USAG REDSTONE ARSENAL EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Unmasking Loneliness & Social Isolation

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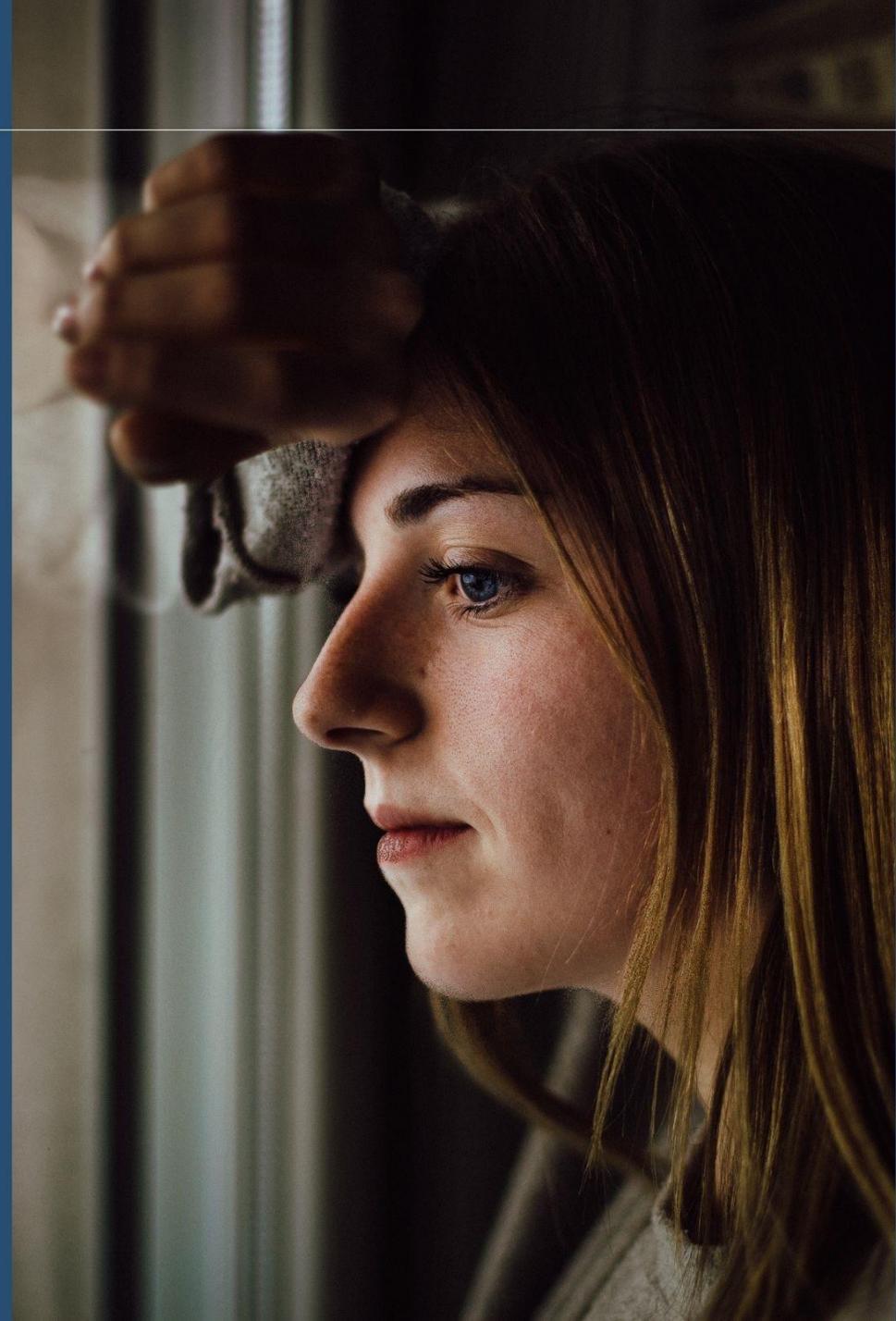
Content Synopsis

OVERVIEW OF KEY IDEAS

Defining Loneliness & Social Isolation

Short & Long Term Impacts

Strategies for Connecting & Coping

Resources for Support

Human Nature

Social distancing and self-isolation are a challenge for many people. This is because humans are innately social. From history to the modern day we've lived in groups – in villages, communities and family units.

Loneliness

Loneliness is associated with feelings of emptiness, sadness, and shame, alongside the perception that one is disconnected from others.

It can occur in the context of social isolation but can also be experienced when others are physically present.

Some people can feel lonely despite having extensive networks, while some others might not, even if they live alone.

There are many factors behind this, and the COVID-19 pandemic is another significant one.

UCLA Loneliness Scale

For each statement please indicate how often you feel the way described using the numbers below. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

1=Never   **2**=Rarely   **3**=Sometimes   **4**=Always

1. How often do you feel unhappy doing so many things alone?

2. How often do you feel you have no one to talk to?

3. How often do you feel you cannot tolerate being so alone?

4. How often do you feel as if no one understands you?

5. How often do you find yourself waiting for people to call or write?

6. How often do you feel completely alone?

7. How often do you feel unable to reach out and communicate with those around you?

8. How often do you feel starved for company?

9. How often do you feel it is difficult for you to make friends?

10. How often do you feel shut out and excluded by others?

Social Isolation

Social isolation is having little to no social contacts and interaction with people and society. It is influenced by internal or external/environmental factors.

Internal factors are personality, thoughts and feelings, physical/mental health conditions.

External/environmental factors are transportation, access to resources, global pandemics.

Social isolation is a very strong predictor of depression, anxiety and stress.

Immediate Impacts

Emotional rollercoaster

Anxiety and depressive symptoms

Substance use

Poor sleep

Emotional or overeating

Digestive problems

Domestic violence and child abuse

Figure 1

Average Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder and/or Depressive Disorder, January-June 2019 vs. January 2021

41.1%

11.0%

Jan - Jun, 2019 (NHIS)   January 2021 (Household Pulse Survey)
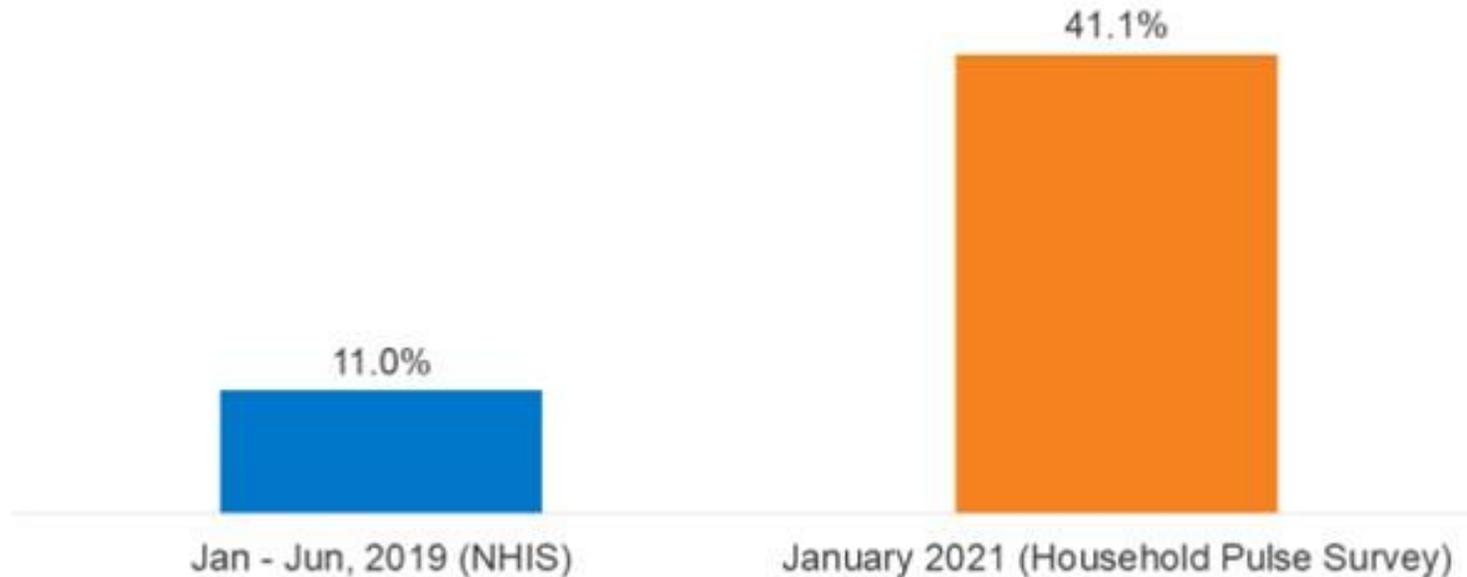
NOTES: Percentages are based on responses to the GAD-2 and PHQ-2 scales. Pulse findings (shown here for January 6 – 18, 2021) have been stable overall since data collection began in April 2020.
SOURCE: NHIS Early Release Program and U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey. For more detail on methods, see:
https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/ERmentalhealth-508.pdf

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Figure 2

Share of Adults Reporting Symptoms of Anxiety or
Depressive Disorder During the COVID-19 Pandemic

41.1%

35.8%

28.4%

Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder   Symptoms of Depressive   Symptoms of Anxiety and/or
                                Disorder   Depressive Disorder
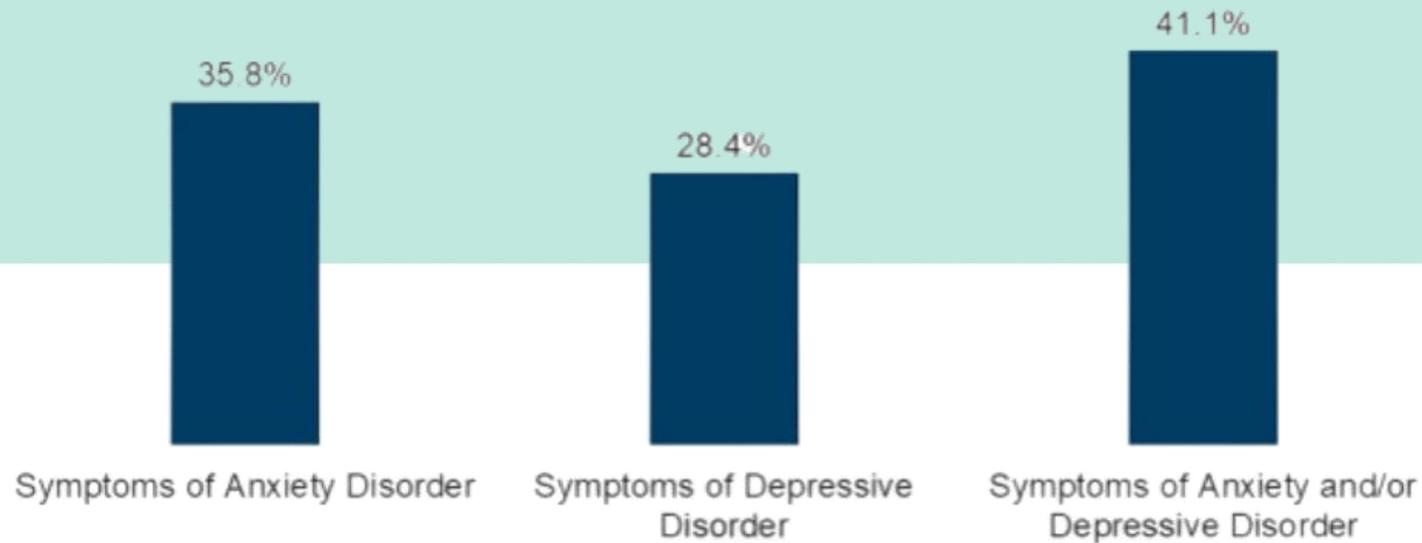
NOTES: These adults, ages 18+, have symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder that generally occur more than half the days or nearly every day.
Data shown is for January 6 – 18, 2021.
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, 2020 - 2021

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Long Term Impacts

While we know social isolation and loneliness have direct correlations to negative mental and physical health impacts, we don't know what the effect of compulsory and prolonged experiences will be. Long term exposure to fear may trigger the development of mental health disorders related to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, and compulsive behaviors. Additionally, ongoing social withdrawal will exacerbate the loneliness and isolation associated with social distancing.

GRIEVING

A WAY OF LIFE AND FAMILIAR ROUTINES

Losing a family member or friend is difficult regardless of the circumstances, but the pandemic makes grieving even more difficult. Not being able to say goodbye or fully grieve the loss of someone can be traumatic and create a sense of ambiguous loss.

Readjusting When Social Life Goes Back to Normal

Most people will probably adjust quickly to increased in-person social interactions when social distancing requirements are removed.

For others, it may be helpful to gradually increase social outings. If you experience social anxiety it may take a while to adjust and you may like to seek extra help at that time.

Re-Entry Trauma

RETURN TO EVERYDAY WORLD

Following a traumatic experience, adjustment to the new-normal may cause increases in anxiety, depression, insecurity, and even re-traumatization.

CREATING SAFE SPACES

Plan for transition by building in opportunities to de-stress, refuel, and reconnect. Creating workspaces that are comforting and soothing will enhance sense of safety at work.

Psychological Flexibility

what is soft is strong

This sheep escaped a farm and spent 6 years in the mountains, during which time he grew 60 pounds of wool. Wolves tried to eat him, but their teeth could not penetrate the floof. You don't have to turn hard to survive the wolves, just be really, really soft and fluffy.

How to Start

Reflect

Dedicate time to write down thoughts and feelings in order to understand the source of your loneliness and social isolation. Reflecting on your triggers increases awareness of how they impact your behaviors and begins the process of creating space between your internal narrative and how you respond.

Explore **what matters most** to you and incorporate that into your new narrative. Your **values** act as a compass to guide you through difficult thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Instead of avoiding the discomfort, focusing on your values to move you in the direction you want to go.

Being Mindful

"the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally"
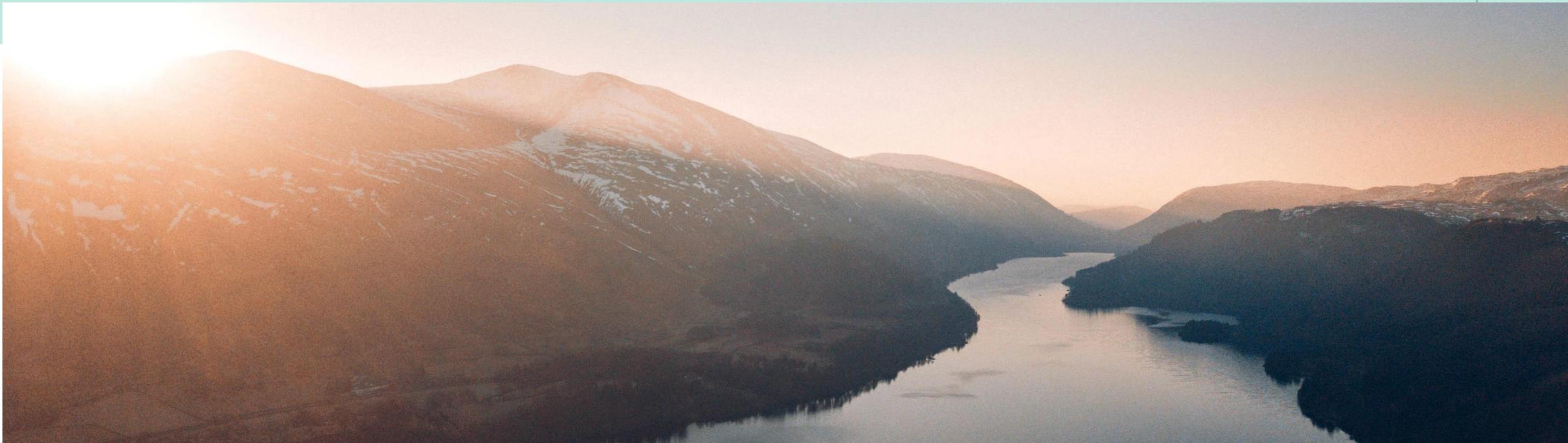
Recognize Unhelpful Thoughts

- **Comparisons**

  focusing others' situations and using that as basis for evaluating own experience.

- **Catastrophizing**

  focusing on worst case scenario and interpreting future events in worst possible light.

- **All or nothing thinking**

  only seeing extremes of a situation. decreases flexibility because there is no middle ground.

- **Mind reading**

  believing that you know what another person is thinking. leads to imagined hurts or slights without actual evidence.

Create Connections

Engage in activities and creative interests. Focus on the short-term future and making plans to provide structure.

Find ways to connect with the yourself, others, and environment. Share experience with others and open up loneliness.

Identify what brings you pleasure now and in the past. Recognize the effort you are making to increase the belief that you can create a different experience and environment.

Focus on Values

Positive emotions

Engagement in satisfying tasks

Achievement

Meaning and sense of purpose in life

Relationships

MANAGING DAY-TO-DAY

Establish and keep a routine

Ensure basic needs are met

Eat a healthy diet

Exercise regularly

Get plenty of sleep

Take breaks from the news and social media

Unwind from work with relaxing activities

Go outside

SIGNS TO SEEK HELP

Anger

Changes in appetite, energy or activity levels

Difficulty concentrating

Feelings of numbness, anxiety or fear

Headaches, body pains, stomach problems or other physical reactions

Increased use of substances like tobacco, drugs or alcohol

Worsening of chronic health problems

Not taking care of basic needs (eating, showering)

Where to go for Support

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Church or Chaplain

Mental Health Provider/Therapist

Primary Care Physician

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

- National Alliance on Mental Health

  https://www.nami.org

- SAMSHA National Hotline

  (800) 662-HELP

- National Suicide Hotline (800) 784-2433

  www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

- Insurance Plan & Therapist Directories

  https://www.therapyden.com

  https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists

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QUESTIONS & THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

Please let me know your thoughts by completing this survey:

https://s.surveyplanet.com/nnAFGci4i

Healthy Living and Working
2021 Webinar Series

Please join us Tuesday, April 27, 2021 for

SCREAM FREE PARENTING

Presented by Tim Rolfe, LCSW, Family Advocacy Program Manager,

Army Community Services

Link to join via Microsoft Teams: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_MzNlODUzMDgtNWI0NS00NGViLWE0ZmEtZGM1N2VmNzFiYTZl%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%2221acfbb3-32be-4715-9025-1e2f015cbbe9%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%223be367c4-375b-46c2-af0b-5059d60838c5%22%7d
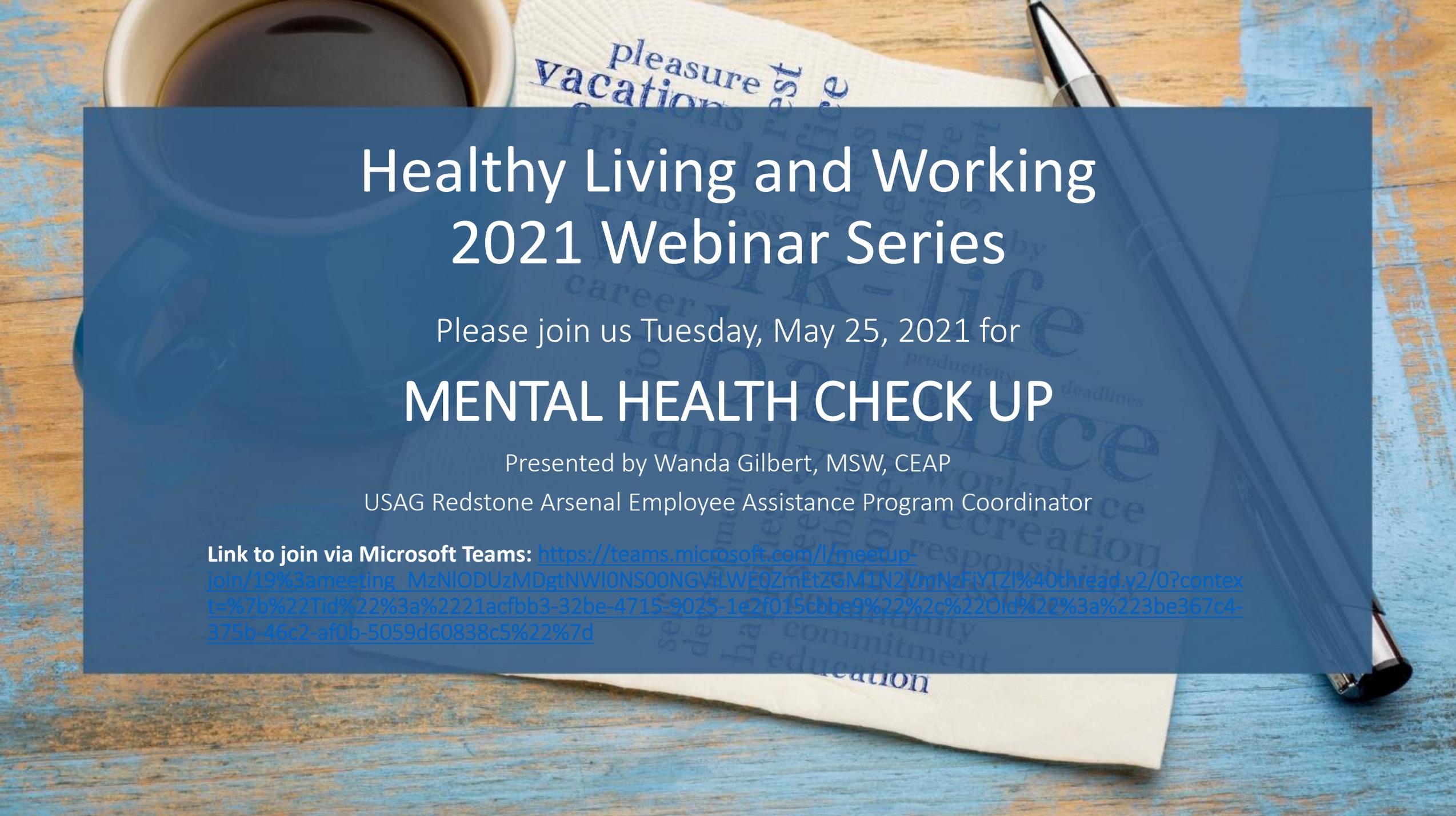
Healthy Living and Working 2021 Webinar Series

Please join us Tuesday, May 25, 2021 for

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK UP

Presented by Wanda Gilbert, MSW, CEAP

USAG Redstone Arsenal Employee Assistance Program Coordinator

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