DROP-IN ARTICLE

Look Around, Look Within: Your surroundings say a lot about your mental health

Take a moment to consider your surroundings. Do you feel safe? Do you have access to health care and grocery stores? Does your home support you, both physically and mentally?

This Mental Health Month, challenge yourself to look at your world and how different factors can affect your mental health.

Where a person is born, lives, learns, works, plays, and gathers, as well as their economic stability and social connections, are part of what is called "social determinants of health" (SDOH). The more these factors work in your favor means you are more likely to have better mental well-being. However, when it seems like the world is working against you, your mental health can suffer.

While many parts of your environment can be out of your control, there are steps you can take to change your space and protect your well-being.

- **Work toward securing safe and stable housing:** This can be challenging due to finances, age, and other reasons, but there are a few things you can try, such as reaching out to state/local agencies to secure housing, removing safety hazards in the home, or finding another space (such as a community center or friend's home) where you can get the comfort you are missing at home.

- **Focus on your home:** Consider keeping your space tidy, sleep-friendly, and well-ventilated. Surround yourself with items that help you feel calm and positive.

- **Create bonds with your neighborhood and community:** Get to know the people living around you, join or start neighbors-helping-neighbors groups, and support local businesses to challenge gentrification.

- **Connect with nature:** Hike in a forest, sit in a city park, bring a plant inside, or keep the shades open to absorb natural light.

If you're taking steps to improve your surroundings but are still struggling with your mental health, you may be experiencing signs of a mental health condition. Take a free, private screening at mhascreening.org to help you figure out what is going on and determine next steps.

The world around us can be both positive and negative – bringing joy and sadness, hope and anxiety. Learn more with Mental Health America's 2023 Mental Health Month toolkit, which provides free, practical resources, such as how an individual's environment impacts their mental health, suggestions for making changes to improve and maintain mental well-being, and how to seek help for mental health challenges. Go to mhanational.org/may to learn more.