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Five tips for a social support system in the pandemic

BusinessMirror · 28 Jan 2022 · B5

SOCIAL distancing protocols and stay-at-home orders may affect one's social connections. However, it is crucial to have a social support network of families, friends and peers to help us get through trying times, especially amid the challenges brought by the pandemic.

Psychosocial rehabilitation specialist, author and educator Kendra Cherry, an expert in psychology and personality research, and the medical editors of Mayo Clinic, a nonprofit organization committed to clinical practice, education and research, have all reiterated the mental health benefits of support systems and how to foster these networks.

These findings have been compiled by the experts of the Benilde Well-being Center (BWC) of the De La Salle-college of Saint Benilde, to create and develop these connections in and out of the family.

Here are five pointers for a healthy social support system amid the pandemic:

1. Make healthy choices. Social groups will influence your behavior. Surround yourself with encouraging individuals. They will inspire you to reach your goals.
2. Cope with stress. Caring peers allow us to better deal with stress. This is likewise associated with lower risks of high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases caused by emotional distress. Care in times of crisis also lessens the repercussions of trauma-induced disorders.
3. Improve motivation. Connect with persons who actively try to attain your shared goals. Talk to those who have the same experience. They are a source of support, empathy and motivation.
4. Cultivate your network. Get involved in a cause or hobby. Meet others with common values. Explore other reputable sites or online communities dedicated to those with similar interests or experiences.
5. Give and take. A successful and lasting relationship is a two-way street. It requires the active participation of both parties. Stay in touch and let others know you care. Answer phone calls. Return e-mails. Reciprocate invites. But do not overwhelm them. Listen to them when they speak. Be available when they need your assistance. Express how much you appreciate their help.

Social support may be emotional, instrumental or informational. It comes in many forms. The goal of building this network is to reduce your stress level, so be cautious of situations and environments that might drain your energy. If you are struggling to make and keep friends, you may likewise seek guidance from professionals.