We are all in this together. We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and will follow guidance from public health officials and government agencies, so we can continue to support our community.

UCS to increase in-person services with everyone’s safety in mind.

I hope you and those you love are staying safe and healthy.

As you are probably aware, UCS has remained open to serve the community, though the majority of our services have been provided virtually, online or via telephone. In preparation for increasing the number of staff on-site and the number of clients seen in person, we want you to know that we are doing everything possible to make your visit with UCS safe—we want you to feel comfortable during your visit, so please let us know if there is anything we can do to help. With continued and enhanced safety practices, UCS is planning to emerge from this phase cautiously, carefully, and safely.

Here is how United Counseling Service’s efforts to continue providing and expanding safe services for you will progress:

What you can expect at our locations:

- All visitors and employees will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 and undergo temperature checks each time they enter our facilities.
- Hand sanitizer will be provided at all locations, and all who enter the building will be asked to use it.
- Masks covering nose to chin are mandatory in all public areas, as well as in 1-to-1 services. If you have forgotten your mask at home, we will provide one for you.
- Facilities are frequently cleaned and disinfected following our extensive cleaning guidelines.
- All in-person services will be held in offices that allow for following social distancing measures.
- All offices are cleaned after each appointment.

I am so proud of the staff at United Counseling Service. Their flexibility and creativity in providing needed services during this pandemic is a sign that, out of this crisis, an even better model will emerge. We do not desire to simply return “back to normal.” We will be more accessible, convenient, and prepared. We look forward to serving your needs and together, we will build a stronger community.

Lorna Mattern, Executive Director
You are not alone — Help is a phone call away.

We know that COVID-19 has claimed more than 100,000 lives so far. While this is devastating for all the individuals and families directly affected, national mental health organizations are warning that a related crisis could be looming.

Well Being Trust & The Robert Graham Center for Policy Studies in Family Medicine and Primary Care estimate that we could lose 75,000 more people due to “deaths of despair,” including increased drug- and alcohol-related events and suicides brought on by stress related to the pandemic.

These organizations based their estimation on previous data combined with the anticipated effects of unemployment and financial instability, social isolation, and uncertainty. All three are among the top causes of drug misuse and suicide...Read more.

Telehealth has been a great way to connect clients with services
By Melissa Hunter, Managed Care Coordinator at UCS

Being isolated can be a struggle for many of us as we juggle work, life, parenting, and our mental health. In times like these, we are fortunate to have resources like Zoom, Outlook Teams, and even audio-only platforms, which have allowed us to keep serving clients, connecting them with providers, groups, and other helpful resources.

Telehealth has been a great way for our clinicians to continue providing services to the community. Telehealth is a technology that facilitates long-distance patient and clinician contact. This service was available from UCS prior to COVID-19, but its value and use have increased exponentially with stay-at-home and social-distancing mandates from the state.

Telehealth services are typically offered with restrictions on the type of platforms used for communication. In order for UCS and other organizations to meet the urgent needs of the community during the pandemic, many of the requirements imposed by private and state insurance policies have been loosened to expand access to as many people as possible. At this time, telehealth services can even be provided via “audio only” platforms (i.e. telephone).

According to the Vermont Program for Quality Healthcare (VPQHC), Vermont has one of the nation’s highest rates of telehealth use. UCS is glad to be able to continue services to our clients and community during such a trying time!

Help us #EndTheStigma.

Now more than ever, it is imperative that we take care of ourselves both mentally and physically.

We know that mental and physical health are closely linked, yet there are many reasons why people don’t seek the help they need when it comes to mental health and substance use. Right now, today, there is one barrier we can overcome:
We want to **END THE STIGMA** surrounding discussing and addressing mental health, and **we need your help**. We are asking community members to share thoughts on seeking help and getting past the stigma barrier. We hope you can help by joining us in this public effort.

Here’s how you can participate:

- Provide a personal message or statement that UCS can share publicly. If you are willing to share a photo as well, we would welcome your permission to use it in social media and other outreach. It doesn’t have to be long or fancy; it just should be meaningful.
- Use your cellphone and film a short clip of yourself that we can share. It may be a personal experience, or reassurance that it is ok to seek help.

Please send your personal messages, photos, and videos to Heidi French, UCS Director of Community Relations, at hfrench@ucsvt.org.

Thank you for joining UCS in building a stronger community. **We are all in this together and together we can #endthestigma.**

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**The News Project: United Counseling Service Adapts to Pandemic**

**WATCH NOW**

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**UCS Clients: We want your feedback!**

We are looking for your feedback. If you are receiving services from United Counseling Service, we would like to hear from you. Please take a few minutes and complete this brief survey. Here is the link to access the survey: [UCS Spring 2020 Survey](#).

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**Pandemic Effects on Mental Health**

By Bob Bick, CEO of Howard Center

The community’s response to the COVID-19 crisis has been monumental. Our neighbors in the medical professions and in our community-based programs are doing heroic work and it seems as though nearly every Vermonter is finding ways to contribute.

I have always been humbled by the deep well of generosity in our community. Now we are seeing that generosity coupled with Vermont’s trademark ingenuity as businesses shift manufacturing capacity to make masks and hand sanitizers, and individuals sew masks in their homes. Donations of items like these have been a tremendous help to Howard Center and we are deeply grateful.

“I am Vermont Strong” united Vermonters when Tropical Storm Irene devastated the state’s infrastructure and many families’ homes and livelihoods. The iconic phrase represents the Vermont spirit that has once again come to the fore as we face the challenge before us today...[Read more](#).
Managing Parental Stress in the New Normal  
Wednesday, June 3 at 6pm

Join us for a presentation on managing stress in what is now the new normal. Learn how to focus on the importance of flexibility as well as developing skills to help you manage their own anxieties about the current situation.

Presenters: Alison Clausnitzer-Lane, Behavioral Health Clinician and Monica Bolio, Outpatient Clinician

Register at Managing Parental Stress

Practicing Mindfulness  
Wednesday, July 1 at 6pm

Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you’re sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgement. Learn ways to practice mindfulness including breathing methods, guided imagery, and other practices to relax the body and mind and help reduce stress.

Presenters: Bob Wubbenhorst MA, NCC, ACS, Cht, LCMHC, Clinical Manager

Register at Practicing Mindfulness

Head Start/Early Head Start  
2 Park Street  
North Bennington, VT 05257  
Phone: 802-442-3686  
Locations in Bennington, North Bennington, Manchester and Pownal

Moving forward

Governor Scott has announced that Child Care Centers may reopen June 1. We are still waiting for additional health and safety guidance from the state and are working through the planning process. However, as a federal Head Start program, we will not be reopening on June 1 because we must meet the more stringent requirements of the Office of Head Start and Child Development Division—and of course, everyone's health and safety are our top priorities.

For now, we do know that many systems and procedures will
change, and that childcare will have a new normal when we reopen. Once we have a clear path to reopening, we will let you know. In the meantime, we appreciate your consideration, patience, and understanding as we all work through this.

We look forward to being back in the classroom with the kids!
Things for your family to do outside!

- Bike, scooter, or Ripstick in the driveway: You can set up an obstacle course or try new tricks.
- Build a Fairy House - here are instructions for building one from the official Fairy Houses website - https://www.fairyhouses.com/about-fairy-houses/how-to-build/
- Star gaze and learn and find constellations - https://astronomy.com/observing/astro-for-kids/2008/03/learn-the-constellations
- Enjoy the classics: Play hopscotch, 4-square, Mother May I, or jump rope - https://www.wired.com/2009/08/simpleoutdoorplay/
- Measure the rain: Set out a cup in an unsheltered location and monitor how much rain has fallen, and next thing you know you'll be cheering for more rain.
- Let rain inspire art: If rain's in the forecast, get the kids out on the driveway with sidewalk chalk, then wait to see it melt. Use washable paint on hands and feet, then head outside to see it wash off.
- Shake a rainy tree. Head outside under some branches and let kids shake the branches for an instant rainstorm. Kids absolutely love getting grown-ups wet.
- Create a nature journal and record what you see
- Catalog the birds in your neighborhood by listening to their sounds and song. Make it a game or contest to see how many you can find. - https://wtfishandwildlife.com/conserve/conservation-planning/animal-inventory/birds
- Make luminarias and light up your driveway - https://www.hgtv.com/design/make-and-celebrate/handmade/how-to-make-luminarias
- Create an obstacle course in your yard – you can all be ninjas!
WE ARE BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY.
JOIN US!

During this time we want you to know that we are listening. United Counseling Service has increased the number of groups being offered to the community. Group sessions will be held virtually via zoom. Limited in person spots also available. Call 802.442.5491 to learn more or to sign up.

**MONDAY**

8am - Reduce Anxiety Through Mindfulness Activities
4pm - Men’s Substance Abuse

**TUESDAY**

8am - Wellness During Covid-19
9am - Relationship Dynamic Group
12:30pm - Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Informed Group
2pm - Coping with Fears
2pm - Networking based on Open Dialogue

**WEDNESDAY**

8am - Substance Abuse
11am - Anxiety/Depression

**THURSDAY**

8am - Maintaining Abstinence Through COVID-19
9:30am - Parenting in an Uncertain Time
11am - Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP)
12pm - Hearing Voices
4pm - Yoga

**FRIDAY**

8am - Coping Skills
11am - Women’s Anger Management
1pm - Networking based on Open Dialogue

**UCS groups are open to all residents of Bennington County.**
For more information information visit ucsvt.org or call 802.442.5491.
UCS Main Office
100 Ledge Hill Drive, Bennington
BENNINGTON COUNTY FOOD RESOURCES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19*

The Bennington Banner has lifted the paywall on all coronavirus stories that provide critical public health information to readers.

See the full list

Additional resources for COVID-19 information

Vermont Department of Health
Center for Disease Control
Southern Vermont Medical Center
Managing Anxiety and Stress -CDC
Map of Community Resources in Bennington
Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) COVID 19 Resource Page

As a part of the federal Coronavirus Relief Bill, 3SquaresVT households who don't already receive the maximum benefit will see an increase in benefits in April and May. To learn more & find out if you qualify for 3SquaresVT visit Hunger Free Vermont.

Articles of Interest

Health Matters: Protecting kids from COVID-19 by Dr. Meghan Gunn Medical Director of SVMC Pediatrics.

The VT Department of Mental Health's current e-flyer about mental health awareness also contains links to additional resources.
It’s Not Too Late
COMPLETE YOUR CENSUS NOW!
www.2020census.gov

Be counted in the 2020 Census

Census data is used to allocate billions of dollars in funding for hospitals, school lunch programs, Medicaid and resources that are needed every year, especially in uncertain times like now.

Make sure everyone in your home is counted.

Complete the 2020 Census now

Please consider supporting UCS

Now more than ever, support from our donors is vital in ensuring that we continue to meet the growing needs of our community. Please consider making a donation. Your donation makes a difference and with your help we can build a stronger community.

Donations can be mailed to:
United Counseling Service
PO Box 588
Bennington, VT 05201

DONATE NOW

UCS is a great place to work.

Our employees are creative, thoughtful, energetic, forward thinking and empowered. UCS is living its mission: Building a stronger community by empowering individuals to live healthy and meaningful lives. If you want to make a difference and help those who need it most, consider joining our team. UCS is a great place to work and a great place to get care. Check out all current openings here. UCS JOB OPENINGS

Please be advised that the Coronavirus Virus/COVID-19 has altered the way we are currently recruiting at this time. Should you be contacted for consideration, we are limiting job interviews to telephone or video communication, in order to align with guidance by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Hiring for certain positions may also be slowed by efforts being used to promote social distancing and other recommended strategies. We thank you for your understanding as we navigate the best way to keep you, employees, and our community safe.