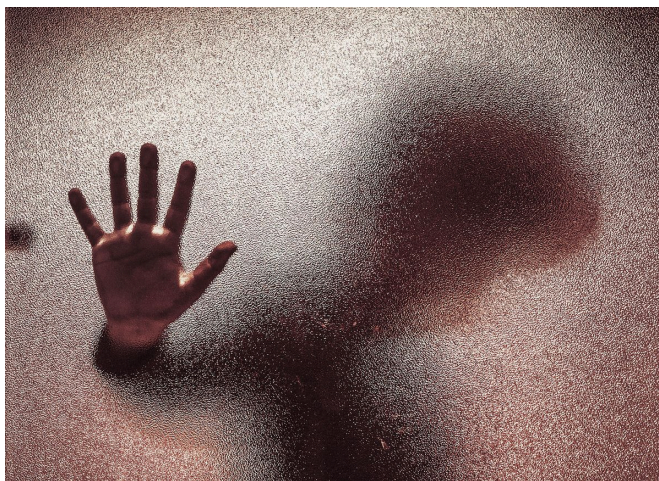


December 16, 2023



According to the American Psychiatric Association, nearly nearly one in three Americans can expect to be more stressed this holiday season than last year. Leading author and Penn State graduate Stan Popovich, who has dealt with fear and anxiety for over 20 years, emphasizes not to overlook the warning signs to increased anxiety and distress this holiday season.

“Everybody struggles with stress and depression throughout the year, but certain parts of the year like the holidays make people more susceptible,” said Popovich, who is the author of “A Layman’s Guide to Managing Fear.”

“The issues are still there. But the holidays can make it worse, like dealing with the loss of a loved one or reliving situations. Mental health has been a taboo for years, where people never said anything. With social media and with mental health awareness, people are starting to open up by saying they’re having issues that need to be addressed.”

His book and website focus on six reasons why people need to take mental health seriously because there are options through professional help. Before you can let it go, you have to let it out, Popovich said.

“It can be difficult to admit that you have a mental health problem in your life. In the past, people would never say anything. They would just keep it to themselves and deal with it,” he said. “With the changing culture, people are more receptive and open.

“The first thing is to talk to your doctor or primary health care physician. Don’t go to your friends or Google it because they’re not professional. You go to your doctor for physical health issues. The same holds true for your mental health because it affects us all, rich or poor, educated or not. Everybody needs help every now and then.”

He outlines six reasons people should make mental health a priority.

1. The situation will improve if you get help: Anxieties and fears can be challenging to manage and more than likely you will need some help. Left untreated, anxieties and fears may not go away.

2. Drugs and alcohol are not the answer: Drugs and alcohol can make your problems more complicated. There are many health professionals in your area that can give you some ideas on where you can go for assistance, he said.

3. You will save time and money: Eventually, you will have to confront your fears and mental health issues. You will save months of struggling by getting help right away, he explained. The sooner you get assistance the faster you will start getting some relief.

4. You are not alone: Everyone deals with fear, stress, and anxiety whether your friends or others. Do not be embarrassed that you are getting help. We all learn new things from others on a daily basis and learning how to manage your anxieties is no different, he said.

5. Do not make the mistake of doing nothing: There are many people who struggle with anxiety and other mental health related issues and tried to ignore the problems. As a result, some of these people struggled on a daily basis and eventually things became more difficult. It can be scary asking for assistance, but the key is to take things one day at a time.

6. You have a variety of options: There are many mental health support groups, organizations, and counselors in your area that can help get your life back on track. Talk to your doctor to get more details on

where you can go for some assistance. Every problem has a solution. People just have to make the effort to find the answers, Popovich said.

“Wintertime can make it worse. Christmas and the holidays can make it worse too,” he said. “You can’t underestimate other times of the year because every holiday can be different for different people. There are certain triggers.

“Some of the warning signs include where they keep to themselves or a loss of appetite. They’re acting different, they’re not themselves or they become antisocial in the way they deal with people.”

Popovich suggested getting outside for some fresh air. Exposure to sunlight can help you relax and lift your mood, he said.

“Many people struggle with some feelings of depression during the winter months with fewer hours of sunlight and more time spent indoors. Walking outside in the sun can be an effective centering and calming tool,” he explained. “Numerous studies have pointed to the mental health benefits of spending time in nature, including stress relief, better concentration, lower levels of inflammation and improved mental energy.”

The big thing with holiday anxiety or depression of any kind, Popovich said, is to be open and not to be afraid to seek outside help in the professional community.

Rodney Harwood is an award-winning journalist and photographer and can be reached at cgsentineleditor@countrymedia.net