAME AND VULNERABILITY



04.

DEFINITION: Shame

A highly unpleasant, painful self-conscious emotion arising from the sense of there being something dishonorable or troublesome in one's own being or circumstances.

While you read the following excerpts by Brené Brown with your partner, reflect on what the ideas of shame and vulnerability mean to you.



"The Power of Vulnerability" TEDTalk (2011):

Shame is really easily understood as the fear of disconnection...Is there something about me that, if other people know it or see it, [indicates] that I won't be worthy of connection?... The less you talk about [shame], the more you have it."¹¹

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead (2015):

Vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional... the level to which we protect ourselves from being vulnerable is a measure of our fear and disconnection.¹²

With your previous discussions as a foundation, consider and discuss the following question as a group.

How can practicing vulnerability reduce shame and stigma?

COPING WITH COVID-19

Jewish tradition teaches us that *pikuach nefesh*, or preservation of human life, overrides virtually every other religious obligation. For the first time in most of our lives, we are experiencing a global pandemic that has led to rising levels of anxiety, fear, isolation, and emotional distress. The impacts of COVID-19 are stressful and it's easy to feel a general loss of control over our health and emotions during this time. We have been tasked to embody *pikuach nefesh*, through taking precautions to save humanity, but this has also come at a cost to our mental and physical wellbeing.

RIGHT NOW, IT'S NORMAL TO FEEL:

LONELY OR SAD

It's hard to stay connected with loved ones, and difficult to make new connections during this time.

IRRITATED

You may be feeling annoyed by certain people or situations in your family, social circles, and the news.

BORED OR UNMOTIVATED

Having limitations such as staying home can become tiring and repetitive for many people.

SCARED OR ANXIOUS

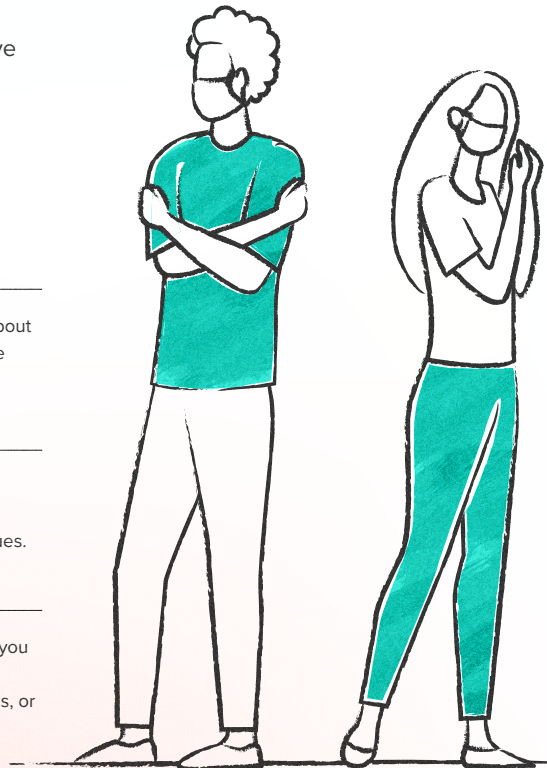
In a public health crisis, it is normal to worry about the health of yourself and others, and what the future will bring.

HOPELESS

A pandemic can be overwhelming due to uncertainties regarding health, employment, finances, relationships, and larger societal issues.

GUILTY

There may be certain aspects of your life that you are feeling guilty about. These may include productivity, unintentionally spreading sickness, or not being able to be fully present with or care for loved ones.¹



ALL OF THE EMOTIONS YOU ARE EXPERIENCING ARE VALID, AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO TAKE THE TIME TO PROCESS THEM. HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO REDUCE STRESS RELATED TO COVID-19:

01.

Set limits on when and for how long you consume news and information, especially news that might cause distress.

03.

Practice mindfulness. Meditation and other forms of mindfulness, such as breathing exercises, can help calm your mind and body to reduce anxiety.

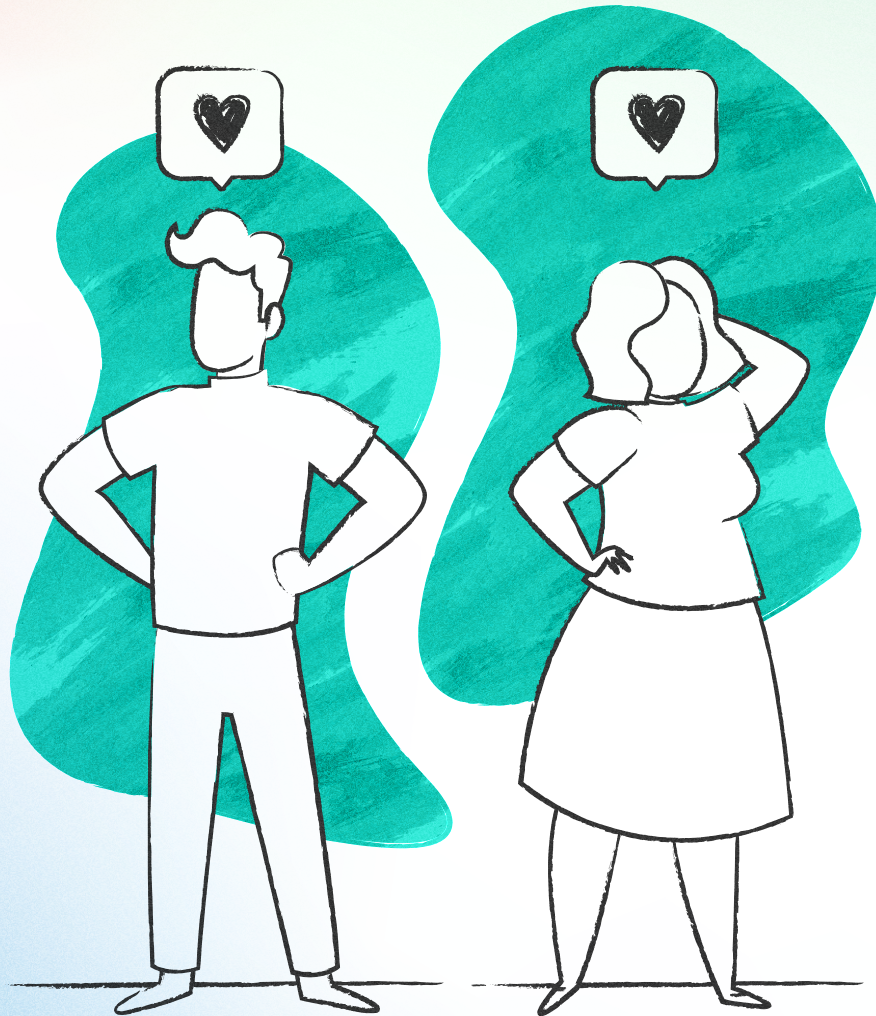
02.

Follow healthy daily routines. Prioritize sleep, engage in self-care, move your body, eat nourishing food, and make time for breaks in your day.

04.

Stay connected with others. Even if you can't see people in person, stay in touch with friends and family to manage feelings of isolation. We are all in this together.²

WHAT'S NEXT?



MAKING A COMMITMENT

Reflect on the intention you set at the beginning of the meal. Did you follow through? Ask yourself this question when thinking about future steps towards action.

Below is a non-exhaustive list of ways to act toward building mental health awareness and supporting those who live with mental illness.

ACTION STEPS:

01.

Engage in self-care and mindfulness on a regular basis.

03.

Learn how to recognize mental illness in yourself and others.

05.

Social isolation impacts us all, and community is a large part of our healing process.
#ServeTheMoment by writing letters to isolated seniors with LoveforOurElders.org.

02.

Continue to have meaningful conversations about mental health with your friends, family, and community.

04.

Educate yourself and others about what services are available to help those living with mental illness.

06.

Get involved in [volunteer work](https://www.volunteerwork.org) in communities to reduce stressors that can exacerbate mental health symptoms.

Now, set an intention for what will come after this conversation. It may be similar to the one you set at the beginning, or it may be completely different. Either way, this intention should act as a reminder and motivation to commit to continue learning and talking about mental health.

How will you support individuals in your family or community who struggle with mental health issues? Take this time to share any thoughts that have not been said, and practice gratitude for allowing the space for this conversation. You might consider thanking a specific individual for their valuable insights or just being grateful for your willingness to be vulnerable. Or you may show appreciation to your group for fostering a safe discussion environment. Any way you can express gratitude is meaningful and important!

Your participation in this conversation about mental health has been a great first step toward
#QuietingTheSilence. Thank You

MENTAL HEALTH HOTLINES

This is a non-exhaustive list of national mental health resources that are accessible by phone, for additional resources, visit thebluedovefoundation.org

01.

ALCOHOL AND DRUG HOTLINE

1-800-821-4357

Around-the-clock national hotline that provides resources about local alcohol and drug abuse treatment options. Calls are free and confidential.

02.

CRISIS TEXT LINE

Text HOME to 741741 | crisistextline.org

Around-the-clock support from trained crisis counselors.

03.

NATIONAL EATING DISORDER ASSOCIATION (NEDA)

1-800-931-2237 | nationaleatingdisorders.org

The largest nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals and families affected by eating disorders, NEDA serves as a catalyst for prevention, cures, and access to quality care. The NEDA Helpline (1-800-931-2237) is available Monday-Thursday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET and Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. ET to provide support, resources, and treatment options for yourself or a loved one.

04.

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS (NAMI)

1-800-950-NAMI (6264) | nami.org

The nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

05.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

1-800-799-SAFE | thehotline.org

Part of the largest nationwide network of programs and expert resources. Its website has information about domestic violence, online instructional materials, safety planning, local resources and ways to support the organization.

06.

CHILD HELP NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE

1-800-422-4453 | www.childhelp.org/hotline

Around-the-clock hotline with professional crisis counselors that offers crisis intervention, information, and referrals to thousands of emergency, social-service, and support resources. All calls are confidential.

07.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

1-800-273-8255 (1-800-SUICIDE)
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Around-the-clock hotline for people in distress and their loved ones to access prevention and crisis resources and best practices for professionals. Calls are answered by local crisis lines whenever possible.

08.

RAPE, ABUSE & INCEST NATIONAL NETWORK (RAINN)

National Sexual Assault Hotline

1-800-656-4673 | rainn.org

The nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, RAINN operates the hotline in partnership with more than 1,000 local support specialists across the country and administers the Department of Defense (DoD) Safe Helpline. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure perpetrators are brought to justice.

09.

THE TREVOR PROJECT

1-866-488-7386

LGBTQ+ Youth Suicide Prevention Hotline
If you are in crisis or thinking about suicide, The Trevor Project is available 24/7 by calling 1-866-488-7386 or texting "START" to 678-678.

THANK YOU



**FOR TAKING THE
TIME AND CREATING
THE SPACE TO COME
TOGETHER TO TALK
ABOUT A SENSITIVE
AND DEMANDING
ISSUE.**

Mental health affects each of us, and spreading awareness starts with a conversation. We appreciate your willingness to have that important conversation. We hope it will be meaningful for you and will spark positive change toward **#QuietingTheSilence** around mental illness.

ABOUT THE PARTNERS

REPAIR THE WORLD



Repair the World mobilizes Jews and their communities to take action to pursue a just world, igniting a lifelong commitment to service. We believe service in support of social change is vital to a flourishing Jewish community and an inspired Jewish life.

werepair.org
[@RepairTheWorld](https://www.instagram.com/RepairTheWorld)

THE BLUE DOVE FOUNDATION



The Blue Dove Foundation was created to help address the issues of mental illness and addiction in the Jewish community and beyond. Based in Atlanta, we work with people and organizations across the United States and around the world.

thebluedovefoundation.org
[@TheBlueDoveFoundation](https://www.instagram.com/TheBlueDoveFoundation)