

'Need for professional mental health guidance has never been greater'

New hotline will offer free and anonymous mental health support for those struggling due to abuse or coronavirus lockdowns.

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With the entire world reeling from the effects of the devastating coronavirus outbreak, a nationwide group of mental health professionals is launching an Amudim anonymous support hotline to help the general public weather this unprecedented crisis.

Spearheaded by Amudim, the hotline will address the many facets of the current situation, including general anxiety, abuse, addiction and domestic violence. Volunteers from Amudim, Child & Adult Psychological Services, Empower Health Center, Madraigos Midwest, Naaleh Cleveland, Nesivos, Relief, Shalom Task Force, The Living Room and others will be joining forces with mental health practitioners in private practice to staff the hotline, which will be manned from 8 AM to 11 PM EST.

“The general effect on the population has been very dramatic, with the mental health crisis potentially creating even more fallout than the coronavirus,” observed Amudim CEO and director Zvi Gluck. “This is an amazing opportunity for all of us to band together and help each other as we navigate our way through the weeks and months ahead.”

With people everywhere staying home and going out only when absolutely necessary, many are experiencing feelings of isolation whose effects can range from mildly upsetting to devastating, noted Dr. David Pelcovitz, chair of Amudim’s clinical advisory board.

“It is so important when people are feeling alone and like they’re twisting in the wind to know that the community is here for them,” Dr. Pelcovitz emphasized. “It is beautiful to see so many organizations coming together at a time like this when connection is literally a matter of life and death.”

The public can reach out to the hotline at 888-7-AMUDIM or 718-972-3000 and caller ID is disabled to ensure complete confidentiality. A call center will be staffed 24/7 so that those who reach out after hours or at a time when all volunteers are busy will have their calls returned as soon as possible. Those who prefer to communicate in writing will also be able to get help by emailing support@amudim.org. All calls and emails will be received by licensed mental health professionals under the joint direction of Amudim’s clinical director, Myriam Lankry, and Dr. Pelcovitz.

Dr. Shloimie Zimmerman, vice chair of Amudim’s advisory board, said that having a communal resource offering extremely high level professional guidance will help alleviate some of the confusion and address the upheaval that has left many struggling to cope as the coronavirus continues its destructive march across the globe.

“What truly unites us as a community is not being in the same room or even in the same shul,” he added. “We are all brothers and sisters with one Father in heaven and a shared mission to be a light unto the world. At this time, while we need to be physically apart, it is our job to band together, practically, emotionally, and spiritually, joining forces in every way imaginable to face this challenge together.”

Those thoughts were echoed by Rabbi Binyomin Babad, director of Relief, who explained that those already under the care of a mental health professional might be unable to keep their regular appointments under current circumstances, while people who have never sought treatment may find themselves floundering and in need of guidance.

“People are feeling anxious about so many things including their health, their finances and even Pesach,” elaborated Rabbi Babad. “Just speaking to someone who can calm them down and refocus their feelings can be a tremendous help at a time like this.”

Menachem Poznanski, clinical director of The Living Room, noted that for those struggling with addiction, the coronavirus outbreak presents numerous difficulties while also wreaking havoc on their normal supportive networks. Establishing a professionally staffed hotline will create an access point to those systems, filling a vacuum created by the pandemic.

Also facing major challenges are those who face abuse in their own homes, said Dr. Shoshana Frydman, executive director of Shalom Task Force. “Our volunteers are trained for safety during this time of sheltering in place and to help those in the dynamic of domestic violence so that they don’t feel frightened or alone. We are keeping our lines open and sticking to our regular schedule so that they don’t feel isolated and know that we are there for them.”

With Amudim’s phones ringing off the hook in recent days, Lankry emphasized that the need for professional mental health guidance has never been greater. She added that it is important for people to know that the difficulties they are facing right now are normal reactions to abnormal events.

“We need to get the message out,” asserted Lankry. “There are people here you can speak to who are here for you and ready to lend a listening ear. People need to remember that needing help doesn’t make you weak and that reaching out for help makes you stronger. Even in a time when we have to be physically distant, our hearts can be connected and our words can connect us.”

Credit-Amudim