

# Winter **MENTAL HEALTH & COPING**

As we move through this last stretch of winter, the cold days and dark evenings can feel particularly hard.

It's not uncommon to experience an increase in loneliness, stress, or sadness this time of year, and it's important to be intentional about taking time to care for ourselves and each other.

If you've been feeling down or overwhelmed, this guide offers strategies that can help you prioritize your well-being as we move towards the brighter days of spring.



University  
of Windsor

*Employee Mental Health*



# 1 GO BACK TO THE BASICS

When we're feeling stressed, often the first things to fall to the wayside are the foundational practices needed to care for ourselves: getting enough sleep, eating well, engaging in physical activity, and staying hydrated. If you're finding it hard to keep up, you're not alone.

Even though these practices on their own likely won't fix the sources of your stress, finding ways to incorporate small wins in these areas can help regulate your nervous system and increase your reserves for getting through the day. Feeling stuck? Check out these resources:

- [What to do when you can't sleep](#) by the Sleep Foundation
- [Health & nutrition coaching](#) provided by UWindsor's Employee Assistance Program
- [Toldo Lancer Centre](#) on campus offers a variety of options for adding movement into your day, including an indoor walking track (download the [GoLancers App](#) for information about open rec times). Free and paid membership options available for eligible employees.
- [Tips for drinking more water](#) by the Mayo Clinic



## 2 PRACTICE SELF-COMPASSION

When life gets hard, our default is often to be harder on ourselves. Many of us have a tendency towards harsh self-talk when we're feeling low.



But just as you wouldn't say hurtful things to a friend who is struggling, it's important to extend that same grace inward - you deserve kindness and to feel safe within yourself.

Dr. Kristen Neff, the leading voice in self-compassion research, has identified three core skills that make up self-compassion:

- **Self-Kindness.** Responding to your emotions and needs with gentleness, kindness, and understanding rather than judgment.
- **Common Humanity.** Recognizing that you are not alone in your experience and that other people have felt the way you are feeling. You emotions are part of the shared human experience.
- **Mindfulness.** Noticing and being with your emotions in a purposeful way through a gentle and non-judgmental lens.

Check out her [free collection of guided practices](#) you can use to help increase self-compassion and add moments of gentleness into your day.



# 3 INCREASE CONNECTION

Cold weather, ice, and snow tend to make it harder to feel connected with others during the winter months – people hunker down, seasonal opportunities for connection and engagement change, and less daylight can limit go-to evening activities. If you're feeling lonely, get intentional about finding ways to build more connection:

- Text a friend you haven't seen in awhile and invite them for coffee
- Pitch a brainstorming meeting with your team for new project ideas
- Reach out to a colleague and share something that you appreciate about them
- Sign up for a creative community workshop
- Visit your favourite stores and spend some time walking around in the company of others

Recognize that there are likely people in your circle who are also feeling lonely, and you reaching out first might just be what they need to feel a bit better too.

For more ideas on how to stay connected during the winter months in a way that best aligns with your comfort level and preferences, check out [this article](#) from University of Washington Medicine.



# 4 PLAN FORWARD

Having something to look forward to and actively working towards it can provide an uplifting boost of motivation and increase hope. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Plan your spring garden and visit a local hardware store to buy seeds (it's just about time to start your seedlings indoors!)
- Set a new goal and break it down into manageable steps so you can see progress
- Identify a new skill you want to learn and sign up for a course or certificate
- Plan out a summer vacation
- Spend some time thinking about what you're looking forward to for the warmer months (they're just around the corner!)

Looking for fun things to do that you can add to your calendar right now? Visit the [Tourism Windsor-Essex Event Guide](#) and explore upcoming local events and opportunities!

Intentionally adding enjoyable activities into our days is important for mental health and well-being.



# 5 REACH OUT FOR SUPPORT

It can be hard to know when to reach out for support when we're going through a tough time. It's not uncommon for people to delay reaching out because they believe that what they are experiencing "isn't bad enough" or that they should just "deal with it" alone.

But the truth is this: you don't have to be in crisis to access support and no one should have to white-knuckle life alone. Feeling seen, heard, understood, and connected is the catalyst for coping and healing.

If you are experiencing difficult emotions or life challenges, if you feel like you're just getting by every day, or if you are overwhelmed, that is reason to find someone you trust who you can talk to.

The [Employee Assistance Program](#) is available 24/7 for UWindsor employees, and a variety of other community-based resources can be [found here](#).

If you are thinking about hurting yourself or ending your life, it is important to reach out for support right away. Please visit [www.uwindsor.ca/wellness/you-matter](http://www.uwindsor.ca/wellness/you-matter) for more information and [24/7 community-based crisis options](#). Most resources on this page are available to employees and students, with populations served specified in the descriptions.

*Seeking support is always strong. Always.*