Dear friends;

I've shared bits and pieces of my life and childhood in this space in the past….I do that in hopes that some of those shared experiences may resonate with you or help in some small way.

Alcohol has been present in my life for as long as I can remember. The line between social drinking and problematic use - the kind that causes pain and suffering - has always been a

Alcohol and the Pandemic

On May 9th, the television show Saturday Night Live released a musical sketch entitled “Let Kids Drink”, facetiously advocating parents to reduce some household tension by allowing their children to consume alcohol. While surely no one meant it seriously, the premise of the sketch seemed to resonate with many. Stuck at home, bored with cabin fever, anxious about health or employment, and not sure when or if things will return entirely to normal, no doubt most of us wish we could ratchet down the stresses of the COVID epidemic just a bit.

Unfortunately, at least as it applies to adults, it’s not just the joke’s premise that reflects reality. On April 1st, Newsweek reported that alcohol sales in the United States had increased a remarkable 55% week-over-week. That’s become something of a persistent trend with similar reports continuing, and some estimates indicate that online liquor sales are up as much as 234%. While those figures reveal spending, the actual volume of alcohol sold has increased even more sharply, as more consumers choose to purchase cases of beer, boxes of wine, or larger bottles of liquor. Some of that demand replaces sales in bars and restaurants; most simply reflects increased consumption.

The Journal of American Medical Association, Psychiatry published a study in 2013 based upon the self-reporting of over 43,000 with at risk or 43,00 individuals at risk for Alcohol Use Disorder. Its conclusions: “Drinking to alleviate mood symptoms is associated with the development of alcohol dependence and its persistence once dependence develops”.

People self-medicate with alcohol for all manner of emotional
bit blurry. And, ultimately, it’s not for me to say for anyone elsewhere that line is.

Only a select few family members outwardly discussed their alcoholism and recovery. But I know that others lived with it in the quiet, not talked about way. For the most part, my loved ones were high functioning, bright, generous, charming, and fun, even those for whom alcohol was a lifelong go-to coping mechanism. The ubiquity of the alcohol was something I never questioned. For me, that meant that I was never quite sure what category to place some of the behaviors, sadness, anxiety, and even forgetfulness that accompanied excessive use. The connection between the discomfort I felt…the worry, the urge to keep the peace, to soothe, or to run away – well – it took me until I was well into my teens before I consciously connected my reactions to my loved ones' drinking.

This month we’ve been exploring this a bit. Where is the line and how can we determine when we’ve crossed it? There’s not a nice, neat formula for most of us here. It’s messy and complicated…but all the important stuff in life is, don’t you think? Here’s my take; when we can take a courageous inventory of what drives our choices, we always learn something valuable about ourselves. What discomfort are we looking to escape? How might that escape impact and psychological ailments. Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorders, panic disorders, PTSD, and personality disorders are all common examples, as are less defined but all too familiar ailments like loneliness, boredom, interpersonal strife, and grief. None of these conditions is ever in short supply; the COVID epidemic offers an array of stressors that are likely to exacerbate them all. Alcohol is not effective treatment for any of them, whatever its efficacy seems to be in the moment, and it can very often produce a rebound effect that makes the problem worse and that may motivate continued drinking.

While many people consume alcohol safely, some cannot, and the use of alcohol as self-medication is never safe behavior, even for a person who has not had alcohol issues in the past. Not only is it associated with the development of Alcohol Use Disorder, but the act of self-medicating alone is associated with “several adverse outcomes, such as increased psychiatric comorbidity, suicidal behavior, [lower] treatment utilization, [higher] levels of stress and dysfunction, and lower health-related quality of life”.

Fortunately, information abounds about alternative approaches to decreasing the stresses of this difficult time. Exercise is a mainstay, as are meditation and social contact through technology or at a safe distance. Sleep is, as ever, essential to our emotional wellbeing. Taking some time for self-care or to care for others can help us block out the frightening reports and regain perspective on the more positive things in our lives. Self-care looks different for everyone, but it’s important for us all.

Perhaps most importantly, there is no need to self-medicate. Effective treatment exists for each of those difficult conditions, just as it does for alcohol use disorder itself. We’re probably all feeling a little run-down these days, but it’s important to listen to ourselves and know when what we’re feeling is something more than just a tough day or passing pandemic worries. If that’s the case, there is help just a phone call away, and often available in the comfort and safety of your own home.

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those around us? What if we sat with the discomfort and asked of ourselves what it can teach us? How might we show up for our people after doing so?

All my best to you always,

Maria

**Miss our WZBG Interview?**

Click on this [link](#) to hear this month's interview on WZBG 97.3 with Dale Jones. Tune in on the 3rd Wednesday of every month at 8:20 to hear us in real-time.

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**Community Bag**

Want to give back? Support the community and the environment! Go to the Stop and Shop located at 211 High Street, and 931 Torringford Street, Torrington CT and purchase the $2.50 Community Bag. We will receive a $1 donation for every bag sold in June.