



## NAMS Support Groups Go Digital

Peer support groups are often recommended for individuals with an addiction to complement their treatment plans and help sustain their recovery. Caregivers also benefit from attending support groups to help them cope with caregiver distress and look after their well-being.

In view of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) has moved four of its support groups – BRIDGE, BRIDGE Family, GAME (Gambling Addiction Management through Education) and GAME Family – online (see box), allowing

patients and caregivers to log on from the comfort of their own homes. As with the in-person sessions, the online sessions are facilitated by counsellors from NAMS and peer support volunteers.

Prior to the launch of the online sessions, focus group discussions were held to address concerns about patients' safety and confidentiality via Zoom. From June to September 2020, NAMS has conducted a total of 59 online sessions.

"To quote Henry Ford: Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success. In

extraordinary times, we can't bring all the support group patients together physically for the group support sessions, but we can bring the sessions to them," said Mr S.B Viknesan, senior counsellor at NAMS. "This is made possible by online technology, without compromising the quality of care delivery, safety and confidentiality."

For more information about BRIDGE Family and GAME Family, which are open to the public, please contact: 6389 2222.

### NAMS Support Groups



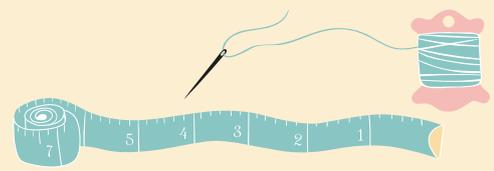
**GAME** is a weekly support group for NAMS patients struggling with gambling addiction. The first session of GAME Online was held on 2 July 2020. GAME Family Online, which provides support to caregivers of individuals with gambling addiction, was first held on 9 July 2020.

**BRIDGE** is a weekly support group for NAMS patients with a drug and alcohol use problem. BRIDGE Online started on 3 June 2020, with BRIDGE Family Online (a support group for caregivers of individuals with drug and alcohol use problem) starting a few days after on 9 June 2020.

The online sessions of BRIDGE Family and GAME Family were subsequently opened to members of the public from mid-October to provide an avenue for families with loved ones who have addiction issues but are not ready to seek treatment yet. Through the support groups, family members learn to deal with addiction problems at home and receive support for their self-care.



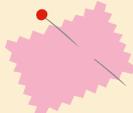
# Make U a Mask (MUM)



To cultivate a spirit of togetherness in our patients and empower them to give back to society during these challenging times, a team of IMH staff came together and initiated the Make yoU a Mask (MUM) project. With funding from the Woodbridge Hospital Charity Fund and under the guidance of the Slow Stream Rehabilitation (SSR) team, this project involves SSR patients in sewing masks for themselves, their carers as well as for other patients. These masks will be distributed to patients, in the clinics, emergency services, and the acute wards in IMH.



Dr Goh Yen Li demonstrates how to prepare the cloth for sewing to fellow SSR nurses.



# Emerging Mentally Stronger Together



World Mental Health Day (WMHD) is commemorated on 10 October annually to raise awareness for mental health and to reduce stigma through education and advocacy. This year's event, themed Emerging Mentally Stronger Together – Strategies for a New Normal, was jointly organised by the Agency for Integrated Care, Institute of Mental Health, Health Promotion Board and the National Council of Social

Service. It saw close to 30 agencies banding together to offer some 60 virtual workshops, webinars, and activities to promote mental wellness and resilience during the current COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to webinar topics ranging from getting better quality sleep to managing stress and dealing with anxiety and adversity, the event included activities like film screenings, book launches, and journaling.



World Mental Health Day 2020

Emerging **Mentally Stronger**

Together - Strategies for a New Normal

**19 September to 30 October**

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed our lives in many ways. Join us for a series of **online talks, workshops and activities** to learn how to better look after our **mental well-being** and adapt to a new normal.

**Highlights:**

- Talks and workshops on self-care, sleep, caregiver stress, dealing with stress, anxiety and adversity, and many more topics
- Book launches, film screenings and panel discussions
- Relaxing activities like cooking demonstrations and journaling

Register now. For more details, go to [Mental Health Awareness Singapore Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealthAwarenessSG) [www.facebook.com/MentalHealthAwarenessSG](https://www.facebook.com/MentalHealthAwarenessSG)

Organising Partners:

• AICent • Alzheimer's Disease Association • AMKPSD Community Services • Apex Harmony Lodge • dMWA Lite • Bepi Team • Brain Centre • Campus PEY • Caregivers Alliance Limited • Caring For Life • Changi General Hospital • Clarity Singapore • Club M&A • ClubCare • Community of Floor Support Specialists • Enable Asia • First Community Services • Graceworks • Limitless • Montfort Care • National University Hospital • Singapore Association for Mental Health • Singapore Children's Society • Singapore Psychogeriatric Society • The Breathe Movement • Singapore Mental Health F&D Festival • Virga Community Services

Organising Partners:

• Beyond the Label • BRAVE THE NEW

Sponsors:

• Johnson & Johnson



# Self-Care: The Greatest Gift of All

*Tahirah Mohamed*

As a caregiver, you take care of everyone else's needs but how many parents out there know that self-care is essential in parenting. I am a mother to a large family of nine children (six of them have autism spectrum disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and global developmental delay), and I knew the importance of self-care but I never really followed it through. It was through an excruciating experience that I finally realised that self-care is not just important – it is the greatest gift to myself and my family.

Back in 2018, during the Ramadan month, I found myself racing from appointments to appointments. From attending Parent-Teacher Meetings to visiting new specialised schools for my 5th child, I was rushing all over Singapore under the unforgiving weather. Although I was excused from fasting as I was breastfeeding my youngest son, I had to be discreet about drinking in public out of respect to other fellow Muslims. At home, I also had to make sure my children were revising for their exams while juggling other duties. This went on throughout the month, before my body finally reached breaking point in June.

I developed a high fever and was put on drip at an outpatient clinic because of dehydration. I went back home, but my fever returned on the same night and

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**Being a mother and a caregiver is not all about giving, we should not neglect our own needs as we care for others.**”

spiked so dangerously high that I had to be admitted to the hospital. My fever did not abate even after medication, and the doctors ordered tests to find out the cause. The tests revealed that I had two large kidney stones in my body, and I was raced to surgery the following day. During my 5-days hospitalisation, I was glad that my family has a strong support system and everyone stepped up to keep the household running. When I left the hospital, it was already the first day of Hari Raya.

As a person of faith, I felt that I was put through this ordeal as God wanted me to rest and slow down – I just had to learn this the hard way. I learnt that I should not wait till my body breaks down to practise



self-care. In fact, I should be doubling my efforts as I have a large family and children with special needs to care for! It was through this ordeal that I made it a point to hydrate regularly, maintain a healthy diet and share parenting and caregiving duties with my husband. Also, having small breaks in between tasks is good for self-rejuvenation and is energising.

Being a mother and a caregiver is not all about giving, we should not neglect our own needs as we care for others. In the midst of our busy schedule, let's remember to gift ourselves the time to relax and practise self-care. It is not selfish. It is self-full.



# Coping with Retrenchments

Retrenchments can have a huge impact on mental health and can often make one feel very alone. Ms Serena Ho, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Department of Psychology, shares how individuals can cope with the emotional toll and transition through this difficult period.

## How does retrenchment affect one's mental health?

Losing one's job can have devastating effects on one's life and family, especially if the retrenchment is involuntary and sudden. Individuals may experience anxiety about their financial security, and may also start doubting their personal ability if they derive a lot of self-worth from their vocation. Even the remaining employees in the company will experience the ill-effects of retrenchment, such as having to cope with uncertainty about their position in the company and also the increased workload from their colleagues who have left.

## What are some of the common reactions when faced with retrenchment?

The extent of the emotional impact of a job loss varies in individuals depending on their current financial situation (e.g. if they are the sole breadwinner of the family), family support and how much they define themselves based on their job. Employees facing a sudden retrenchment are more likely to react negatively — akin to a grief reaction — and may experience various emotions such as shock, anger, denial, bargaining and depression.

Affected employees are likely to react more positively and would be more accepting of their job loss when companies help them understand the rationale of the retrenchment. While doing so, companies should also treat employees with respect by ensuring that they are compensated fairly and that support — such as linking them up with external consulting manpower agencies to aid with their search/transition to a new job — is extended to them.

## When should one seek professional help?

Individuals experiencing a loss or change in job are more susceptible to developing anxiety or depression, especially if the period of their unemployment persists and they have poor social support. When the individual goes on to experience the following signs, it is usually an indication that they would require professional help:

- Severe emotional stress which impacts their ability to carry out their day-to-day activities
- Resorts to using alcohol or substance to cope
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Impairment in their interpersonal relationships
- Suicidal thoughts

## How can he/her look after their well-being during this period?

Being retrenched is not an easy thing to deal with hence, it is important that individuals give themselves some time to process what has happened and take care of their emotional well-being. They are encouraged to continue their daily routine and structure, which usually gives them a sense of reassurance and stability, and to engage in meaningful activities.

In addition, it is helpful for them to maintain contact with family, friends and workplace colleagues with whom they have formed strong bonds. This can provide them with the necessary support as they get back on their feet.

### For further assistance:

Individuals who require assistance during this period can benefit from the various government-operated employment services such as WDA's Career Centre or NTUC's Employment and Employability Institute (e2i).

Those who require support for financial difficulties or are facing family issues triggered by financial worries may consider approaching their nearest Social Service Office (SSO) or social help agencies such as Family Service Centres (FSC).

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