

Clearinghouse Connections

Your Quarterly E-Newsletter
Update From the New Jersey
Self-Help Clearinghouse



NJ SELF-HELP CLEARINGHOUSE
NJGROUPS.ORG



As summer comes to an end, preparing for the return to school is an annual routine for millions of students, families, and caregivers across the nation. For some, that means a child starting kindergarten or a teen entering high school. For others, it means preparing for move-in day for college, the start of graduate school, or beginning a new trade program. Parents and families also feel the ripple effects of these transitions as they support their loved ones through another year of learning while juggling schedules, financial demands, and the emotional ups and downs of supporting students.

While back-to-school can bring excitement and opportunities, it also creates **unique pressures that can take a toll on mental health**. These transitions can have a real impact on mental health, and for many, the season brings intense feelings of overwhelm—and these stressors don't stop with students. Families and caregivers carry much of the weight, too.

Before we dig deeper into this topic, here's a quick update on what the Clearinghouse has been up to lately.

SHCH Update

Fall has officially begun!

Here's a look at what the Self-Help Clearinghouse has been up to **this quarter**:

- **Wrap Seminar I:** The SHCH coordinator, Megan Macapagal (that's me!) co-facilitated her first WRAP in July and just finished co-facilitating another WRAP with her supervisor, Kelly Uhland, who is also the Assistant Director of Education & Outreach and certified ALF (advanced-level WRAP Facilitator)!
- **SHCH Webinars:** Past webinars include "Facilitating Through Crisis: Navigating Group Disruptions with Confidence and Compassion" - hosted by Kelly Uhland; "Understanding the NJ Psychiatric Advance Directive (PAD)" – hosted by Eve Ellsworth (Consumer Connections) & Megan Macapagal
- **NJPN:** On September 12th, Megan Macapagal (along with Consumer Connections' director, Chrissy Schayer, and administrative assistant, Emily Kurc) participated in the NJPN Peer Recovery Summit at Brookdale College in Monmouth County! Megan not only shared information about the SHCH, but she also shared information about MHAOC's R.O.A.D.S Community Peer Recovery Center and MHAAC's UBW virtual support groups. (picture included below)
- **Outreach:** As schools start back up, the SHCH focused their outreach efforts on colleges! Megan Macapagal appeared on Ocean County College grounds on September 22nd, tabling at the student center to promote SHCH and MHANJ as a whole. She will continue to seek similar opportunities in other colleges and universities in NJ. (picture included below)
- **Support Group Requests:** The SHCH continues to answer over 100 requests per quarter from individuals seeking for support group and related resources!



As we move further into the fall season and closer to the holidays, we're looking forward to continuing this momentum!



What Back-to-School Season Can Mean for Mental Health



Regardless of your age and the year of school you're stepping into, common stressors include but are not limited to:

- **Academic pressure and high expectations:** Tests, grades, and competitive environments create daily stress.
- **Social dynamics and pressure:** Navigating friendships, cliques, and social media.
- **Transitions:** Adjusting to a new school, new teachers, new peers, or even a whole new environment.
- **Financial strain:** Rising costs of supplies, tuition, or extracurriculars.
- **Extracurricular demands:** Athletics, clubs, and other commitments can overwhelm schedules.
- **Sleep difficulties:** Early start times and late-night workloads cut into rest.

These challenges do not stop with students — **families, caregivers, as well as school staff** often carry their own stress while supporting students.

Students ARE Struggling

The American College Health Association (2015) found in one year:
30% of college students said stress affected their academics.
22% said anxiety did.
20% reported sleep difficulties.
14% reported depression.
(Suicide Prevention Resource Center)

Nearly 49% of high school students in one survey said they feel great stress every day.
(Charlie health)

A 2022 study of ~840 college students found a moderate to strong inverse relationship between academic stress and mental well-being: as school stress goes up, mental wellness goes down.
(Charlie Health)

School stress often interacts with family stress, financial strain, extracurricular/athletic demands, social expectations, and identity pressures, making the overall load heavier.
(Suicide Prevention Resource Center)

All references are placed at the end

These statistics make it clear that **school does not simply coexist with mental health; it actively shapes it.**

Stress can ripple into many areas of life. When left unaddressed, these pressures may lead to:

- **Declining academic performance:** Stress and anxiety make it harder to focus, retain information, and stay motivated, leading to lower grades despite the efforts to work harder.
- **Sleep disruption:** Students often sacrifice hours of sleep to finish assignments or worry about deadlines, which in turn worsens concentration, mood, and physical health.
- **Burnout and exhaustion:** The combination of daily stress, extracurriculars, and family responsibilities can create a cycle of constant fatigue.
- **Increased anxiety and depression:** Academic stress has been shown to directly correlate with a decline in mental well-being among high school and college students.
- **Lower self-esteem and self-worth:** Constant comparison, fear of failure, or struggling to meet expectations can erode confidence.
- **Risky coping behaviors:** In some cases, unmanaged school stress can lead students toward substance use or other unhealthy coping strategies.
- Etc.



Interview Spotlight

Meet Seth Edwards, UBW (United By Wellness) Program Coordinator at the Mental Health Association in Atlantic County (NJ).

Answers have been condensed and slightly altered for the sake of brevity

Seth has been part of support groups since middle school – first as a participant, and now as a facilitator and program coordinator, overlooking the various support groups provided by United by Wellness. As a student himself, he knows firsthand how stressful school can be and why support groups can be an amazing resource.

Q: How has going back to school affected your mental health?

Seth: "School really forces me to structure my days more carefully. It's easy to let work and classes take over, so I try to intentionally carve out time for my support system, even if that means doing schoolwork while I call or chat with friends."

Q: Have you attended support groups in the past?

Seth: "Yeah, even way back in middle school and high school, I was attending support groups. I frequented Ala-teen, which ended up being a great place to receive support and de-stress. For people who don't know what Ala-teen is, it's a safe space for teens to talk about their experiences having family members that drink. In college, I attended support groups that were more focused on general mental health."

Q: Do you think that students and their families have enough access to groups or safe spaces?

Seth: "That's a good question... the resources are out there, but it can be difficult to find them and know where to go. That's why the **SHCH** is such a great resource—you help people locate support groups. However, there's always room for more groups to pop up, especially for the demographic of students and their support systems. I notice that students in college tend to engage in body doubling and they support each other while they focus on doing schoolwork and related tasks—it's like they're making their own mini support groups. "

Q: Why is UBW a good fit for students and families? And what are some UBW groups that you think students should be aware of?

Seth: "When you're busy going to school or working, it can be hard to carve out time to go to a support group. An hour-long support group can turn into a two hour commitment if you include drive time, traffic, etc. The cool thing about UBW is that you don't have to drive anywhere, you can join from the comfort of your bed, and there's so many different groups to choose from each week that include weeknights and weekends. It's great for busy people and it's more accessible. If you're wanting something laid back, we have the Friday night music group and Saturday game night spectacular. If you're looking for something task-oriented or more aligned with a traditional support group, there are the groups for anxiety and depression, and on Saturdays, there is a put off procrastination group which is really helpful for students!"

Q: What do you wish more people understood about student stress?

Seth: "It's a lot to juggle—people often define their worth based on their performance, especially academic performance. I've heard school described as running a marathon because you have to keep going week after week without much of a break. School is a really big part of people's lives, and I wish people would be sensitive and aware of the pressure and stress students are in. Please show extra love to the students in your life who are doing their best in school!"

A huge thanks to Seth for taking the time to interview with the SHCH! To learn more about UBW, go to <https://www.mhaac.info/ubw-mission.html>.

Support Groups: A Source of Connection and Relief

When we think about "back to school stress," students often come to mind first. But the reality is, school transitions affect entire communities—parents, caregivers, and even teachers and staff carry these pressures, too.

Support groups can provide:

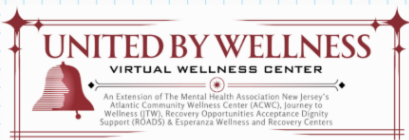
- **For students:** a safe space to share academic stress, peer pressures, or identity struggles without judgment.
- **For families and caregivers:** connection with others who understand the challenges of supporting a child or teen experiencing stress, while also helping them manage their own stress.
- **For educators and school staff:** a confidential space to process workload demands and the balance of personal well-being with professional responsibilities.
- **For everyone:** a reminder that stress is easier to manage when we face it **together**.

Whether you are a student, a parent, or part of a school community, support groups can be a powerful way to reduce isolation and strengthen mental well-being during the back-to-school season.



Resources to Consider

Finding the right support can make all the difference! Here are some options to explore:



<https://www.mhaac.info/ubwc.html>

50 virtual support groups offered each week, including nights and weekends.

PAY WHAT YOU CAN PEER SUPPORT



<https://www.paywhatyoucanpeersupport.com/>

Virtual support groups that you can sign up for free and pay what you can for the services being offered.



<https://parentshelpingparents.org/>

Virtual support groups for anyone who identifies as a caregiver, where members share experiences about parenting no matter where they are on the parenting journey.



<https://naminycmetro.org/>

Connection Corner - Virtual teen support group for ages 14-18 living with mental health challenges.



<https://www.meetup.com/>

Provides opportunities to join virtual and in-person support groups on a wide variety of topics; some exist specifically for students.



<https://advocates.org/virtual-support-groups>

Advocates offers free, virtual peer support groups via Zoom. These include mental health support groups, as well as social and recreational groups. Facilitated by members of the Advocates peer support team, these groups are open to anyone in the community, not just people served by Advocates.



<https://renfrewcenter.com/support-group-for-college-students/>

Offers a virtual support group to address the many challenges that college students face,

For college guides and toolkits:

- **NAMI:** <https://collegeguide.nami.org/#>
- **Mental Health America:** <https://mhanational.org/back-to-school-with-mental-health-in-mind/>

Looking for support groups offered by your school?

Most universities and colleges offer support groups through their counseling or wellness center. You can often stop by in person or check your school's website to see what's available. If you're not finding what you need, reach out directly! Staff can point you in the right direction and are often able to connect you with other resources.

While these resources are valuable, there is still a **gap in support groups specifically designed for students**. Few groups focus directly on academic stress, groups for middle schoolers and high schoolers are few and far between, and families often find that the options available don't fully meet their needs.

That's why the Clearinghouse is always looking to:

- Connect with new groups
- Expand awareness of existing ones
- Encourage anyone interested in starting a group of their own



Looking for support? Connect with us to find a self-help group near you!



800-367-6274

The NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP CLEARINGHOUSE provides education, training, support, and technical assistance to a broad range of self-help support groups across all 21 counties in New Jersey.

WHAT WE OFFER

- Technical Aid for New and Established Self-Help Groups
- Trainings and Workshops
- Self-Help Group Referrals
- WRAP Training
- Community Psychiatric Advanced Directives (PAD) Education

CONTACT US

✉ njgroups@mhanj.org

📞 732-451-4457 or 800-367-6274

f [NJSelfHelpGroupClearinghouse](https://www.facebook.com/NJSelfHelpGroupClearinghouse)

 Visit Our Website: www.njgroups.org

If you know of a support group for students, families, or school staff — or want to start one — please reach out to us at njgroups@mhanj.org

Back-to-school involves transitions, growth, and many challenges. Students are adapting to new environments and expectations, families are juggling support roles and shifting routines, and educators are balancing their own well-being while caring for others. This time of year can bring stress, and it can also stir up feelings of uncertainty, pressure, or even isolation. Recognizing these experiences is important, but even more important is knowing that no one has to navigate them alone. Consider joining a support group or starting one of your own this back-to-school season! :-)

Before you click away, make sure to view the wonderful flyers from organizations showcasing their groups and other related services!



Community Flyers



J.O.B.H.F.

Women Support and Empowerment Group

Topics are Related To

Girl Talk and Life Issues

Every Saturday

Beginning Saturday, September 6, 2025

11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81204121432>

Phone: 646-558-8656

Meeting ID: 812 0412 1432

[Click Here for More Information](#)



“STRENGTH THROUGH SUPPORT”

IN PERSON STROKE SUPPORT GROUP MEETINGS

**IN-PERSON MEETINGS ARE EVERY LAST
WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH FOR
STROKE SURVIVORS AND CAREGIVERS**

**MORRIS COUNTY LIBRARY
30 EAST HANOVER AVE
WHIPPANY, NJ
TIME: 1:00-3:30 PM**

PLEASE CALL OR EMAIL FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Lois - Stroke Caregiver
908-578-0812
loisfirz@yahoo.com**

**Rich - Stroke Survivor
201-230-8204
rchclr@gmail.com**

[Click here for More Information](#)

Welcome!



We have a new schedule:

Tuesdays (in person) - 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Wednesdays (in person) - 11:00 am to 1:00 pm
Thursdays (online) - 7:00 to 9:00 pm
(Contact us for online meeting info.)

In-person Location

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
201 N. Warwick Road
Magnolia, New Jersey 08049
(near corner of Warwick & Evesham)

Supportive family and friends are welcome to attend.

We also enjoy activities such as picnics and holiday dinners.

Call or text: (609) 471-0676
NewBeginningsNJ@gmail.com
NBgroup.org
facebook.com/NBpeersupport

For more information:

We are happy to answer questions!

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In-person Location
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
201 N. Warwick Road
Magnolia, New Jersey 08049
(near corner of Warwick & Evesham)
(Contact us for online meeting info.)

*Our meeting room is at the front of the church, facing Warwick Rd.

New Beginnings is not equipped to help someone in immediate crisis.

If you have an emergency or feel like hurting yourself or others, do one of the following NOW:

- Call 911
 - Go to the emergency room
 - Call one of these hotlines:
 - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
 - 988 (call or text)
 - NJ Hopeline
- 1-855-654-6735

New Beginnings



Supporting peers with mood disorders since 1987

If you experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, bipolar, or related mood disorders, we invite you to our free peer support group.

Come and share support and coping strategies with others like you!

Tuesdays (in person) - 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Wednesdays (in person) - 11:00 am to 1:00 pm
Thursdays (online) - 7:00 to 9:00 pm

Call or text: (609) 471-0676
NewBeginningsNJ@gmail.com
NBgroup.org
facebook.com/NBpeersupport

New Beginnings Mission Statement

Our mission is to support one another as we empower ourselves to live successfully with mood disorders.



You are not alone...

- A mood disorder is a real health issue. It is not a weakness or character flaw, and we can't just "snap out of it". It takes strength and courage to seek help.
- At a support group, you can share with others who have had similar experiences.
- You are welcome to be a part of our group. We can help one another achieve and maintain wellness.

Call or text: (609) 471-0676
NewBeginningsNJ@gmail.com
NBgroup.org
facebook.com/NBpeersupport

Group Guidelines

1. Confidentiality: What is said in group stays in group. We respect privacy.
2. Safety: Observe boundaries and respect others with language and actions. See a facilitator if you have any concerns.
3. Medicine & Doctors: We do not prescribe, diagnose, or give advice. Advice only comes from professional care givers. We do not name medications of any kind.
4. Participation: You have the right to pass. Participation is voluntary.
5. Unrelated Activities: No cell phones, texting, or food during group. Cell phone must be on vibrate.
6. Listening: Listen to others without interrupting. Raise your hand to respond. One person speaks at a time.
7. "I" Statements: Use "I" statements and share from your own positive experiences, insights, and coping skills.
8. Judgment: We do not judge or criticize each other.
9. Sharing: Our time is limited, and we start and stop on time. We need to give equal opportunity, for sharing as well as feedback, to all group members.
10. Accountability: We are responsible for ourselves, our actions, and our wellness.



More About Us

- We strive to successfully manage our disorders and live well.
- We share positive support, encouragement, and coping strategies in a safe, confidential environment.
- All meetings are free.
- All meetings start and end on time.
- Everyone present must be at least 19 years old.
- All participation is voluntary.
- We offer peer support, not therapy or education.
- The facilitators are peers from the group.
- We are not professionals, nor is our group a substitute for professional treatment.
- We maintain a positive environment. We want to feel better when we leave a meeting than we did when we arrived!

[Click Here to Visit Their Website](#)

References

1. <https://www.charliehealth.com/research/student-stress-mental-health>
2. <https://sprc.org/consequences-of-student-mental-health-issues/>



Mental Health Association in New Jersey | 673 Morris Ave. Suite 100 | Springfield, NJ 07081 US

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