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Virginia Department of Health and Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Encourage Virginians to Care for Their Mental Health During Winter Weather

RICHMOND, VA – As temperatures remain low and travel is impacted across Virginia, many Virginians might be experiencing feelings of stress, loneliness, isolation, or tension at home. The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and Virginia Department of Health (VDH) want to remind people to check in with themselves and those they love and reach out for help.

“Seasonal affective disorder – sometimes described as the ‘winter blues’ – is a real mental health condition that can affect anyone no matter their age, race, gender, or background,” said **Virginia Health Commissioner, Dr. Cameron Webb**. “Just as we prepare for winter storms to protect our physical health, it’s important to take steps to protect and support our mental health.”

Shorter daylight hours, colder temperatures, and reduced opportunities for outdoor activities can lead to feelings of isolation and seasonal depression. If you or someone you know are experiencing thoughts of suicide, mental distress, substance use disorder, or need emotional support, call or text 988. 988 is a three-digit calling code for mental health crisis in Virginia. By contacting 988, you can get free, immediate help from a trained crisis worker 24/7, whether you would like emotional support, are worried about a loved one, or are considering harming yourself. To learn more about 988, visit 988va.org. In December 2025, Virginia 988 received over 36,200 calls, 3,900 chats, and 3,700 texts from individuals seeking help for themselves or a loved one.

“The winter months can bring moments of isolation, seasonal depression, and increased substance use,” said **Daryl Washington, LCSW, Commissioner, DBHDS**. “No matter who you are or where you live, 988 is here for you as an easy way to quickly connect with the support you

need. It's more than just an easy to remember number: it is a direct connection to compassionate and accessible care, when you need it the most."

Mental Health Virginia offers a [peer-run Warm Line](#) for people not experiencing crisis, but who would like someone to talk to, or who request community mental health resources, or who have specific questions about their recovery journey. The peers who answer the Warm Line listen with compassion and provide non-judgmental support. You can call or text the Warm Line at 866-400-6428 Monday-Friday from 9am-9pm and 5pm-9pm on weekends and holidays.

You can also follow these practical tips from DBHDS to support mental wellness when spending more time indoors:

- Stay physically active with indoor workouts, stretching, or yoga.
- Schedule regular virtual or phone check-ins with friends or family.
- Take short breaks from screens to rest your mind and reduce fatigue.
- Keep your living space tidy to reduce stress and promote a sense of control.
- Practice relaxation techniques like deep breathing or mindfulness.
- Maximize time in rooms with natural light and sit in direct sunlight when practical.
- Balance indulgence in comfort foods with healthy fruits and vegetables that provide energy and digestive health.
- For those with children in the home, create visual schedules for the day that include times for activities, meals and snacks, and quiet/free time.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic or intimate partner violence, there is help available. Contact the Virginia Family Violence & Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-838-8238 or the LGBTQ Partner Abuse and Sexual Assault Helpline at 1-800-356-6998. If you are not able to call, text 804-793-9999. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.

Abuse is a pattern of behavior used to gain power and control and can include physical abuse or emotional abuse. In addition to seeking help, VDH offers some strategies to keep you and your family safe:

- **Identify a safe room:** Find a room or area that you feel safe to go to in an argument. Be sure this space has no accessible weapons. Consider rooms with available exits to the outside.
- **Keep Your Cell Phone Accessible:** Keep your cell phone charged and with you at all times. Keep a charger nearby.
- **Keep a Go Bag Ready:** Keep a go bag with essential that you can grab and go quickly. If you are concerned that your partner will find the bag, keep it at a friend or family member's house. Item to include in your go bag:
 - Essential documents and photos,
 - Medication and food,
 - Extra money

- Change of clothes,
- Extra keys, and
- Extra charger for your phone.
- **Take A Break:** As safely as you can, find moments to spend outside. It is very difficult to remain inside all the time, especially if you feel building pressure in your relationship. When weather conditions make it safe to do so, take advantage of opportunities to run errands, take a walk, or just get out of your home.
- **Consider Children:** If you have children in the home, you must consider them as well.
 - **Set up Code Words:** Set code words or signals with your kids so you can communicate with them discretely to go into another room or call for help.
 - **Practice Staying Calm:** Talk to your kids about things that make them feel safe when they're stressed out. Create a set of activities or practices they can do if they're feeling stressed, scared, or overwhelmed.

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The Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) seeks to promote dignity, choice, recovery, and the highest possible level of participation in work, relationships, and all aspects of community life for individuals with mental illness, developmental disabilities or substance-use disorders. DBHDS operates 12 state hospitals and centers and partners with 40 locally-run community services boards and thousands of private providers statewide. For more information, please visit www.dhbs.virginia.gov, and find DBHDS on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [YouTube](#).

The mission of the Virginia Department of Health is to protect the health and promote the well-being of all people in Virginia. Learn more at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/>.