



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND  
Center for Excellence  
in Aging and Health

# Online “Peer Connections” Group

Center for Excellence in Aging & Health

University of New England (UNE)

March - August, 2020

## Purpose

*Peer Connections* is an online forum for personal sharing and mutual support in this time of social distancing. Prolonged social isolation can be harmful to mental and physical wellbeing. Meeting online with others through a video (or voice) connection can help.

This group is a “safe space” for peer fellowship and social connection, facilitated by health profession faculty and students from UNE. COVID-19 brings us together in this new space. The realities of daily living and our responses are the focus. *Peer Connections* is a place to share feelings, express frustrations, suggest activities, and offer mutual support.

UNE personnel (faculty, staff, and students) will encourage discussion and manage the logistics of the online platform (ZOOM). Otherwise, this forum is for its members. If you are a Legacy Scholar, you know how our group works. If you are new to UNE, take your cues from others or simply ask. This is your space for social connection.

## Expectations & Logistics

- Our meeting is linked to the present COVID-19 crisis and helping all to feel supported. This is not a psychotherapy group.
  - If you are in significant distress and wish to explore options for formal care, please contact Dr. Tom Meuser, CEAH Director, at 207-221-4140 or [tmeuser@une.edu](mailto:tmeuser@une.edu). Or see the crisis hotline information end of this handout.
- Privacy is important. What’s said in the group stays in the group. Do not share what you learn outside without permission from the individual in question.
- Our goal is to make this a safe space for communication and sharing. If you feel uncomfortable or have a suggestion to make a group better, voice it during the meeting or off-line with a member of the team.
- Avoid dominating the conversation, unless you really need to share a long story or comment. Sometimes this will be important. Be mindful of the need of others to participate, in other words.
- Sessions are scheduled for one hour. Should a great discussion be happening at minute 58, there may be an opportunity to extend the meeting. All meetings at UNE

these days are on Zoom. If the staff member managing the controls has the time, an extra 10-15 minutes will be provided. Please understand if this doesn't work out.

- The format for our Peer Connections groups have evolved since first offered in March. Our present groups are open to anyone registered through [CEAH Online](#).
- Finally, we ask that you avoid charged social topics - politics, especially. We are all in this together. Your group host may redirect conversations that are highly charged and/or insensitive.

### **UNE Faculty Team**

Tom Meuser, PhD, Director, Center for Excellence in Aging & Health  
207-221-4140; [tmeuser@une.edu](mailto:tmeuser@une.edu); personal cell 314-402-8638 (texts preferred)

Regi Robnett, PhD, Associate Director, Center for Excellence in Aging & Health  
207-221-4102, [rrobnett@une.edu](mailto:rrobnett@une.edu)

**Know someone else who might like to join? Direct them to this site:**

<https://sites.une.edu/ceah/legacy-scholars/online-learning-support/>

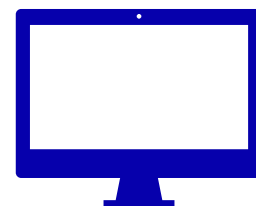


## Free Mental Health Services for Covid-19 Related Distress

*\*Correction to the free counseling with ACA, the resource offering free **emotional support** is New York's Emotional Support Line, **1(800)863-9314**. (Consisting of 6,000 mental health professional volunteers, calls are anonymous. While the resource is intended for NY residents, this hotline can be used especially for those who have connections to NY, such as loved ones.)*

(Please note that most resources listed below are **intended for emotional support and crisis**, a referral may be made for long term or intensive low cost counseling upon further discussion with attendant if desired.)

- International Warm-line: **(866)771-9276**, For those who need to call and talk out emotions.
- SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline: **(800)985-5990**, 24/7, 365 day-a-year counseling and assistance for emotional support related to human caused disasters.
- 7 Cups: [www.7cups.com](http://www.7cups.com), Free online text chat with trained responder for counseling and emotional support. Offer fee-for service online therapy with a licensed clinician.
- Psych Central: [www.psychcentral.com](http://www.psychcentral.com), "Ask the Therapist" function.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1(800)273-8255**
- Courses on Meditation, Mindfulness and Alternative Wellness offered through universities such as Yale and Princeton online for **free** at Coursera: <https://www.coursera.org/search?query=meditation&>



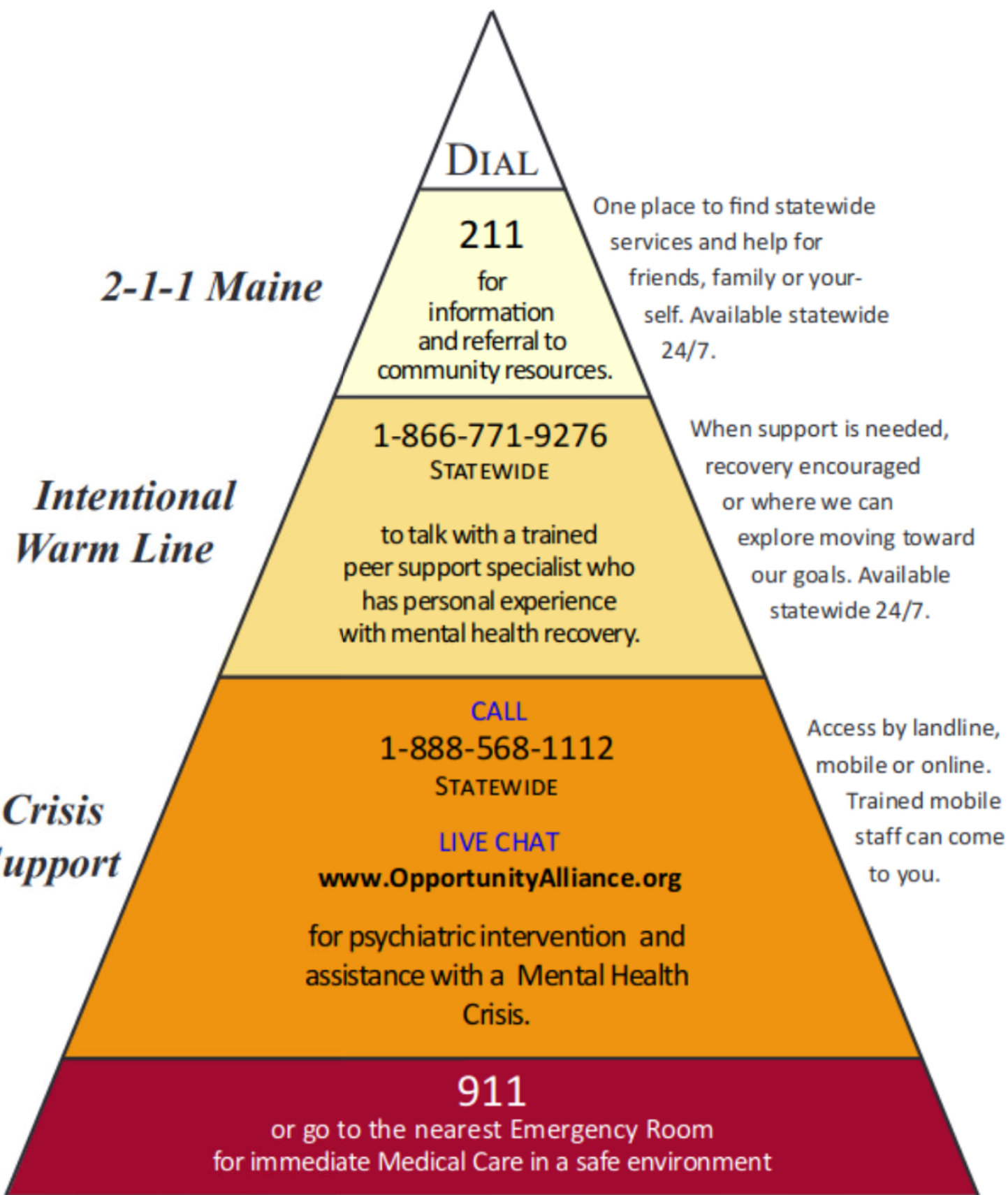
*For one-on-one sessions contact your insurance for a list of **in network** mental health providers.*

# aine Crisis Line

Diagram below illustrates immediate support services available to you as your level of crisis increases. (Start at the top of the pyramid)

## IMMEDIATE SUPPORT SERVICES

The diagram below illustrates immediate support services available to you as your level of crisis increases.  
(Start at the top of the pyramid)



# Zoom is booming in COVID-19 era

## Can you hear us? Here are tips to get started

**Jefferson Graham**  
USA TODAY

If you're like the rest of us, Zoom has become a prominent new fixture in your life.

The video conferencing tool has been a backbone of enterprise. But now keeping our distancing amid the coronavirus pandemic has sent students and workers home, and people are climbing the walls looking for things to do. Zoom has soared to the top of the Apple iOS app chart as the No. 1 most downloaded app and No. 6 on Google's Android chart.

Zoom is similar to Skype and FaceTime in that it's used for video conferences. However, Zoom has expanded into new uses such as teaching, book clubs and just general hangouts. Zoom is free to use for meetings less than 40 minutes, and charges monthly subscriptions, starting at \$14.95 for longer meetings and larger groups.

New to Zoom or wondering how to get the most out of it? We've got 10 tips for you.

First, you'll need a laptop or computer with a webcam, an accessory webcam, or a smartphone or tablet with a built-in camera. (Which is pretty much every model nowadays.)

Begin by going to the Zoom website or downloading the app and registering your account. From there, once registered, click "Host a Meeting" and send out the invite URL to others to join. (Or you can await your invite on the other side, if you're a participant. The meeting can be joined on a host of devices.) Invitees don't even need to be on a laptop, or use the app. They can simply call in on a phone number as well.

Our tips:

### 1. Do an audio test

Don't skip over this step. Your meeting won't go very well if people can't hear you. Zoom will ask you to confirm that you've heard a tone and then play-back sample voice audio.

### 2. Have good lighting

Participants have a choice of appearing on camera or not. But if you're going to replicate the meeting experience, then you want to have the camera on. Otherwise, the conference table is empty. Or the class is devoid of students. People want to know who they are speaking to. So look your best! Dress well, comb your hair, sit up straight and place yourself in a great spot that's not full of distractions.



Reporter Jefferson Graham uses the background feature of the Zoom app to put him at the beach SCREENSHOT

Michael Oldenburg, a marketing executive with drone maker DJI, suggests starting the meeting as a participant with the video off. This will give you a few moments to see yourself on the screen and make yourself look presentable.

### 3. Gear suggestions

If you're going to take meetings using the phone app, invest in a cellphone stand or mini-tripod with a phone attachment. AirPods or some other form of headset will let you be hands-free during the meeting and will help eliminate distracting background noise. You may also want to invest in a higher grade webcam, as a good, accessory camera will give you better audio and video. Logitech's C920S (\$69.99) records in 1080p high definition. But if you're willing to spend more, the Brio (\$199.99) is touted as the "widest, sharpest, fastest" webcam, one that adjusts for backlight, records in 4K resolution and can zoom around the room if you're a pacer.

### 4. Multitasking could get you in trouble

Speaking of privacy, Zoom offers an "attendee attention tracking" feature that lets the employers check to make

sure we're all paying attention. So if you're tweeting away during a meeting, or answering a personal e-mail, big boss will know.

### 5. Mute, mute, mute!

One of the cool features of Zoom is the ability to mute your mic when you're not speaking. This is a vital thing to stay on top of. Because otherwise, as the speaker talks, they could be accompanied by the sounds of typing, rings or kids screaming in the background. It's an easy fix. Mute is the first thing you'll see on the bottom left. Click "MUTE" to go silent, and unmute when it's your turn to talk.

### 6. Bored with the standard look? Adjust it

In Zoom's preferences section, it lets you add a unique background, similar to the green screen you see weather reporters stand in front of on TV. Zoom does an admirable job of cutting you out and sticking you over another location. (See the accompanying shot where I appear to be at the beach, when in fact, I'm actually in the home garage.) To use it, go to "Preferences" and upload a photo. Make sure it's not one with distractions that will send the participants looking at the background and not you.

### 7. Share a screen

Hosts can share from their computer, everything from word documents, spreadsheets, Photoshop, Adobe Premiere and Apple Final Cut Pro editing programs, to opening cloud-based files from Dropbox and Google Drive. The share button is on the bottom tab, in the middle of the screen. Just click it, and choose which program you want to share.

### 8. React

Zoom has a chat window for you to offer text comments during a meeting, or you could respond like they do on Instagram and Twitter with graphical images. Zoom offers thumbs up and applause icons.

### 9. Record the meeting for later

Click record to keep the meeting archived, and when the meeting ends, Zoom will download the archived file to your hard drive.

### 10. Stream

You can stream the meeting to Facebook and YouTube, but you'll need to be a paying subscriber. There are a number of steps involved, which Zoom points out on its support page.