

THE SPECTRUM

Depression & Bipolar Support Alliance of Greater Chicago



Happy Spring to our DBSA-GC Family!

Hard to believe it is Spring Forward with the time change. Most of us are looking forward to putting winter behind us with warmer weather ahead. The DBSA-Greater Chicago Board hopes you are finding wellness as the season changes and as we progress in to the next quarter of the year. Enclosed are updates on our community activities, as well as articles on daylight savings day, how to change negative thoughts, artistic expressions of mental health in our youth and some pep for your step – ideas of what to do in Chicago this Spring.

DBSA-GC 2023 Goals

- **Adding more in-person support groups:** So far in 2023, we've added several new in-person support groups and currently have support groups in person at: Palatine Library, Uptown/Andersonville, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Warrenville Public Library, Jot Lutheran Church (Gurnee), Westmont, Kumler United Methodist Church (Springfield), Kenilworth Union Church
- **Book Club:** We had 2 book club meetings in 2022 and hope to have more in 2023!
- Honor **World Mental Health Day** (Tuesday, 10/10) and **May Mental Health Awareness**

Spectrum Writer Feature Margaux Shain

What was a proud accomplishment in 2022?

- Changing jobs, excelling in the role, working on exciting projects!

What are some goals for 2023?

- Progress in my weekly running goal and navigate an active toddler!

How does DBSA-GC continue to inspire you?

- Provide me the creativity to highlight mental health in a positive way and connect with other

If you had one wish, what would it be?

- I'd take a fun trip this year!

How do you take care of yourself?

- Read, workout, eat healthy, stay connected to friend and family, voice my needs

How to Hit the Delete Button on Negative Thoughts

Why your inner world has a natural tendency to go haywire and what to do about it

It happens to the best of us. There you are, happily going along your ordinary day-to-day when suddenly, a thought pops into your head from out of nowhere: “What if I’m making a big mistake?” And then comes the ripple effect: “I have no idea what I’m doing. Why did I say that? Why did I agree to do that? I can’t do that.” And it goes on, sometimes replaying conversations to analyze how stupid you must have sounded or what another person really meant.

What ensues is a crippling chain reaction that, along with each ensuing negative thought, sets your mind on a deeper downward spiral towards virtual combustion, leaving you paralyzed in its wake. It’s like you’ve single-handedly managed to blow up your entire world in an instant—and all in the confines of your own mind.

The Brain’s Natural Negative Bias

Chalk up those thought patterns to survival instincts and a biological sense that we aren’t going to live very long

(depressing, we know). Our brain has evolved to survive, and has a bias toward threat detection, says psychiatrist Grant H. Brenner M.D., FAPA, co-founder of Neighborhood Psychiatry, in Manhattan.

Along with this constant scanning for threats, we are designed to use negative information far more than positive information to inform our world. When you think about this in the context of evolution it makes sense. Survival depends more on spotting danger than enjoying the warmth of a nice cave fire. And it’s not just that we gravitate towards using that negative information; it even carries more weight. Negative thoughts are more powerful in our brain processing than positive ones. In fact, researchers say that we require more positive messages (at least five) for every negative one to keep things on an uplifting trajectory.

The Glitch In Our Operating System

“It’s become a more maladaptive function as we’ve gotten more technologically developed and advanced. We can’t deal with things getting better, so our fight-flight systems can make us respond to one another badly,” he says. It’s like a communal glitch in our collective existence. “We lack compassion and see strangers as enemies rather than family. We think the planet is vaster and more omnipotent than it is—an illusion which will shatter badly if we aren’t thoughtful and wise,” Dr. Brenner says.

It’s a vicious cycle too. Basically, the brain becomes trained to look for and recognize threat early — both internally and externally, which leads to greater attention to negative thoughts, re-enforcing

them, and making them more frequent. “Like a car engine running in neutral, the default mode network of the brain runs an operating system that loops in more negative thought and memories, which go around and round diminishing the functions of the brain which could interrupt that looping,” Dr. Brenner says.

The Impact of Negative Thoughts

The ramifications of this negative thought cloud can be detrimental. “Obsessing over a negative thought can become such a focus it can be difficult to engage with what’s happening in life,” says clinical psychologist Kristin Naragon-Gainey, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology in The University of Buffalo’s Department of Psychology. “This can lead people to withdraw from who they’re with and what they’re doing.” And not to mention, push other people away. “It can be harder to enjoy things because you’re more tuned in to what could go wrong; it can create friction with other people and fuel even more stress.” Dr. Naragon-Gainey says.



Why Are Some People More Prone to Negative Thoughts?

“Having negative experiences in childhood, as well as adulthood, may strengthen, confirm, and/or create sticky expectations that the world is a negative place,” Dr. Brenner. “Such expectations can come up as negative thoughts, which are defenses against disappointment and other reactions, as well as simply accommodating to the way the world really seems to be,” Dr. Brenner says.

So, for example, someone with a negative thinking parent may internalize those ways of seeing the world and oneself. However, another person in that same situation might respond adaptively by adopting a more positive way of appraising things. From a biological standpoint, less resilient people are more likely to worry and get stuck in negative thinking, Dr. Brenner says.

How To Stop Negative Thoughts

But, the good news is, you don’t have to be stuck in a negative spiral (read that statement again so it sinks in). You can consciously work to turn that Debbie Downer mentality around. And it starts by recognizing your negative ways of thinking.

Imagine a stop sign literally. This can help put the brakes on the negative thought as it strikes. “This kind of visualization—of a literal diversion—can help move your attention away from negative thoughts,” Dr. Brenner says. You can also try distracting yourself—listen to music, go for a walk, imagine a positive memory, call a friend. “Switching to another task where you can get absorbed in something more efficacious helps build self-esteem and give you a realistic positive reappraisal.” he says.

Be curious, not self-critical. This is a way of being kind to yourself when uncomfortable thoughts come up. “Giving yourself a compassionate pause can serve as a distraction, an interruption, and a way to

change the activity of brain networks,” Dr. Brenner says. Studies show, over time, compassion-based practices, such as giving yourself a positive affirmation like, “I’m doing the best I can,” or “I’m being really hard on myself,” can help a great deal to change the way the brain responds to negativity by reducing self-critical thinking and anxiety.

Pay attention to the thought itself. Did you ever realize, the more you try not to think about something, the more you, in fact, think about it? “When people try to push negative emotions away, they unintentionally grow stronger,” Dr. Naragon-Gainey says. Studies show being mindful by honoring and accepting the thought and trying to work through it in a constructive way can help resolve the underlying issues. “Practice noticing the thought without jumping to judgement,” she says. Try to understand why thinking this way is problematic. Say things like, “Is this thought accurate? Is this thought helpful?” Taking a cognitive perspective can help you cultivate more accurate and helpful ways of thinking and feeling.

Our Chicago: Expressions Challenge helps teens cope with mental health challenges

A recent survey by the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention found more than half of teenage girls reported feeling "persistently sad or hopeless." That number is a record high. In addition, one in three high school girls said they had considered suicide, while 14% of boys said they had. To help teens cope with mental health struggles, a nationwide initiative called the Expressions Challenge was started in Chicago to help promote creative and artistic expressions to help children who are coping.

Senn High School graduate Samantha Oliva took part, and is a 2021 winner of the Expressions by Walgreens Award Winner. "I am super grateful that I did it. I think it was a challenge for myself, to try to come up with something that was important to me while also trying to make it relatable to others," Oliva said. "I feel like that was my goal a lot through the pandemic, I was making a lot videos for my school trying to promote taking care of your mental health, taking care of yourself in general."



So, what's behind some of the struggles that American teens are experiencing these days?

"When we're talking about our teens, I think we have to really understand and appreciate that most of our children were born into a recession. And, with that recession, you have unemployment. You have housing insecurity, and some family discord, things of that nature. So, we had that going on," Alexander said. "Then, we had a contentious presidential time. And, the United States is engaged in external conflict, then you follow that with a pandemic. And so, throughout the course of the lives of our

young people there have been significant stressors impacting people, not just the young people, but impacting people. And so, if the adults are stressed, then chances are that the children are stressed and that's really what we've been seeing."

Senn High School teacher Michael Cullinane has been using the Walgreens Expressions Challenge in his classroom for roughly eight years. He said early on, the students work focused on topical issues. Now, he said, students are comfortable telling their "own unique stories." He said his students' entries for this year "are a lot what I'm calling the 'fine, not fine entries.'"

"A lot of young people express to adults and to their parents and teachers 'I'm fine, I'm fine, everything's okay,' and really, what they're trying to say is 'I'm not.' There's more to the picture than meets the eye, and they're using this as an opportunity to share that," Cullinane said. Click [here](#) for more information on the Expressions Challenge.

Spring Activities in Chicago

Lastly, some fun! With the weather hopefully getting warmer, Chicagoans are looking forward to spending more time outside and seeing blooming flowers and plants. From beautiful gardens and parks check out the best attractions in Chicago and top things to do in Chicago this spring. Article link: [BEST Things to Do in Chicago in the Spring 2023 \(From a Local\)](#) (thesavvyglobetrotter.com)



DBSA-GC Support Groups

Zoom Support Groups

We are still holding Zoom support groups on Sundays at 7pm, an ages 50+ group on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at 7pm, a back community support group on Fridays at 5pm, and a support group on Saturdays at 10am. Here is our [virtual event calendar](#).

In-Person Peer Support Groups

- **PALATINE LIBRARY:** Located at 700 North Ct, Palatine, IL 60067. This group meets on the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm. If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Judy Sturm at (847) 359-4140.
- **ANDERSONVILLE/UPTOWN Ebenezer Lutheran Church:** Located at 1650 W Foster Avenue in Chicago, IL. This group meets weekly on Wednesdays at 7:00 pm. Come early, street parking only. If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Wayne Hoffman at waynehoffmandad@gmail.com or (312) 502-4212.
- **COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN LIBRARY: HILLIARD, OH:** Located at 4500 Hickory Chase Way in Hilliard Ohio at the Columbus Metropolitan Library. This group meets on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm ET. If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Jennifer Murrah at jennmurrah@gmail.com or (614) 756-9396.
- **JOY LUTHERAN CHURCH: GURNEE, IL - Just added!** Located at 749 S. Hunt Club, Gurnee, IL 60031 at Joy Lutheran Church. This group meets every Monday at 7:00pm CT. You

must arrive by 7:00pm, as doors are locked at all times (the church doors automatically lock). If you are late, call support group facilitator Michelle at (847) 715-8820 or Susan at (847) 691-4042 to get let in after 7pm. If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Michelle Kelly at dbsaofgurnee@gmail.com.

- **WARRENVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY - WARRENVILLE, IL - Just added!** Located at 28W751 Stafford Pl., Warrenville, IL 60555 at the Warrenville Public Library. This group meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 2:00pm CT in the west & east meeting rooms (combined). If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Bob Bendorf at (630) 791-8064 (home).

- **ADVENTIST (Formerly AMITA) HEALTH - WESTMONT, IL - Just added!** Located at Advent Health (formerly AMITA) 740 Pasquinelli Drive Suite 104 (at the back of the building) Westmont, IL 60559. This

group meets every Tuesday at 7:00pm CT. If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Norma Wimunc at nwimunc25@earthlink.net.

- **KENILWORTH UNION CHURCH - KENILWORTH, IL - Just added!** Located at 211 Kenilworth Ave., Kenilworth, IL 60043. This group meets once a month on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00pm CT. If you have any questions about this group, contact support group facilitator Beth Palzat at (847) 909-3639 or eag_p@yahoo.com.

DBSA GC
DEPRESSION & BIPOAR SUPPORT ALLIANCE
GREATER CHICAGO

CURRENT SUPPORT GROUPS

IN PERSON

- ANDERSONVILLE/UPTOWN CHICAGO WEDNESDAYS 7PM
- COLUMBUS, OHIO METROPOLITAN LIBRARY 2ND/4TH WEDNESDAYS 7PM
- PALATINE LIBRARY: 1ST/3RD WEDNESDAYS 7PM
- GURNEE, IL: MONDAYS 7PM
- WARRENVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY: 3RD THURSDAY 2PM
- WESTMONT, IL: ADVENTIST HEALTH: TUESDAYS 7PM
- KENILWORTH, IL: KENILWORTH UNION CHURCH: 2ND TUESDAY 7PM

ON ZOOM

- SUNDAYS: 7PM
- SATURDAYS: 10AM
- BLACK COMMUNITY *CURRENTLY PAUSED*
- AGES 50+ GROUP: 2ND & 4TH THURSDAYS 7PM

DETAILS AT: [DBSA-GC.ORG/ONLINE-SUPPORT-GROUP](https://dbsa-gc.org/online-support-group)

DBSA Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance Greater Chicago

Questions? wecanhelp@dbsa-gc.org

Support groups are free and we welcome friends and family

The Spectrum

Thank you for reading! Got Spectrum Newsletter Feedback? Do you like what you are reading and/or do you want more? We would love to hear what's on your mind. Please reach out to us if there are topics and ideas you would like to include or share in the next quarterly Spectrum. Anything goes – events, memorials, celebrations, recognition, thank you's, etc.

2023 Spectrum Schedule

Q1: March-April: Spring Spectrum

Q2: May-June: May Mental Health Awareness Month

Q3: August-September

Q4: November-December: Holiday Spectrum

If you'd like to submit an article, event, celebration, recognition, etc. to be included in our Spectrum, please submit to Margaux@dbsa-gc.org and we'll be happy to review!

Get in Touch with Us

If you are feeling alone, please know we're here to support you. Your recovery matters to us. If you're experiencing a difficult time, please reach out and we'll do what we can to help you get back on track. For questions on our peer lead support groups or anything else on your mind, or to get more involved, please reach out to us at: wecanhelp@dbsa-gc.org and visit dbsa-gc.org. We'd love to speak with you and build our community foundation stronger.

Wrap Up

Thank you for reading! We look forward to staying connected this year. Please reach out to DBSA-GC. We also welcome contributions.

For future Spectrum newsletters, if you want to share an article, testimonial or photo, please submit it to Bridget@dbsa-gc.org and Margaux@dbsa-gc.org.

Stay well and connected with us,

DBSA Greater Chicago Board