

Pandemic Helpline Launches For People With IDD, Caregivers

Disability Scoop by Shaun Heasley

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As the COVID-19 pandemic wears on, a new 24-hour support line is working to help individuals with developmental disabilities and those who care for them cope during this tough time.

Known as Project Connect, the telehealth line is free and available anytime for people with disabilities, their families, caregivers and other members of their support teams across the nation.

Developed by The Arc of California and the Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare, the helpline launched just before Thanksgiving and is staffed by graduate students at the school who are supervised by licensed social workers. Callers can expect to receive support, guidance and referrals.

“Going into the pandemic, we were aware that people with disabilities would be experiencing greater levels of stress, fear and depression; and coupled with a well-documented provider shortage for mental health services, we felt the need to develop an open line of communication for our community as a safety net during this challenging time,” said Jordan Lindsey, executive director of The Arc of California. “As the holidays rapidly approach and the country is still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope that Project Connect will make mental health support more accessible for anyone who needs assistance.”

[Researchers say](#) that the impact of COVID-19 has been more profound on individuals with developmental disabilities than nearly anyone else, with many losing access to caregivers, support services and schooling. Meanwhile, [surveys](#) of family caregivers of people with disabilities suggest that this group is disproportionately experiencing isolation, anxiety and other consequences as a result of the pandemic.

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Those behind the helpline said that it offers valuable counseling experience for the graduate students involved while also supporting people with disabilities and their families during a difficult time.

“We hope this free teletherapy line will remind people that they are not alone, and to give those who are feeling overwhelmed or are struggling a glimmer of hope that together we can get through this and thrive,” Lindsey said.

Project Connect is available by calling 888-847-3209.