

ROADS TO RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

Created by Dual Recovery at Ascend Mental Wellness
to support individuals in recovery

*A newsletter for you
and about you*



SPOTLIGHT TOPIC

Empathy, How Important Is It?

BY GINGER MILLER



I remember having an ant farm when I was a child; one of those thin, square, see through boxes where you could watch them create their tunnels. I remember being intrigued by how mechanical they seemed in their work and how productive they were. I also remember they seemed to do nothing but work. I never saw them just huddling together like they were having a cup of coffee or sharing a meal together. I also remember watching after one had died how another ant came alone and just picked up the carcass of the dead one as if it was just a twig in its path that needed to be moved out of the way and walked away carrying it. I watched it thinking maybe they would bury it, like a funeral or something but instead they seemed to just move it to a place not in the way until they had the time to disassemble or eat it. I didn't like my ant farm much after that.



Ants do not have empathy. Can you imagine our world without empathy? Everyone, including family and friends, just moving about staying busy, never showing interest in anyone else. I'm not talking about just a day or two, or while overwhelmed with an aspect of life, we all have days or time periods we forget to slow down and have empathy or are struggling with something of our own. I'm talking about ALL the time... like the ants. Everyone is only aware of the surface behavior of the people around them and oblivious to their inner life while they remain unmoved by what is happening in others' lives. That is not a world I would want to live in. Would you?

Empathy is a foundation block to building relationships. Think about a time you felt misunderstood, or even worse, a time when the other person acted as if they couldn't care less about understanding you. In particular, anyone who is vulnerable has a profound need for empathy; children, elderly, someone struggling with their mental health symptoms, someone trying to get/stay in recovery, etc. When empathy is sparse or missing altogether, it's very disturbing. Empathy can make a relationship strong, the lack of empathy can break a relationship.

Empathy gives you a feeling of what it's like to be another person. When you are empathic, even doing so without saying a word – just body language, that tells the other person that he or she exists, is not alone, is important enough to be heard. Isn't that what we all want; to know we're not alone, that we are valued by others? Empathy alone can be more fundamental than whatever the person is talking about. When empathy is present it's much easier to work through struggles, it is soothing, calming, and creates connection. When someone is empathetic toward you it gives you a lot of information about their character and what is important to them. That builds connection and can make you feel more willing to talk with them, right?

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Empathy (Con't)



After thinking about empathy from this angle, how important is it to you?

To build the character of empathy remember that empathy is not approval or agreement, you aren't giving up your opinions or rights. Showing empathy does not mean you have to solve the other person's problems either. We can even learn to show empathy toward someone who irritates us or has hurt us. Think for a moment of a time, perhaps you didn't realize in the moment but after reflecting you realize, you were irritating someone. If instead of reacting offensively to that or walking away, what if the person had stopped and responded sincerely, "I'm sorry you are having a difficult time right now, is there anything I can do to help?" What impact would that have had on you at that moment? A bit profound isn't it?

There are several things a person can do to help build their empathy. First, it will be easier if you have awareness. By being mindful in your daily life, it will make being fully present easier. Being mindful and present is a necessity for becoming a more empathetic person.

Practice putting yourself in another person's shoes, this will help you deepen your understanding of others. This can be done in a number of ways. When you read a book, watch a movie, or have a conversation with someone, try imagining what someone else's lived experience might be like. What would it be like to be in their body; tune into their breathing, posture, gestures, and actions. Think about what that would be like. Tune into their emotions, watch the eyes to see their expression, the unspoken feelings. Ask yourself how you would feel in their situation. Tune into their thoughts, needs, memories, expectations, and intentions. Form little ideas in your mind about what could be going on with them. Think about the things you already know about the person, their history, personality, priorities, temperament, and such.

Be curious and look beneath the obvious or surface. Ask yourself what you would be feeling in their position and how you would feel most supported. Ask them questions to see if your intuitions are on target. Asking things like: "Were you feeling ____?" "Did you want ____?" Be careful not to assert your own views or needs yet.

When they are talking, focus on their words and feelings, don't be thinking about what you should say next. Reflecting back what they say shows them you are truly listening.

As you are listening to their words watch their facial expressions, gestures, and posture – the things they are saying without words. Don't assume you are coming to the correct conclusion. Ask more questions. You could even ask them whether they feel you are understanding them.

Like most things, it may take practice to step into someone else's world and stand there for the duration of the conversation. Stay with it. One day at a time, one person at a time, every one of us can build our empathy; after all, we are human... not ants.



UNDERSTANDING THE DIAGNOSIS GAMBLING DISORDER



According to the Cleveland Clinic, Gambling Disorder (gambling addiction) is a mental health condition characterized by recurrent, maladaptive gambling behavior that causes you clinical stress. It causes major problems with your relationships, work or school, and/or finances. Gambling disorder is sometimes called compulsive gambling or problem gambling.

Gambling refers to an activity in which a person risks something valuable to themselves to win something in return. There are many types of gambling, but common forms include betting in casinos or on sporting events. Not everyone who gambles develops gambling disorder.



GAMBLING DISORDER (CON'T)

Gambling can be a recreational activity for many, but for some, it can develop into a serious problem that affects mental health, finances, relationships, and overall well-being. Problem gambling is defined as any gambling behavior that disrupts one's daily life, leading to financial hardship, emotional distress, and difficulties in personal and professional relationships.

Problem gambling can manifest in various ways, including:

- Frequently thinking about gambling.
- Increasingly frequent gambling activities
- Needing to gamble with greater amounts of money or valuables to receive the same level of pleasure and excitement (tolerance).
- Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control or stop gambling.
- Restlessness or irritability when you try to stop gambling (withdrawal).
- Gambling when you feel distressed (as an "escape" from negative feelings).
- Gambling to regain recent gambling-related losses (called "chasing losses").
- Downplaying or lying to loved ones about your gambling behaviors.
- Relying on other people to fund your gambling or replace the money you lost from gambling.
- Continuing to gamble even when it negatively affects your finances, work, education or personal relationships.

HELLO
SPRING



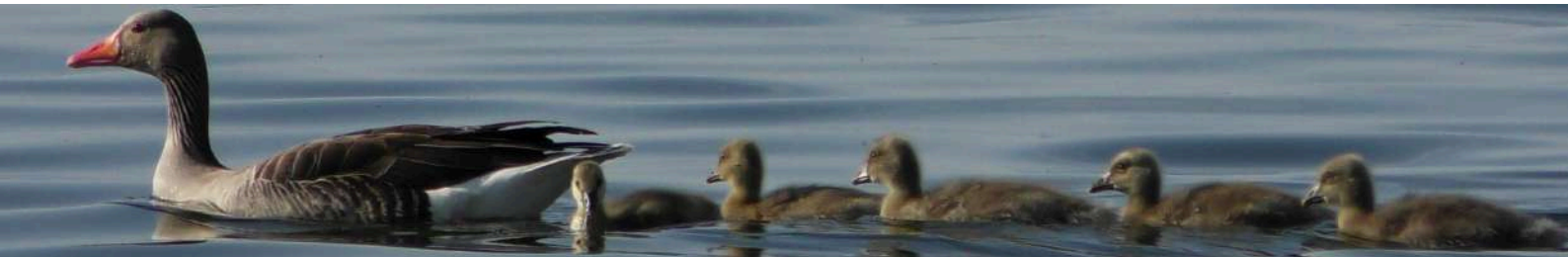
Those struggling with gambling addiction often face challenges such as depression, anxiety, and even substance misuse. The consequences extend beyond the individual, affecting their loved ones and communities.

In New York State, problem gambling is a significant public health concern. With access to casinos, sports betting, online gambling platforms, and gambling apps, more individuals are at risk of developing gambling-related problems. According to the New York State Council on Problem Gambling (NYSCPG), thousands of individuals and families experience the negative effects of gambling addiction, emphasizing the need for increased awareness, prevention, and treatment services.

If you or someone you know is struggling with problem gambling, there are numerous resources available through the New York State Council on Problem Gambling (NYSCPG) and other organizations:

- NY Problem Gambling HOPEline: Confidential support available 24/7 at 1-877-8-HOPENY (1-877-846-7369)
- NYS Council on Problem Gambling: Provides information on gambling addiction, prevention strategies, and treatment resources. Visit www.nyproblemgambling.org for more details.
- National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG) – Offers national resources, helplines, and research on gambling addiction.
- Self-Exclusion Programs: Individuals can voluntarily exclude themselves from gambling facilities and online betting platforms.
- Community-Based Services: Local support groups, counseling services, and educational programs aim to help individuals and families affected by problem gambling.
- Responsible Play Partnership (RPP) – A collaboration between the NYS Gaming Commission, NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS), and NYSCPG that promotes responsible gambling. Visit [Children and tee](#) for more information.
- New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) – Offers support services for gambling addiction, including treatment options. Visit <https://oasas.ny.gov>

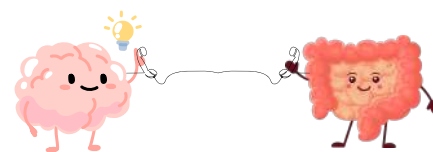
Raising awareness about problem gambling is crucial in preventing addiction and mitigating its impact. Schools, workplaces, and community organizations can play a role by providing educational programs and encouraging responsible gambling behaviors. By recognizing the signs and seeking support, individuals can regain control of their lives and break free from the cycle of gambling addiction. If you or someone you know is struggling, don't hesitate to reach out for help—support is available, and recovery is possible.



HEALTH & WELLNESS

The Brain-Gut Connection

BY ASHLEY MARIE



As a person who has experienced symptoms of both mental health and addiction, I have spent a good amount of time in treatment settings. If this article landed in your life, I am guessing you've had some experience in those spaces, too. So, let me ask you a question - How many times have you heard 'eat healthy-feel better', or some variation of that? I'd bet a lot of us have. However, no one ever explained the HOW it works to me...and I'm the type of person who needs the HOW. Healthy eating habits are a tool I use on my recovery journey every day now. When I practice mindfulness in my eating choices I can feel and see a difference in my moods, health, and overall quality of life. I notice it, and other people in my support circles notice, too. The undeniable positive influence my diet had prompted me to start learning HOW it works. After I explored the topic and discovered some of the answers, I started thinking that maybe you're wondering too. How does what I put in my belly directly influence my mind?

(SPOILER: It is the BRAIN GUT CONNECTION!!!!)

This was a deep rabbit hole, so for the purpose of time, let us focus on the importance of how sugar interacts with our gut and brain. In short, OUR STOMACH, INTESTINES, AND COLON ALL TALK TO OUR BRAIN!!!! (and our brain talks back)

Sounds wild, right? But it is real, and it has a name. Bilateral Communication, also called Two-Way Communication, is information flowing both ways; every second of the day, our GUT and BRAIN are sending messages back and forth. From the GUT to the VAGAS NERVE up the the BRAIN, and from the brain, down our vagas nerve, to our gut. Some scientists have even started calling our gut 'the second brain'!

Our gut has an entire civilization (called a microbiome) of over a TRILLION different bacteria!! They work together to keep us healthy and communicate all sorts of things to our body. When we eat or drink things with different ingredients, the gut releases different chemicals in response. Foods that have a high sugar content trigger the production of enzymes to break the sugar down into energy. Our body can either use this energy throughout the day as fuel or store it in our fat cells. When the bacteria in charge of keeping a guest list detects the presence of the sugar enzymes, it sends a message using to our brain through our central nervous system, telling it to produce DOPMAINE. (We have heard that word before, right?) The brain does what it's told, and the chemical dopamine goes and finds the receptors in the pleasure center of our brain. Dopamine, simply put, is a neurotransmitter (a chemical messenger) that tells us an activity or substance is enjoyable. Dopamine is the chemical our body demands when we are experiencing a craving for our drug (or behavior) of choice. A lack of dopamine can influence our levels of motivation, our mood, even our learning and memory! It gives us feelings of satisfaction and reinforces what we perceive as pleasurable. This is the basis of why sugar can often be a replacement addiction. It can be a piece of why we have a hard time cutting back on sweets. When we consistently eat a diet high in sugar, our gut is often flooded with sugar enzymes, and our body then demands sugar for them to break down. (Hence, a craving.)

A few of the positive results I noticed specifically from my sugar-intake experiment were that decreasing added sugars significantly reduced my anxiety, increased my ability to focus, lowered my A1C, and I had less adult acne. Don't forget, a more balanced mood! Upon bringing these sugars back into my diet, all these symptoms worsened. Also, I was able to apply mindful practices to the cravings I was experiencing. Less sugar in my diet meant less cravings. More sugar = more cravings. Learning about how different foods affect my guts microbiome, and the resulting changes in my mental (and physical) health has been an interesting endeavor, one I look forward to continuing! I hope what I shared here helps you, wherever you are in your Recovery Journey!!





IS THIS MEETING FOR YOU?

7 Cups



Although 7 Cups is not specifically a meeting, it does provide support. 7 Cups is an online Therapy Community that they claim many call home. No matter who you are or what you're going through, you're not alone. There are many people who are just like you at 7 Cups. This is a place where you'll be heard and cared for. They state that although we might be strangers on the surface, underneath we're just the friends you haven't met yet. Feeling overwhelmed? You are not alone. Connect with their supportive community that's touched 72 million lives around the world. They will create a personalized plan with proven strategies to help you feel better, fast. Three of the services this website provides are 1. Free 24/7 chat, 2. Confidential online therapy and coaching with licensed therapists for a low monthly fee, and 3. A Community Support Forum where you can explore self-help guides and growth paths for proven tips and advice on how to feel better.

For more information go to: <https://www.7cups.com/>

MENTAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT

TIPS &
TOOLS

Your Toolbox

BY GINGER MILLER



Why is it important to have a mental health toolbox? Just like any task we take on, we need to know what tools we will need to work on it; the same is true for managing our mental health. If we are working on a car then it will be tools like wrenches and screwdrivers; if it is wood working then the tools are hammers and saws, if it is a craft then we get the supplies together before we start, and so on. A mental health toolbox will have tools in it that help you to stay mentally healthy and tools that will help you 'fix' when you aren't feeling as mentally well as usual.

What should you put in your toolbox? When it comes to a mental health toolbox sometimes it may be a notebook with information you write when you're feeling healthy so that when you aren't feeling so clear headed you will see your own writing and thoughts so it can help you get back on track. It's even a good idea to have an 'inventory' in your toolbox where you write down things you can do to help yourself. Some common tools are to take a deep breath, write down your thoughts, call/visit a loved one, take a walk outside, eat healthy, see a therapist/counselor, set goals, listen to music, reduce screen time, learn something new, do a hobby, exercise regular, etc.

Why not take a few minutes to mindfully and with intention think about what tools you have and use when you are having a difficult time. You probably have some 'go to' things you do automatically but if you make a list, the next time your 'go to' isn't available or isn't doing to trick you'll have more things to consider!

Keep checking this article in future newsletters to maybe find some new tools you can add to your list!

INSPIRATION & MOTIVATION

Small Changes
Lead to Lasting
Breakthroughs.



For better or worse, what
you do to others ripples
back to you; what you do to
yourself ripples out to
others.





CREATIVE WRITING CORNER



I would like to visit the Albany State Museum. Donations are accepted and it is located in the heart of downtown Albany, a historic city in and of itself, with many fascinating and fabulous facets to it in the state of New York.

~ Josh B.

If I could study a new skill it would be how to become a nurse. I want to help people.

~ Paizley



p

If You Could Be An Animal, What Would You Be?



p

A lynx.
~ Johnny S.



An owl.
~ Richard M.



A wolf because they are majestic animals.
~ Nova C.



I am passionate about learning as much as I can about creating a healthy environment for me to grow in. From the foundation of soil all the way to the relationships I have with people around me.



~ K.W.

One of the most beautiful things I have seen was the planet Jupiter with its four moons and possibly some cloud bands ro red spot with my telescope. It was very faint to see. I would like to see Saturn with one or two rings. It would be beautiful to see.



~ Anthony G.



A



We would love to hear from you! If you'd like to share a poem you've written, some creative writing you've done or a piece of your recovery story we would love to add it to our newsletter to help support or inspire our readers. Not sure what to write about? We'll provide prompts each month as an option.

March/April prompts

1. Write about a defining moment in your life. Was it painful? What did you learn or how did you grow from it?
2. What is something you used to love doing but don't make time for any more? Why did you love doing it?
3. Write about something that helps you feel calm.

To submit your writing please email it to gmler@ascendmw.org, mail it to ASCEND, Dual Recovery Department, 230 Maple St., Glens Falls, NY 12801, or drop it off in the Peer Pod at the East Side Center at the address above.

Riddles of the Month:

1. What has four wheels and flies?
2. What begins with T, ends with T, and has T in it?



Riddle Answers

1. A garbage truck
2. A Teapot

RECOVERY

Resources

PHONE NUMBERS

Life Line Mental Health Crisis & Suicide Prevention: 24/7 support for people in emotional distress or suicidal crisis. **Call or Text 988** When calling Press **1** for Veterans, Press **2** for Spanish, Press **3** for LGBTQIA+, or visit 988lifeline.org

Mobile Crisis: Meet a clinician in an agreed-upon location. 518-741-6099

Crisis Text Line: 24/7 for any crisis. A live, trained Crisis Counselor receives the text and responds, all from our secure online platform. Text 'HOME' to 741741

United Way: 24/7 Connects you to a community resource specialist who can put you in touch with local organizations that provide critical services. English and **Spanish** Dial 211

Never Use Alone Crisis Prevention Center: A toll-free nationwide overdose prevention, detection, crisis response and reversal lifeline services for people who use drugs while alone. The all volunteer peer-run call center operators are available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. No stigma. No judgment. Just love! 800-484-3731

Rose House Warm Line: 24/7 A safe place to stay or someone to talk to. 518-502-1172

National Domestic Violence Hotline: confidential support 24/7/365 **English, Spanish and 200+ languages through interpretation service** 800-799-7233 or Text 'START' to 88788

National Sexual Assault Hotline RAINN (Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network): 24/7 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or visit online.rainn.org.

The Trevor Project: 24/7 crisis support services for LGBTQ young people. Text, chat, or call anytime to reach a trained counselor: thetrevorproject.org/hotline: 866-488-7386 or Text 'START' to 678678

National Center for PTSD Helpline: 1-800-273-8255

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): Hotline staff are prepared to answer any mental health questions you may have. (800) 950-NAMI (6264)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): Available 24/7, 365 days a year: (800) 662-HELP (4357). The professionals on the phone can provide treatment information and referrals in English and **Spanish**.

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): Available 8:30am to 5pm EST: (866) 615-6464 or (866) 415-8051 (TTY). Professionals can answer any mental health related questions in English or **Spanish**.

Boys Town: Specially trained counselors are available 24/7, 365 days a year to provide crisis support specifically for children and their families: (800) 448-3000

National Eating Disorders Association: 24/7 crisis support Text 'NEDA' to 741741

National Human Trafficking Hotline: Serving victims and survivors. Toll-free hotline is available from anywhere in the country, 24/7, 365 days a year at 1-888-373-7888

WEBSITES

Al-Anon and Ala-teen Groups: Hope and help for families and friends of alcoholics: al-anon.org

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA): Local group schedule and information: district13.aahmbny.org To speak to someone local call 518-463-0906

Debtors Anonymous: Offers hope for people whose use of unsecured debt causes problems and suffering in their lives and the lives of others: debtorsanonymous.org

Digital Recovery Support: Online recovery support groups are available daily. They are open to anyone who is dealing with substance use, mental health conditions, and any other quality of life concerns. Meetings are led by peer recovery support specialists who have firsthand experience and understand what you're going through: www.recoveryanswers.org

Gamblers Anonymous (GA): Online services for anyone struggling with a gambling addiction: gasteps.org

Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing (GRASP): For those who have lost someone to substance use or addiction: grasphelp.org

In The Rooms: A free online recovery tool that offers 130 weekly online meetings. We embrace multiple pathways including all 12 Step, Non-12 Step, Wellness and Mental Health modalities. Other resources available also such as news, blogs, guides, and more <https://www.intherooms.com/home/>

Narcotics Anonymous (NA): local group schedule and information: narcotics.com

Overeaters Anonymous (OA): Online support groups for anyone who wants to stop eating compulsively: oarecovery.com

PODCASTS

Mental Illness Happy Hour: Weekly interviews with comedians, artists, friends, and the occasional doctor.; exploring mental illness, trauma, addiction and negative thinking.

This Naked Mind: Some of the episodes discuss alcohol withdrawals, the link between drinking and binge eating, how to deal with loneliness, and more.

Recovery Rocks: Our varied paths show listeners that there are a myriad paths to recovery and countless songs to rock out to along the way.

Mental Health - Hope and Recovery: They share inspirational true stories and a host of recovery skills. You'll learn about treatment options, coping skills, goal setting, relationships, and mindfulness.

APPS

Addiction Apps: Twenty-Four Hours A Day (Free), Quit That! Habit Tracker (Free), NoMo (Free)

Anxiety Apps: MindShift (Free), Self-Help Anxiety Management – SAM (Free)

Bipolar Disorder Apps: IMoodJournal (\$), EMoods (Free)

Counseling Apps: TalkSpace (\$\$) BetterHelp (\$\$) Larkr (\$\$) ReGain (\$\$) TeenCounseling (\$\$)

Depression Apps: Talk Space Online Therapy (\$\$), Happify (Free), MoodTools (CBT; Free)

Eating Disorder Apps: Recovery Record (Free), Rise Up & Recovery (Free), LifeSum (Free)

General Mental Health Apps: What's Up (CBT; Free) Mood Kit (CBT; \$)

Mindfulness & Meditation Apps: Calm (\$), Serenity: Guided Meditation & Mindfulness (Free)

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Apps: nOCD (Free), Worry Watch (\$), GG OCD (Free)

PTSD Apps: PTSD Coach (Free), Breathe2Relax (Free)

Schizophrenia Apps: UCSF Prime (Free), Schizophrenia Health Story Lines (Free)

Suicide Prevention Apps: MY3 (Free) notOK (Free)

Wellness: Wellness Recovery Action Plan (Goal Setting; Free)

Check Out Our Peer Perspective Podcast!
On ASCENDMW.org, SPOTIFY, IHeart Radio,
Apple Pod Cast, and Amazon

ASCEND DUAL RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUPS

EVERY TUESDAY
12:00-1:00 PM OPEN DISCUSSION/RECOVERY TOPICS
CONIFER PARK
55 ELM STREET, GLENS FALLS

EVERY TUESDAY
4:30-5:30 PM OPEN DISCUSSION/RECOVERY TOPICS
HOPE & HEALING RECOVERY CENTER:
37 CHESTER STREET, GLENS FALLS
IN PERSON OR
VIRTUALLY - ZOOM MEETING ID: 844-2214-0148

PLEASE VISIT [WWW.ASCENDMW.ORG](https://www.ascendmw.org) FOR MORE
INFORMATION & COPIES OF OUR NEWSLETTERS

THANKS FOR READING! :)

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUBSCRIBE TO OUR
NEWSLETTERS, PLEASE EMAIL US AT
GMILLER@ASCENDMW.ORG OR CALL 518-401-5991



GARDEN CLUB

IT'S TIME TO GET BACK TO THE GARDEN

March 2025

Gardening for Mental Health

Wellness gardening can help improve memory, cognitive abilities, language skills, and socialization. The physical activity of wellness gardening can help strengthen muscles, improve coordination, balance, and endurance. In wellness garden settings, individuals learn to work independently, problem solve, and plan out projects step-by-step.

Soil has even been described as having antidepressant properties. Researchers found that bacteria in the soil, called *Mycobacterium vaccae*, actually help stimulate serotonin production in the brain, which can improve mood and reduce stress.

This month is about *cultivating patience* and embracing the process of *slow growth*. Just as seeds take time to sprout, our goals and aspirations require care, *consistency*, and trust in the unseen process beneath the surface. Through hands-on learning, we'll explore how nurturing plants mirror the journey of personal growth, helping us build *resilience*, *mindfulness*, and a deeper *connection* to the rhythms of nature.

GARDEN CLUB MEETINGS MARCH & APRIL:

Thursday March 6
10:00 am - 12:00pm
Wellness Gardening 101

Thursday March 13
10:00 am - 12:00pm
Wellness Gardening 101

Thursday March 20
10:00 am - 12:00pm
Wellness Gardening 101

Thursday April 3
11:00 am - 12:00pm
East Side Center

Thursday April 17
11:00 am - 12:00pm
East Side Center

April 2025

A CLEAN SLATE AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Cluttered environments often lead to *sensory overload*, making it difficult to focus and process thoughts effectively. To the brain, clutter represents unfinished business, and this lack of completeness can be stressful for some people. In some ways, clutter and mess are linked to negative emotions like confusion, tension, and irritability.

An organized space tends to produce more positive emotions like *calmness* and a sense of *well-being*. By reducing external distractions, we allow our brain to function with *clarity* and *efficiency*, resulting in improved decision-making and creativity.

When belongings have a designated space, it creates a structured, intentional environment that reflects care and respect for our personal space. Giving intentional spaces for your things can help reinforce emotional stability and provide a sense of purpose.

By creating a space that feels welcoming, we cultivate an atmosphere where we feel *grounded*, *safe*, and *at home* in our surroundings.

Garden Coordinator
Kayleigh Winne
kwinne@ascendmw.org