Bateman Horne Center
RESEARCH | CLINICAL CARE | EDUCATION

Support Group: Cultivating Hope with the New Year While Chronically Ill

January 6, 2026

Announcements

- BHC online event schedule beginning Jan 2026
    - 1st Tues: Support Group
    - 2nd Wed: Coffee with a Clinician
    - 3rd Tues: Support Group
- Events Calendar: https://batemanhornecenter.org/events/
- Clinical Care Guide: https://batemanhornecenter.org/clinical-care-guide/
- Support BHC's mission: https://givebutter.com/BuildingAccessNow

The following resources and anecdotes were shared by attendees and do not necessarily reflect BHC guidance or endorsement.

Timothy Weymann, LCSW, introduced the topic of hope and how it can serve as a source of strength and guidance for those living with a chronic illness.

Guiding Questions

1. What helps you when you feel hopeless?
2. How are you creating hope in your life while being ill?
3. What does the power of hope do for you amidst your struggles?
4. How do you differentiate helpful hope from denial or "toxic" positivity?

Timothy's Shared Wisdom

- Resilient people focus on what is in their control instead of what is outside of their control.
- When choosing a therapist for chronic illness, it is important to ask about their education, training, and experience in this area, as well as their approach to working with chronic illness and the reasoning behind it. Understanding how they view and handle chronic illness can help you determine whether their perspective aligns with your needs and experiences. It is also acceptable to ask if

they have personal experience with chronic illness, though this is not required. A well-qualified therapist should be knowledgeable enough that you don't have to explain every detail about your condition, making it easier for you to focus on therapy rather than teaching them about what it's like to be ill.

- One approach to hope is finding ways to live meaningfully and in alignment with one's values, regardless of circumstances. This approach fosters flexibility, acceptance, and durability, highlighting the importance of being intentional about how we define and nurture hope.
- Hope can come from being true to oneself.
- Hopelessness can sometimes be productive. While general hopelessness about ourselves or life isn't helpful, feeling hopeless about specific things that aren't working can allow for grieving those losses. This process can then help shift focus toward areas where one does have power and control, turning hopelessness into a step toward re-direction, action and empowerment.
- Sometimes we can have a limited definition of success. We can reorient ourselves to the notion that even when we are physically impaired/limited, our progression and growth can be internal. We can grow emotionally, psychologically or even existentially (if atheist or agnostic) or spiritually (for those who are spiritually-minded) through the experiences of our illnesses. If we experiment with expanding our definition of what success and achievement are we can feel more hope.

Participant Verbal Comments

- Participant shared that when they feel hopeless, what helps most is not fighting the feeling or trying to suppress it. Returning to familiar routines and engaging in calming, quiet activities allows them to acknowledge what is happening in their body and emotions, which often helps them find a way forward. Learning to recognize and allow hopelessness rather than treating it as a personal failure has been an important part of their coping.
- Participant shared two strategies they use when feeling hopeless: shifting their focus toward other people rather than themselves and continuing to move or stay active as much as they are able.
- Participant shared that small, positive changes help reduce feelings of hopelessness. They shared that they recently started listening to

the ZOE podcast, and it inspired them to eat more plant-based foods, and having a vegetarian meal gave them an unexpected boost of energy. After gaining weight over the past year due to chronic fatigue and low mood, they have found that being intentional about nutrition makes them feel more in control of what they are putting into their body. Finding this positive physical response helps them feel less hopeless.

- Participant shared that avoiding people who engage in toxic positivity has helped preserve their hope. Living with Long COVID and an ME/CFS diagnosis has led them to recognize they have likely experienced chronic fatigue since childhood. While that insight is challenging, it has also brought them clarity and understanding that helps support their hope.
- Participant shared that as their baseline has declined, they have struggled with hopelessness. At the same time, they have noticed that small things now bring them greater joy than before. Focusing on these moments helps them feel connected and uplifted. They described intentionally finding joy where they can, simplifying their focus, and practicing mindfulness by staying present in the moment as key ways of coping.
- Participant shared that when feeling frustrated or as though all options have been exhausted, this group helps them recognize there are still possibilities to explore. Participation in the group has also led them to see the value of working with a therapist who specializes in chronic illness.
- Participant reflected that their definition of hope has evolved. Growing up in difficult circumstances, they equated hope with looking toward a better future, which drove them to overwork and contributed to illness. A meditation retreat and reading Pema Chodron's, *When Things Fall Apart,* shifted their perspective: hopelessness can be seen not as despair, but as a foundation for spiritual awakening. Focusing on these immediate experiences that bring them joy, rather than hoping for solutions from doctors or tests, has helped them break the cycle of hope mixed with fear and has also helped prevent health crashes.
- Participant reflected on how tough the concept of hope can be with ME/CFS. At the onset of their illness, they had no hope, feeling lost and uncertain while trying to understand a condition few doctors recognized. Their first sense of hope came from realizing they were not alone and that others understood and accepted them. Acceptance of their illness has been central to sustaining hope; by

acknowledging their reality rather than fighting it, they have been able to focus on what they can do, celebrate small accomplishments, and maintain a positive perspective.

- Participant shared that embracing hope in small things and accepting their reality has placed them in a much better place than the previous year. After a first year spent in survival mode and a second year focused on managing symptoms, they now approach life with intention. They plan the year thoughtfully, pacing activities, prioritizing time with people and pursuits that bring joy, and honoring the need for rest. They noted that PEM still affects their mood, but reframing it as a symptom rather than a reflection of overall mental health has helped them cope. Reflecting on grief, they recognized it stemmed from deep love for their life and self, and that working through it has strengthened their resilience.
- Participant shared that this time of year is usually challenging, marked by sadness and holiday disappointments. They cope through radical acceptance, taking life day by day and minute by minute, combined with focusing on what they can do. Staying in touch with people, despite being introverted, and getting outdoors for walks has helped their mental health. They emphasized the importance of pacing, noting that avoiding crashes is key to preventing hopelessness, and they have been doing well in maintaining this recently.
- Participant shared that after being diagnosed with fibromyalgia, they have spent years working on acceptance. They previously didn't think of themselves as using hope, but now see it in their ability to continue pursuing education and make a positive impact. Hope, for them, comes from being the change they want to see through interactions, perspective, and maintaining integrity. This sense of purpose and commitment to living well, regardless of future challenges, sustains their hope and motivation.
- Participant emphasized that acceptance is key to coping with hopelessness. They highlighted the importance of accepting feelings of hopelessness themselves, rather than judging or condemning them. By embracing the present moment and acknowledging what is, they can focus on things to be grateful for and find joy in their surroundings.
- Participant shared that while they don't necessarily hope for full recovery, they maintain hope for gradual improvement from their current state. Daily, what encourages them is the growing availability of resources, including support

groups and tools like InsightTimer (free mobile app), which helps calm their nervous system and provides reassurance and support.

- Participant shared that they fear seeking medical care, especially hospitals, because their body is sensitive and past experiences have left them worse. While they have had good primary care in the past, their current provider does not adequately address their condition. Drawing on their background in mental health counseling, they noted that their challenge stems from an external locus of control with the medical system. Moving past this fear and finding ways to safely navigate healthcare is their key challenge for 2026.
- Participant reflected on how their past focus on progress and goal-oriented living made it challenging to separate hope from achievement after becoming ill. They shared that while they no longer experience grand accomplishments, they have learned to find hope and joy in smaller, meaningful activities.
- Participant shared that they initially avoided the support group, believing they would get better on their own. Coming out of a crash, they felt cautious about investing emotionally, but attending the group for the first time made their situation feel more real and validated. Although they felt intimidated being around people who have been sick much longer, they also experienced hope and connection, appreciating the sense of not being alone in what can be a very isolating experience.
- Participant shared that they struggle with hope. They described the tension between accepting their current reality and their strong desire for health improvement. As a natural “striver” focused on progress and planning, the unpredictability of illness has forced them to focus more on living in the moment and finding small joys. They also noted challenges with toxic positivity, where others’ expectations of improvement can feel discouraging.
- Participant shared feelings of self-doubt and guilt, often blaming themselves for pushing too hard and then crashing. Being in the group helped them recognize that their illness is real and not a personal failure. Coming from a family where emotions were not discussed, they tend to isolate, which has made the experience more difficult. They described grief and sadness around watching friends do things they can no longer do.

Participant Comments from the Chat

- “Hope provides a lifeline, it gives us strength to keep going on the toughest days. It gives us a reason to look to the future.”
- “For me that gives me hope is that with the use of micro rehab I have seen improvements and honestly getting rid of PT and OT that doesn't understand my pacing needs and micro rehab. Yes, I have had a major setback but have climbed out of black hole before.”
- “What helps me: knowing that everything is temporary.”
- “Cue Dori singing in my brain...just keep swimming, swimming swimming...”
- “NAD+ has helped me quite a bit. In just a day I got more restorative sleep and more energy, no mor naps, but I still rest a lot.”
- “YES living vicariously through other folks and sharing their joy!”
- “NAD didn't do anything for me, but L-carnitine has been so helpful.”
- “I develop narratives that reframe my chronic illness. I see myself as being engaged in a galactic battle against dysautonomia which I call Nerve Wars: where I try to restore balance to the force -in other words -my nervous system. This reframing reminds me of the very real challenges of this condition while reminding me of the tools that I have -compression garments, water, medication, and pacing. This group is a real source of hope.”
- “Reminds me of research by Fred Freidlich on social activity and MECFS…Uplifts are positive experiences and hassles are negative experiences. If I remember ok, one paper shows how helpful uplifts are for us. Online groups shouldn't be discounted, because it may be the only option some of us have.”
- “IMO it’s important a therapist is willing to learn and believe me. They cannot have an agenda.”
- “Seeing improvement definitely helps with hope. Pacing stopped me from getting worse. Coherent breathing is helping me (very slowly) get better. It takes a long time to move the needle, but it can happen.”
- “Removing myself from my body at times has helped so when shit hits fan like what dealing with right now. I can sew the good and bad changes if makes sense.”
- “Truly accepting that I have MECFS altered how I viewed “hope” as well. It helped me let go of some expectations and start trying to find a fuller life in the state I currently am. Still struggle, however, when my baseline goes up or down because of readjusting expectations.”

- “Staying realistically hopeful, but struggling with the long term isolation of chronic illness - both dealing with physically preventing getting sick again, and just facing it all on my own.”
- “I came across something this week…New Years is just ‘administrative’. It isn’t natural except for astronomical) l or biological. Pay attention to natural rhythms and cycles and where you are currently in them. It alleviates pressure.”
- “Acceptance is so important. Once we can do that, we can move forward and explore this new life we have with the parameters it has. It’s different than before but can still be amazing and good.”
- “Hope also comes from focusing on what I can do instead of all I can no longer do. Are there different ways to do what I enjoy? Different ways I can be of service to others? Where are the tiny places I can find beauty in the ordinary?”
- “It took me years... but now I refuse to use any of my spoons on anything negative or on things I can't control. We have so little energy it doesn't make sense to waste it. I also try to go out at least once a week, on a 'good' day. I plan on using all my spoons on those outings and plan on a crash. It helps me move a bit and get out into the world.”
- “Being introverted and housebound is a tough mix…I have a pen pal a mile away since I cant get out…Emails, texts, Reddit, and online games like scrabble can help us stay social.”
- “Progressed from can ONLY go out once a month to I can go out once a month. And thought I was done. Today, thank you, I can progress to I GET to go out once a month.”
- “Every one of us brings value to the world. We just happen to do it slowly and sparingly than other 'normal' people, whatever that is.”
- “One thing I do is when I notice I am regretting or missing things like hiking , being in the outdoors, being outgoing with friends and family etc. I try instead to be grateful that I’ve had the experiences and memories I’ve had to miss these things. not everybody gets to know the joy and experiences I’ve had - not everybody loves the mountains. Focusing on gratitude for the experiences and memories I have helps refocus from despair for what I can’t do to joy for the memories of things I’ve experienced, so I can miss them.”
- “Yeah, having something to look forward to is really helpful! But, I’m also a planner so maybe that is why I agree with that.”

- “Weirdly sometimes watching videos of people dancing, weightlifting helps me have hope but other times makes it worse.”
- “I specialize in ‘round to it’ activities and other plans. Might just be to sort out mail & toss junk next time I can function.”
- “I have found that if I don't push/try but just act as though I have all the time in the world, I actually get *more* done, while avoiding PEM.”
- “So many people don't understand our daily lives. We have to judge our progress differently by healthy folks.”
- “I like these tips that apply to everyone in the wintertime, how to give the body what it needs most in a dark, colder season, what will support rest and restoration:”
    - https://www.spiritualityhealth.com/5-anti-new-years-resolutions

Tiny Triumphs

- “I made macaroni yesterday and had enough left so I didn't have to cook today”
- “All of the dishes in my house are clean, finally!!!!”
- “Couldn't get a handicapped parking space and so used my power chair for the longer distance. Got it in and out of the car myself and did not trigger PEM.”
- “I managed to have visits/visit friends & family over the festive break and attend a Meditation & Reiki session with one friend although I'm now in 2nd week of flare-up. I know this is probably because I did not schedule in enough daily rests & Yoga Nidra/Meditation.”
- “Made it onto this call!”
- “I stuck with pacing over the holidays.”
- “I signed up for a slow read of War and Peace with a group on Substack.”
- “Newer to ME/CFS. Finally got an appt with an Infectious Disease Specialist for March and prioritized my health over my obligations.”

Resources

- Timothy’s Website
    - https://www.timothyweymann.com/
- When Things Fall Apart by Pema Chodron
    - https://a.co/d/gpmzecL

Crisis Resources

- Dial 988
    - What Happens When You Call 988? (Article)
- Dial 911
- Crisis Text Line
- Crisis resource page (BHC)

Potential Financial Assistance Resources

- Healthwell Foundation
- Patient Access Network Foundation
- Needy Meds
- My Good Days

Chronic Illness Therapist Directory

- https://www.thechronicillnesstherapist.com/directory

Support Groups (alphabetical order)

Lived-Experience Support Groups

- Action for ME (online youth support based in UK)
    - https://www.actionforme.org.uk/18-and-under/support-for-under-18/join-our-young-peoples-community/
- BHC Support Group 1st and 3rd Tuesday at 1 pm MST
    - https://batemanhornecenter.org/events/
- Black COVID-19 Survivors
    - https://www.facebook.com/groups/bcsalliance/
- Brain and Spine Group for Zebras
    - https://www.facebook.com/groups/brainandspinegroupforzebras
- CFS/ME Friends
    - https://www.facebook.com/groups/CFSMEFRIENDS
- Health Stories Collaborative Creative Meetups
    - https://www.healthstorycollaborative.org/creativemeetups
- International ME Support Chat
    - 11am-1pm EST/ 5 -7pm GMT / 3-5am Melbourne time & 9-11pm EST/ 3-5am GMT/ 2-4pm Melbourne time

  - https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84362703704?pwd=bfKmegaCLNhS6KwOUve7fkcsQjs7sB.1
- Invisible Youth Support Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/invisibleyouthgroup
- Long Hauler Advocacy Project
  - https://www.longhauler-advocacy.org/support-us
- Long COVID Families
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/4345929175466216
- Massachusetts ME and FM Association Small Group Chats
  - https://www.massmecfs.org/
- #MEAction Living w/ME Support Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/211058135999671
- #MEAction Long COVID Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/205703087068863
- #MEAction Seniors Connect
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/391269901334695/?ref=pages_profile_groups_tab&source_id=1408335399448862
- #MEAction Pillow Crafters (Group Crafting Sessions)
  - https://www.meaction.net/pillow-crafters/
- #MEAction Additional Groups
  - https://www.meaction.net/groups/
- ME/CFS Social Group
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/1202428297198122
- ME/CFS phone support group
  - Occurs on Saturday nights at 8pm, EST.
  - Call: 609-746-1155. Punch in: 915110#. Group is open to all.
- State Specific Long Hauler Facebook Groups
  - https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1vMNCrONg1oTy5QPzajNUJffu0gk4eBR4o585NosVgsk/edit#gid=0
- Surviving with ME
  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/695317212152964
- The Mighty Group Directory
  - https://themighty.com/groupdirectory/
- Utah COVID-19 Long Haulers

  - https://www.facebook.com/groups/2619858348232191
- The Yarrow Collective's Alternative to Suicide group is a weekly Zoom meeting. It's a free resource for folks who are struggling that is nonclinical peer support. They also have chronic illness and disability support groups.
  - https://www.yarrowcollective.org/

Caregiver Support

- Caregiver Wisdom is an online venture to support chronic illness caregivers. Current free offerings include: a monthly support group, a free online community that's off of social media, and a blog with helpful posts.
- A support group for partner caregivers (please note all caregivers are welcome) takes place the first Sunday of each month at **12 p.m. PT / 3 p.m. ET.** Focuses on monthly topics and has small breakout rooms for closer community connection. To be added to the email list, contact Kim at kim.mecfs@gmail.com.
- #MEAction's support group for all family caregivers takes place the third Saturday of each month at 10:30 p.m. PT / 1:30 p.m. ET. To be added to the email list, contact Denise at caregiver@meaction.net.
- If you are on Facebook, #MEAction has a Facebook group for caregivers
- If you are on Discord, Nia has started a channel for ME/Long COVID caregivers.