Announcements

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that the Maryland Counseling Association is now a designated 501C3.

Please join us in congratulating and welcoming our newly elected Executive Committee members for 2020-2021:

President-Elect — Dr. Sara Pula
Treasurer — Dr. Keyona Hall
Treasurer-Elect — Irene Burks
Secretary-Elect — Dr. Danielle LaSure-Bryant
Navigating Grief and Loss in the Coronavirus Landscape — Five Things Therapists Can Do

Written by Melissa Cole, LCSW-C

I took a walk today to get some perspective in the fresh air about the developments taking place around the world in reaction to the coronavirus. Along my travels it was clear how I was not alone in my efforts. At every turn people were processing their observations, questions, emotions, hypotheses, advice, and general thoughts with anyone who would listen. One universal thread among all the conversations was loss as a result of unexpected change and feelings of anxiety about uncertain outcomes.

As mental health providers, this COVID-19 outbreak is an opportunity for us to talk with our clients about grief and loss from a unique perspective. Here are five things we can do to strengthen our work with our clients:

1. Ask clients how they’re attributing meaning to recent events
   - Understanding the filters and frames clients are using to process current events will be instrumental in assisting them with making healthy adjustments.
   - Ask clients how they’re getting information about coronavirus and provide them with reliable and accurate resource information.

2. Consider triggers for unresolved impact issues related to grief or loss
   - Locus of control: assess clients for feelings of helplessness, hopelessness & isolation.
   - Roles: talk with clients about role confusion and role loss.
   - Life events: coronavirus precautions are disrupting many valuable activities such as -
     - Family celebrations (births, weddings, anniversaries, children’s birthday parties, etc.)
     - Education (learning, socialization, field trips, graduations, etc.)
     - Criminal justice (court proceedings, family jail visits, community reentry, etc.)
     - Family events (foster care, family reunification, family court, adoption, funerals, etc.)
   - Employment, religious, social and physical connections
   - Listen for themes in client narratives related to those themes of coronavirus discussions (e.g. vulnerability, confusion, miscommunication, alienation, fear, anxiety).

3. Check in with clients about protective factors versus risk factors
   - Adaptive coping skills may be challenged in new ways with limited access to known support systems (e.g. yoga classes, gyms, support groups, religious meetings, daycare respite, etc.).
   - IPV safety plans may no longer be viable given coronavirus community restrictions.
   - Unhealthy family dynamics may be exacerbated by unemployment, absence of childcare, children being home from school, insufficient supplies, etc.

4. Clarify client values
   - Unexpected change often creates feelings of vulnerability. Check in with clients about what they believe/feel is most important on any given day – providing a baseline for intervention.

5. Provide anticipatory guidance
   - Help clients identify new routines and talk about the value of flexibility.
   - Review telemental health expectations and processes with clients.
   - Provide psycho-education as appropriate to empower clients.
   - Review protective factors and practice revisions to adaptive coping skills.
   - Assist clients with identifying new risk taking behaviors & communicating these to you.
   - Celebrate successes.
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- Support and advocacy for professional counseling in the state of Maryland
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Contact the MCA President for more information about committees and open board positions.

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