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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April is Stress Awareness Month

Legacy Community Health behavioral health professionals offer coping tips amid rise of mental health support demand

HOUSTON – (April 17, 2023) – According to UnderstandingHouston.org, Texas is at the bottom of the national rankings for access to mental health treatment with Houston area residents having significantly less access to mental health care providers than the national average. Following the recent tragic deaths of two college students in Houston, amplification of this year’s observance of Stress Awareness Month is as important as ever.

“Stress is a part of our daily life. It is unavoidable, but that doesn’t mean it’s unmanageable,” says Betsy Vasquez, LPC, therapist at Legacy Community Health. “When we go through certain stressors, it may impact our ability to clearly see the path ahead. This can impact feelings of anxiety and depression, making some of us feel hopeless and unable to see our resilience.”

Vasquez offers the following coping tips for addressing stress in your life:

- **Normalize it**
 - It’s ok to say you’re stressed! You’re not alone. Stressors are inevitable and expected. Not all stress is bad, for example – a move to a new city or school can be both exciting and stressful.
 - Try and look at the duality of stress
 - Can serve as a motivator
 - Can serve as your internal check to when you may need a break
 - Normalize the ability to accept that stress is a part of daily life, but not all of daily life!
- **Strategize it**
 - When feeling stressed, strategize how to care for yourself during these times.
 - I am feeling stressed.
 - What do you enjoy doing and how can you incorporate that into your day
 - Care for yourself on the days when stress seems “bigger than you.”
- **Work it out**
 - Exercising, walking or any movement is so good for your mental and physical health.
 - The bilateral stimulation (left-right, left-right pattern) helps ground you and can aid in looking at stressors through a different, less punitive lens.

- **Write it out**
 - Writing down your stressors allows you to physically see them and can also serve as a release (putting hand to paper and seeing the words) of the stressors.
 - Writing allows us to pause and collect our thoughts and ideas
 - This can help us self-regulate and process our stress
 - Creating lists can help you keep yourself on track, in order to keep you accountable, but to also see all of the things you have been able to accomplish thus far. Be your champion!

- **Talk it out**
 - It is so important for us to have a release in a safe space, where you are able to create a safe space among family and friends, where you can share your feelings in a non-judgmental setting.
 - Parents – Support yourselves and your children. Stress does not discriminate against age, status or gender. We all undergo stress and should be able to support one another during these times
 - No cell phones at dinner
 - Connect with your family and be present with one another.
 - Weekly “check in” with one another
 - What has been stressful for you these last few days?
 - How can I support you?
 - When the negative feelings associated with stress become more prominent, seek the help you need and deserve.

Vasquez recommends additional stress management techniques like writing or journaling, keeping lists, talking to your family or a professional, less screen time, and weekly check-ins with the people you trust.

Understanding Houston states that approximately 21% of U.S. adults (52.8 million) lived with a mental illness in 2020. The prevalence of mental illness was reportedly higher among women (25.8%) than men (15.8%). Young adults aged 18–25 had a higher prevalence of mental illness (30.6%) than older adults (19.5%).

White adults are more likely to report mental health issues than people of color. However, the consequences of mental illness in people of color may be more persistent, meaning even though they might have lower rates, this may be because some could be less likely to seek treatment (or receive effective treatment), and their mental health conditions might go unreported and may not improve over time. The reason for this discrepancy may be cultural competency among providers: Lack of cultural understanding by providers, as well as social stigma, may contribute to the underdiagnosis of mental illness among people of color and the immigrant population.

Legacy provides patients with the support they need through therapy, psychiatry, or both. For more information about Legacy Community Health, visit [LegacyCommunityHealth.org](https://www.legacycommunityhealth.org).

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About Legacy Community Health Services, Inc.:

Legacy Community Health is a full-service health care system comprised of over 50 locations in the Texas Gulf Coast region offering primary and specialty care, as well as pharmacy services. For over 40 years, Legacy has been innovating the ways we provide comprehensive, quality health care services to underserved communities. As the largest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Texas and a United Way affiliated agency since 1990, Legacy ensures its services and programs are open to all, regardless of the ability to pay—without judgment or exception. To learn more, visit www.legacycommunityhealth.org.