

Five *on*
Friday

Musings on Mental Health

[Lose Hope, Game Over](#)

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Lose hope. Game over. The words of a dear friend ring in my ears these days. But it's hard to stay hopeful. Just when it seems like things cannot get worse, they do. The US Presidential debate was a spectacle and a debacle. I have texts from friends who live in Hong Kong concerned about the erosion of individual rights and freedoms, an email from women activists in Belarus whose children are being taken away by the State because their political protests render them "unfit" parents. Images of riots in Chicago and fires in California are everywhere. And then there's the pandemic. Public health graphs quietly document the harrowing and steady rise in deaths every day around the world with no sign of abatement.



[Photo Credit](#)

It is a deluge that is distressing and disturbing. A darkness that poses real threats to our mental health. Now more than ever, we need to find the cracks in this night and turn to the light. Now more than ever, we cannot lose hope. I promise you. Hope matters. We can cultivate it. We can teach it.

1. What is hope? It is a word we all know and use. For some of us, it has a sweeping positive valence. For others, hope is nice but optional. And then there are those who think cynicism is wise and hope is naïve. According to [Kathryn Goetzke](#), [iFred Founder](#), “Hope is a positive feeling and inspired action. It is not a wish. Hope is a proven strategy that impacts all life outcomes.” Science concurs. The late C. R. Synder, a central figure in hope research, defines three key components of [hope](#): goal, agency and pathway. When we are hopeful, we feel capable and motivated to develop and pursue pathways to desired goals.

2. Hope is the bedrock of mental health and wellbeing. The data are quite clear. Hope impacts virtually all dimensions of life, including [academic](#) outcomes, [athletic](#) performance, [health](#) prognosis, and [resilience](#). Higher hope is associated with higher grades, improved attention in class, better sports performance, better quality relationships, and lower likelihood of violence, risky behaviors, addiction, and loneliness.

3. Without hope, the lights go out. Hope is a known protective factor, and conversely, hopelessness is a known risk factor for [anxiety](#), [depression](#), [substance abuse](#), and [suicidal thinking](#). Some studies find that hopelessness, but not depression, predict suicide in both [clinical](#) and [community](#) groups. Some studies find that hopelessness is a [stronger predictor](#) of repeat suicide attempts than depression. [Other studies](#) find the opposite. Of course, all mental health outcomes are multi-determined, and diverse combinations of factors can confer risk. This nuance is important for researchers to study further to improve care. But we can confidently say that hopelessness has never been found to predict positive mental health, and it is frequently associated with poor mental health.

4. Cultivating Hope. The activities that help us cope in difficult times also have the potential to help us cultivate hope. When we feel we are running low on hope, some things we can do include: focusing on what we can change, meditating, journaling, serving a larger cause, reading, learning from role models, laughing, exercising, engaging socially, taking time for self-care, focusing on gratitude and more. The list is nearly infinite and will vary from person to person. These strategies help us refine our goals, refuel our sense of agency, and recommit to our path - the essential features of hope.

5. Hope can be taught. [Hopeful Minds](#) is a project developed by the International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression ([iFred](#)). Hopeful Minds is based on research that suggests hope is a measurable and teachable skill. Hopeful Minds aims to equip children, educators, and parents with the tools they need to create, maintain, and grow hope even during the most trying times. The program reinforces the eight National Health Education Standards set forth by the CDC and meets the Social Emotional Learning Guidelines. It is informed by extensive research on Adverse Childhood Experiences. Kathryn Goetzke, iFred Founder says that "[Hopeful Minds gives children a roadmap to create, sustain, and grow their hopeful mindset.](#)"

The Hopeful Minds Curricula for school aged children were launched today. Not a day too soon. The Hopeful Minds Curricula are designed to be used and adapted remotely. You can download your free Hopeful Minds Curricula, Parent Guide, and Supplemental Resources [here](#).

To be sure, and to be honest, sometimes I feel flattened with dread and despair these days. And then I am reminded of the poetic reference that the darkest hour of all is the hour before dawn. Let's hope so.