

Managing Your Mental Health While Waiting for Counseling: 10 Self-Care Tips



your partner in total health

In today's fast-paced world, accessing timely mental health care can be challenging, with counseling wait times extending to weeks. While waiting for therapy, it's crucial to focus on maintaining mental health and fostering emotional well-being.

By integrating these strategies into your daily routine, you can take control of your mental wellness and ensure you're prepared for your upcoming counseling sessions. In this article, David provides practical and effective ways to navigate these waiting periods and enhance your overall psychological resilience.

“ It's important to remember that we are bio-psycho-social creatures. Bio is our biology, our bodies. Psycho is our psychology or mental health. Not the classic Hitchcock movie. Social is our social world, our environments, and the people around us. How can we care for these three parts of ourselves that make up our greater whole? These three parts interact with each other and influence each other. Changes in your biology impact how you relate to others, impacting your mental health. Look at the list below and consider how small changes can have a ripple effect.”

– David Depew, mental health counselor at UCS Healthcare.

Understanding Counseling Wait Times

Understanding the complexities of counseling wait times is a crucial step in your mental health journey. This knowledge can empower you to better manage your expectations and emotions during this period, ensuring you are well-prepared for the wait.

Reasons for Delays

Counseling wait times can be attributed to several factors. The shortage of mental health professionals relative to the service demand is a primary reason. This imbalance leaves many on long waiting lists.

Seasonal trends also influence demand, with certain times of the year, like the start of school or post-holidays, seeing spikes in counseling requests.

Recognizing these hurdles can help manage expectations and frustration. By being aware of these factors, individuals can better prepare for and navigate the wait by considering alternative or interim support options such as online resources or support groups.

Impact on Mental Wellness

The impact of waiting for therapy on mental wellness is significant and should not be underestimated. Prolonged wait times can exacerbate existing conditions, leading to increased stress and anxiety. The uncertainty of not knowing when help will arrive can be disheartening and lead to feelings of helplessness. It's important to acknowledge these feelings and understand that you are not alone in this experience.

Studies show that long wait periods can diminish motivation to seek help. This underscores the importance of sustaining one's mental wellness during this time.

Strategies to mitigate these impacts include proactive self-care and seeking interim support options. Engaging in activities that promote relaxation and well-being can help maintain mental health until professional help becomes available.

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1. Daily Routines for Stability

Establishing **daily routines** can provide a sense of control and stability. Start by setting consistent wake-up and sleep times. Regular meal schedules can also help regulate your body's internal clock, which is crucial for psychological stability. This sense of routine can reassure you that you are taking proactive steps to stabilize your mental health during this uncertain waiting period.

- **Create a structured daily plan** that includes work, leisure, and self-care activities.
- **Prioritize tasks** to avoid feeling overwhelmed, breaking larger tasks into manageable steps.
- **Include time for relaxation** and hobbies, ensuring a balance between responsibilities and enjoyment.

A structured day can reduce anxiety and create a sense of normalcy, crucial for mental health during uncertain times. For more guidance, consider resources like **UCS Online**, which offers insights into crafting effective daily routines.

2. Mindfulness and Meditation Practices

Mindfulness and meditation are powerful tools for maintaining mental health. Mindfulness involves being present in the moment and acknowledging thoughts and feelings without judgment. Meditation, on the other hand, focuses on deep relaxation and mental clarity.

- **Start with short sessions:** Just five minutes of meditation can significantly impact stress levels.
- **Use guided apps:** Applications like Headspace or Calm offer structured sessions for beginners.
- **Practice breathing exercises:** Deep breathing can calm the nervous system, reducing anxiety.

These practices foster emotional well-being by promoting relaxation and reducing stress. Incorporating them into your daily routine can help manage the emotional turbulence often experienced during counseling wait times.

3. Engaging in Physical Activity

Physical activity is essential for maintaining mental wellness, and regular exercise releases endorphins, which naturally boost mood and reduce stress. This natural mood boost from physical activity can give you a sense of optimism and hope, even during the waiting period for therapy.

- **Choose activities you enjoy:** This could be yoga, dancing, or even a simple walk in the park.
- **Set realistic goals:** Aim for at least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.
- **Incorporate variety:** Mixing different exercises can keep you motivated and engaged.

Exercise is beneficial for physical health and vital to mental wellness. Making it a part of your routine can help stabilize your mood and energy levels during the waiting period for therapy.

4. Maintaining Positive Mental Health

Maintaining positive mental health is crucial, especially when waiting for professional help. Building a supportive network and exploring creative outlets can enhance emotional well-being and resilience. By actively engaging in these strategies, you can boost your emotional well-being and feel more empowered to navigate the challenges of counseling wait times.

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5. Building a Support System

Having a **support system** is vital for emotional well-being. Connecting with family, friends, or support groups provides a space to share feelings and receive encouragement. This network can offer practical advice and emotional support, which is crucial during challenging times.

- **Reach out to trusted individuals:** Open up about your experiences and feelings.
- **Join support groups:** Engage with others facing similar challenges in person or online. UCS Healthcare provides many online and in-person support groups. Times and locations for the groups can be found by emailing ucsinformation@ucsdsm.org.
- **Utilize community resources:** Local organizations may offer support programs and activities.

A robust support system enhances resilience, making navigating the challenges of counseling wait times easier. For more tips on building support networks, visit **UCS Online**.

6. Exploring Creative Outlets

Creative activities can be therapeutic, offering a way to express emotions and foster positive mental health. Whether through art, music, writing, or another form of creative expression, engaging in these activities can significantly boost emotional well-being.

- **Experiment with different mediums:** Try drawing, painting, or writing to discover what resonates with you.
- **Use creativity as an emotional outlet:** Channel feelings into your projects, allowing for emotional release.
- **Incorporate regular creative sessions:** Dedicate time each week to engage in creative pursuits.

Creative outlets allow for self-expression and can be a powerful tool for maintaining mental wellness. By integrating creativity into your routine, you can enhance your emotional resilience and make the waiting period for therapy more manageable.

7. Practicing Gratitude

Cultivating a sense of gratitude can profoundly impact mental health, fostering a positive outlook and reducing stress.

- **Start a gratitude journal:** Write three things you're grateful for daily.
- **Reflect on positive experiences:** Spend a few moments each morning recalling a positive event from the day before.
- **Express gratitude to others:** Acknowledge and thank the people who support you regularly.

Practicing gratitude can shift focus from frustrations to the positive aspects of life, enhancing emotional well-being during challenging times.

8. Engaging in Nature

Spending time in nature has been shown to improve mental health, reduce stress, and increase overall happiness.

- **Take regular walks in green spaces:** Aim to spend at least 15-30 minutes outdoors each day.
- **Practice 'forest bathing':** Immerse yourself in a natural setting and observe the sights and sounds.
- **Incorporate nature into your home:** Add plants or nature-inspired decor to create a calming environment.

Engaging with nature can serve as a grounding practice, helping alleviate stress and promoting peace and connection.



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9. Learning Something New

Engaging your mind with new knowledge or skills can provide a positive distraction and bolster mental health.

- **Enroll in an online course:** Choose a subject that interests you or a skill you wish to develop.
- **Explore a new hobby:** Try activities like knitting, cooking, or learning a musical instrument.
- **Set personal learning goals:** Challenge yourself with small, achievable targets.

Learning stimulates the brain and can provide a sense of accomplishment, helping to maintain motivation and positivity.

10. Volunteering and Giving Back

Volunteer work can offer a sense of purpose and enhance mental health by fostering community connections and promoting altruism.

- **Find local volunteer opportunities:** Engage with community organizations or charities that resonate with you.
- **Participate in online volunteering:** Use skills like teaching or administration to support causes from home.
- **Integrate small acts of kindness:** Simple gestures like donating items or helping a neighbor can make a difference.

Volunteering can lead to increased happiness and life satisfaction, providing a meaningful way to utilize time during the wait for counseling.

The waiting period before accessing counseling services can be challenging, but it's also a time for self-care and personal growth. The tips outlined in this article are here to support you, enhancing your mental health, building resilience, and preparing you for your upcoming counseling session.

While professional help is crucial, the steps you take independently can significantly affect your mental well-being.

For more information on support groups, individual counseling, or access to additional community resources, contact UCS Healthcare — a leading mental health, physical health and recovery service provider, via phone at **515-280-3860** or by email at ucsinformation@ucsdsm.org or on our website at www.ucsonline.org.

And finally, remember that the journey towards improved mental health is a continuous process, and every small step you take is incredibly valuable. Each step, no matter how small, is a sign of your strength and determination.



UCSONLINE.ORG

515-280-3860 | UCSINFORMATION@UCSDSM.ORG |    

WEST DES MOINES

1300 Woodland Ave.
West Des Moines, IA 50265

ANKENY

1555 SE Delaware Ave., Suite M
Ankeny, IA 50021

KNOXVILLE

813 N Lincoln St., Suite #9,
Knoxville, IA 50138