

Mission Moments

Made Possible By YOU!

Edition 56, January 2021

Mental Health: Coping Strategies During a Pandemic

Repercussions of the COVID-19 have rippled through many aspects of our daily lives. Perhaps the most common aspect, which may also be the least talked about, is mental health.

Not only have Tangram employees been called upon to take extraordinary measures to keep our clients safe during this time, but they have also been challenged to find creative solutions to the stress, isolation, anxiety, and boredom that have resulted from the pandemic. This month's Mission Moment highlights just how amazing and adaptable our employees and clients have been during this time.

Dealing with new stress and anxiety: Behavior Team

Lockdown restrictions at the beginning of the pandemic caused increased stress and anxiety among Tangram clients, like it did for many people.

Lee, a Tangram Behavior Consultant, shared her story about working with Anna, an adult with autism, who struggled to adapt to the COVID restrictions. Anna, who works at Home Depot, couldn't understand why she could still go to work, but couldn't see friends, participate in Special Olympics events, or go on vacation. "Anna thrives on routine and it took her a couple of months to accept the changes beyond her control and deal with her anxiety and frustration. I sent her virtual activities that she could do and she used these prompts to discover her own activities within the same categories I suggested. Eventually she settled into a new routine."

Lee explained that she has used lots of different techniques to help clients like Anna—from using visualization apps to playing different games like quiz games and scenario games to just being a good listener. "Sometimes my clients just needed someone to talk to. Many clients, including Anna, wanted to talk about the pandemic to try to get a grip on it and to understand that everyone was having a hard time, not just them," said Lee.

Staying Connected Through Books and Music

Social isolation was a major challenge this year, for all of us. But thanks to the commitment of our volunteers and employees, Tangram was able to offer ways for our clients to stay connected and engaged.

Tangram's Music Club volunteers hosted a one-hour sing-along on Zoom every other Tuesday night last year, and the meetings will continue through 2021. This was a great way to bring people together and have



Above: Matt and his sister, Jessica

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fun!

Tangram's employees also organized video readings of some holiday and winter-themed books throughout the month of December to help spread holiday cheer and give clients and staff something different to do virtually.



Above: Tangram's Music Club

Getting Fit

One silver lining to the pandemic is that it gave some people the opportunity to focus on their physical health. This is true of Tangram client, Matt. He and his roommate used to eat fast food several times per week and started to cut down on this just before the pandemic hit. The restrictions on dining out made it easier to limit their fast food habits, and now they just enjoy their favorite restaurants on the weekends. They have enjoyed home-cooked meals, prepared by their Tangram staff, and have also been walking around their apartment complex. All of these lifestyle changes have led to significant weight loss for Matt. His sister, Jessica, reported, "Prior to the pandemic, Matt was close to 300 pounds, and now he is probably closer to 240 pounds. This year gave him an opportunity to get healthier!"

Matt wasn't alone. Many DSPs searched for ways to keep clients active, knowing that exercise can also help with stress and anxiety. Some encouraged more outdoor walks, when possible, and others used online exercises to help get clients moving.

Just Dance!

Sometimes, you just need to dance. We love this report from Tangram DSP Rosa, who shared her recipe for dealing with stress and tapping into positivity:

"The pandemic has had an effect on almost every person in the world in one way or another. Myself and my clients are not exempt. During this time they have been confined to their home even more than the average person for many well thought-through reasons and the one of most importance being their safety. That means that every week I have to find ways to keep them mentally and physically stimulated. So what I've learned works for us at Site 265 is dancing. We listen to songs we like, we choose whichever is the most fun to dance to, and we shake and shimmy until one of us sits down from exhaustion. It gives us just a little bit of normalcy, a whole lot of fun in a few short minutes, and did I mention we burn just enough calories to have a slice of cake sometime in the week? Win! Win! Win! If at any time you want to join in and boogie down with us in quarantine spirit, this is one of our favorite songs that you can't help but tap a foot to whether you want to or not: 'Can't Stop The Feeling' by Justin Timberlake. Enjoy!"

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