



# **nami** Coping With COVID

National Alliance on Mental Illness

## Southwest Ohio

**NAMI Southwest Ohio's Coping with COVID (CWC) is a presentation that has been developed to open the conversation with students about mental health and anxiety during this global pandemic.** This 45-minute virtual presentation is designed for middle and high school students. Anxiety and depression are more prevalent than ever due to the pandemic, and many individuals with no prior history of mental health challenges may experience them for the first time. Youth may be particularly susceptible to anxiety in a world where they have little to no control. Individuals who live with a mental health condition work very hard every day to manage their illness; in the midst of a crisis, it can become even more challenging for them.

### How Important is Mental Health During a Global Crisis?

- One in five youth aged 13 - 18 experience mental illness each year, and these numbers are expected to increase significantly during these unprecedented times.
- When adults in the home discuss health and economic concerns, children may be listening and internalizing those fears, creating anxiety about situations they are unable to control.
- Prevention and early intervention are key to helping people avoid serious mental illness.
- Isolation, loss of routine, caregivers' loss of income and insurance, and inability to access healthcare visits or therapy add to existing challenges for those already living with a mental illness.

### How Does the Program Work?

- Presented virtually in high school and middle schools (health, science, or psychology classes; youth groups; clubs; after-school programs) via Zoom (alternate options for utilizing online platforms already in use by the school).
- Delivered by a trained two-person team with lived experience of anxiety or anxiety-related disorders.
- Includes lived experience of the presenters, their recognition of new challenges brought on by the pandemic, and coping skills.
- *NAMI Southwest Ohio's Coping with COVID* reduces stigma and gives/provides/offers hope through:
  - Education - accurate information about anxiety promotes understanding and dispels myths.
  - Lived experience - putting a human face to anxiety that gives the message that "It's okay/OK to reach out for help."

### How is This Program Unique?

- As with all NAMI SWOH's programs, *CWC* is offered to schools and students at no cost.
- Students have the opportunity to learn about anxiety directly from individuals living with it. The sharing of personal lived experiences is powerful and authentic.
- Students have the opportunity to ask questions directly of relatable young people living with anxiety, to share their own coping skills, and to motivate one another to persevere.

## How Does *NAMI Southwest Ohio's Coping with COVID* Benefit Students?

- Students receive resources and tools to help themselves, friends, or family members who may be experiencing symptoms of anxiety.
- By engaging in a discussion about anxiety among their peers, students dealing with ongoing or situational mental health issues may realize they're not alone.
- Connecting students with an individual living well with mental illness dispels myths about anxiety and those dealing with it, and encourages students to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.
- Instills a message of hope and recovery.

## What Are the Key Messages of *NAMI Southwest Ohio's Coping with COVID*?

- Anxiety, depression, and mental illness are medical conditions like any other physical conditions.
- We are living in stressful times. Not feeling mentally healthy is not anyone's fault or something to be ashamed of.
- You can help yourself, your friends, and your loved ones by being aware of signs of anxiety and depression and making sure treatment is sought as soon as possible.
- Although it may feel like it sometimes, you are never alone, and there are many resources you can turn to for support and information.
- There is hope, and we will get through this together.

## Student Testimonials

- *"This was very helpful during a time like this because nobody is used to this situation and I feel that this was the best time to hear about stress relievers and coping strategies and more. It was also helpful to hear them share their stories because they let me know we are not alone."*
- *"The presentation was really helpful and I really enjoyed listening and being part of it."*

## CWC Presenter Perspectives

- *"There was an energy and excitement I could feel through the video chat that I didn't expect! When students engage after a presentation it really adds to the level of intimacy and their takeaway from the experience. I believe this platform's chat room feature allowed students to feel more comfortable asking us questions because they weren't sitting directly next to their classmates. Every single time someone shares that they are living with a mental health condition it creates space for others to do the same. The earlier we can show students that there's nothing to be ashamed of, the better, especially during these times. It's invaluable for kids to see us openly talk about experiencing depression, anxiety, and loneliness, yet still coping in healthy ways. To be able to share my story and have a positive impact on these students' lives is a gift to me. I am truly honored to be a part of this program." - Marisa, CWC Presenter*
- *"The development of this new program to confront the anxiety that is part of living through the COVID-19 pandemic for so many of us is just one example of how much NAMI cares about the community. The present fear, uncertainty, and social distance that we feel can have a big impact on our mental health. This has been an opportunity for me to share my story and the coping strategies that I've had to change in order to deal with the unprecedented circumstances. Students seemed to appreciate the openness that this program offers and the opportunity to ask questions. It is so encouraging to remind yourself and others that we are in this together!" - Allie, CWC Presenter*