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We are all confronting the task of figuring out how to handle “the new normal” that COVID-19 has brought us. We are all mourning the loss of our past lives, experiencing uncertainty about the future, and managing ongoing fears of becoming sick. This is a unique challenge for all of us to be facing.

In a pandemic, no one is exempt from experiencing the devastating feeling of loss. You may be grieving the loss of a loved one, financial stability, the “normal” college experience, the plans you had for the future, the feeling of safety in day-to-day life—maybe all of these at once. The sadness and anger prompted by grief can be emotionally isolating, especially when paired with the physical isolation of quarantine. These complex emotions may have heightened this week with news of positive cases on campus. We, as a campus community, are experiencing these feelings together. We can strengthen our individual and communal resilience by reaching out and focusing on wellness, even amid significant challenges.

I recognize that while COVID-19 has changed the reality of all Olivet students, marginalized communities are disproportionately and deeply affected by the pandemic. It’s historically and empirically apparent that BIPOC face greater barriers to preventive health care and treatment of illness. For LGBTQ+ students, many are not able to be out as themselves in their homes. While no one has the solutions to all of these immensely complex and difficult situations, I want to acknowledge the impact COVID-19 has on marginalized students. I stand with you and support you and am here to help how I can.

Coping with COVID-19 and Quarantine

This first step in coping with distress is recognizing the potential signs that you are experiencing it. Below are some common signs of distress in response to COVID-19.

Recognizing distress after a COVID-19 diagnosis

- Fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones.
- Stress from the experience of monitoring yourself or being monitored by others for signs and symptoms of COVID-19.
- Sadness, anger, or frustration because friends or loved ones have fears of contracting the disease from having contact with you.
- Guilt about not being able to perform normal school, work, or parenting duties during quarantine.

September 25, 2020

- Other emotional or mental health changes, including but not limited to: depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and traumatic distress.

Recognizing distress while in quarantine

- Increased worry, fearfulness, or feelings of being overwhelmed.
- Feelings of fatigue or exhaustion that persist and/or intensify.
- Inability to focus or concentrate that may be accompanied by decreased academic performance.
- A feeling of hopelessness and/or a paralyzing fear about the future.
- Sudden anger, sadness, irritability, or noticeable changes in personality.
- Sleep difficulties.
- Isolating or withdrawing from others, fear of going into public situations.
- Increased maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., increased alcohol or drug use, engaging in risky/impulsive behaviors).

Emotional Wellness and COVID-19

Remind yourself that your emotions are valid. There's no right way to respond to the challenges associated with COVID-19. This situation is novel, evolving, and unpredictable.

Stay connected. During this period, it's important to maintain appropriate social distance. Make sure to find other ways to stay in touch with your social supports (a phone call, video chat, or text).

Move away from the worst-case scenario narrative. Limit the time you spend taking in COVID-19 news. We're inundated with information regarding it and are often receiving information through multiple channels. This can be overwhelming. Try cutting down on social media and keep news shows to an hour a day. If it's impossible to shake your biggest fear, write it down and make a note of everything you are doing to prevent it from happening. Take a few deep breaths and connect to the present moment.

Maintain your typical schedule as best as you can – meals, classes, study time, relaxation time, etc. Having a schedule helps us contain emotions and feel a sense of control during a time of uncertainty.

Control what you can. During our months of sheltering in place, we've taken a crash course in staying safe from the virus: wearing masks in public, washing our hands, wiping down counters frequently, refraining from touching our faces, etc. Keep that up! This will help you find a level of comfort because you are doing your best to keep yourself and your family healthy. We feel better when we are being active in our own safety and security.

Let go of what you can't control. While this is a significant event for all of us, remind yourself of what's good in your life and what's important to you: health, friends, academic goals, religion, or spirituality. Connect with the present and practice gratitude.

Engage in self-care. Maintain a regular sleep schedule by going to sleep and waking up around the same time each day. Work towards maintaining good nutrition and regular meals, which includes limiting alcohol and caffeine intake and getting some exercise. When the weather is nice, go for a walk or spend time outside (while wearing a mask and maintaining 6 feet of physical distancing, of course). Practice

September 25, 2020

deep breathing, relaxation, yoga, or stretching. Try taking up an activity that requires use of your body and mind, which can give you an emotional break: knitting, art, playing an instrument, etc.

Seek supports and use campus resources. Reach out to friends and family for support. Consider making use of one of the many mental health resources that are available in the community, whether online or via phone.

Mental health support is provided to the campus community through a HIPAA-compliant online platform called doxy.me. Anyone who would like to speak with a counselor for an initial consultation meeting should send an email to counseling@olivetcollege.edu to arrange for an appointment. This email address is monitored daily during business hours.

Group counseling for OC students is offered weekly via Zoom. I host a COVID-19 Support Group on Mondays from 6-7pm. Lyza Ballard, LMSW hosts a Support Group on Thursdays from 7-8pm. In October she will talk about Managing Anxiety and in November she will cover Managing Depression. Send an email to counseling@olivetcollege.edu to sign up.

Community Mental Health of Clinton, Eaton, and Ingham counties offer mental health and well-being resources as well as free confidential support. Call (517) 346-8318 to access services.

Anyone experiencing a mental health crisis who must have immediate assistance or who needs help outside of business hours is encouraged to access one of these resources:

- The Community Mental Health crisis line at (517) 346-8460
- The NAMI Helpline at (800) 950-6264
- The National Suicide Prevention Line at (800) 273-8255 - for hearing impaired (800) 799-4889
- The Veterans Crisis Line at (800) 273-8255
- LGBTQ+ Trevor Crisis Line at (866) 488-7386
- The Disaster Distress Helpline (crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster) at (800) 985-5990
- Text HOME to 741741 for Crisis Text line