

Going There Episode 7.1: Covid-19 and Mental Health

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A Lake Superior College podcast exploring campus mindfulness, equity, and community hosted with Tara McCoy, Steve Dalager, and Dan Riihiluoma.

In this episode, first in a two part series, we talked with student and mom Alyssa Hainline back in March, right before classes resumed March 30. Alyssa was dealing with a lot, but appeared to be up to the challenge. What we found out later was that the very next day, Alyssa checked herself into a mental health facility. Three weeks later, we follow up with Alyssa to talk about that experience.

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Steve Dalager - Just to be clear we're not binging on Netflix.

Alyssa Hainline - I am.
So when I was at The GRACE Unit I actually got diagnosed with Bipolar II disorder? Which I never knew I had.

I was literally thinking that my life is ruined from the decisions that I made.

A lot of pain to the point where it's like I didn't want to deal with that pain anymore, I just wanted to die.

Tara McCoy - I'm Tara McCoy and this stay-at-home order has been going on for a little over six weeks now.

Steve - And I'm Steve Dalager and those pre-quarantine times seem so long ago. We're gonna hear today about how the quarantine, when coupled with mental health issues, has been a real monster. Back in March 2020 before school had even resumed online--

Tara - We checked in with one of my students, Alyssa Haneline to see how she was doing. You'll hear by and large that she seemed to be coping in spite of some real challenges, but what I found out, because she's my student, was that Alyssa checked herself in to a mental health facility the very next day after we spoke with her.

Steve - And Tara it was your very good idea to follow up with her later.

Tara - Yes, Alyssa has been very gracious and open. We're hoping, and she's hoping, that her experience will be helpful to others struggling during this time. So this is a two part Going There series on COVID-19 and mental health. Listen in as Alyssa talks about both the before and after.

Steve - And then in episode 7.2 we go there with Marie Carter Brooks, Counselor at LSC. Let's turn it over to Alyssa.

Alyssa - My name's Alyssa Haneline. I am a single mom with three beautiful boys. I'm going to school part-time and working part-time, but things have closed so now I'm just stuck at home and I'm homeschooling my boys, so it's been a challenge.

Steve - Alyssa, what was your reaction when you first heard that Lake Superior College was extending their Spring Break?

Alyssa - I was actually, personally, very excited, just because I mean, hey, we got more school off, can not complain, but then uh when I realized like how serious matters started becoming I did start getting a little nervous, towards the end.

Tara - It kinda happened in two chunks right? We got the first extension and then we got the second extension. Were you still the same level of excitement when we got the second?

Alyssa - I was... the first extension I was like there's a few things I haven't fully finished for some homework, so I'm like sweet, extra time for homework, but then once I realized you know that we're going to be switching to online it started getting a little nerve racking cause I haven't taken an online class in years.

Steve - Alyssa, how did you receive the news? Where did it come from?

Alyssa - Uh LSC uh website on D2L.

Steve - You didn't like hear about it from a friend of a friend? Facebook, I saw it on Facebook. There was a post about how LSC was going to be uh having extended break and how schools were shutting down and all that and then I actually did hear from one of my friends um because my friend goes to LSC as well

and I did ask her I'm like, "have you heard anything about LSC?" And she's like, "yeah, they're extending the break." And when we found that out I was actually over in Colorado on my vacation, so I'm like "Oh wow! Okay, we have an extra like a week maybe. That's awesome. Great!" And then I wasn't too worried about the coronavirus or anything like that, but once I started hearing how serious things were starting to get and how it started kind of getting me a little more nervous, but I heard it through a friend, and I saw it on Facebook, and D2L, so three different sites.

Steve - How has your daily routine changed over the past few weeks?

Alyssa - Ugh, lazy.

Steve - Right?

Alyssa - Oh my God. Uh no uh I would say me, my daily routine typically was you know drop the kids off at school, I would go to class, and then probably go to work afterwards and then my little baby would uh go with my dad or with my ex husband, so I never was too worried on where my children were going. I just knew they were in you know going to school or with the grandma or the grandpa or my ex husband and then I was able to focus on my schooling. I was able to go to work, get things done, come home you know, and relax and all that, but everything's kind of combobled uh so I'm actually homeschooling right now um my kids go to the cathedral over in Superior and everything is shut down and it's looking like it might be shut down for the rest of the year, so that's been really nerve racking, but yeah, I've been homeschooling. We just got done actually schooling now. Um and I guess it really opens my eyes up for people who homeschool. That's a lot of work and I never realized how hard a teacher's position was. I used to think "ah, it wouldn't be that hard," but I really opened up my eyes like wow it's intense.

Steve - Where are you getting your resources for your homeschooling?

Alyssa - So we actually had to go to the school and grab the paperwork. They came in like a huge packet Like a month's worth of like a packet um of work to do throughout the day. Like they have a like every day there's assignments that are supposed to be done, so they got like their math, they got their science, their

religion, like all their like little subjects that they have to do.

You're obviously doing homeschooling and sounds like you're engaging in social distancing.

Alyssa – yep!

Tara - Um, what is the most difficult part about social distancing for you?

Alyssa - I'm a very I like to be around people I'm a very social butterfly if you haven't noticed when I'm in your class, so it's been really hard not to be able to go hangout with friends or even family members. I miss my sister. I have a twin sister. We're not identical, but she lives over in Woodland, so it's really in a way almost doesn't feel very serious, this whole matter, this whole pandemic. It's like oh I can just drive and go over to by UMD and go to my sister's house. Whoopee. But then, you know, you start hearing about all these like horrible things and uh people dying from this virus and stuff and just how it can affect older people, children, people who have autoimmune diseases, and stuff, so it opens up my eyes where I have to be a lot more careful and less basically reckless. I can't be reckless. Even though to me I'm just like, "Oh, it's just like pneumonia or it's the flu," but I mean to someone else like my ex husband has two autoimmune diseases and that could really potentially kill him and it scares the hell out of me. It really does, so I'm trying to be as distant as possible. It's just hard because I'm a very social person, I really want to talk to everyone, "Hey, what's going on? What have you been up to?" I feel like I'm going very stir crazy in the house not being able to talk to people. Well not even talk like I mean I can social like on social-

Jackson - It's not in the kitchen.

Alyssa - What was that hun?

Jackson - I said, "It's not in the kitchen."

Alyssa - Okay, I'll be there in a minute, hun.

Steve - Alyssa, tell us about your kids there. Who was that?

Alyssa - That was Jackson. That's my middle child. He is six turning seven this year.

Steve - So you have three?

Alyssa - I have three boys, yeah.

Steve - So that's Jackson. Who are the other two? Who are the other two?

Alyssa - Uh the other two, the oldest is Carson, he's turning eight this year and then my baby, Liam, well he just turned one in December.

Steve - Okay.

Alyssa - Yeah. Yeah.

Steve - You have your hands full

Alyssa - Yeah, I do.

Steve - and scrubbed I'm sure.

Alyssa - Oh, for sure.

Tara - It sounds like you are at least sometimes co-parenting with your ex husband.

Alyssa - Absolutely.

Tara - Um given the fact that your husba...- ex-husband..., excuse me, has two autoimmune disorders, how are you co-parenting given that situation?

Alyssa - Actually, like even now, I think it's just a cold, but like my chest has been feeling kind of heavy, but no fever, chills, like no other symptoms except for just like that kind of heavy feeling which I think is just a random cold because I have not been around as far as we're aware of anyone with that virus. But um okay, for instance yesterday, he had to drop the kids off because he works at six in the morning. So I had the kids last night, so he stopped over and dropped the kids off and it was really hard that I couldn't give him a hug and just you know because we're still very close, we're still like best friends, so it was very hard not to like get too close to him. Like the social distancing, it's very very strange. It's very weird because I'm a very huggy person. I give everyone hugs and stuff and I'm like, "How are you doing?" And so it's kind of like a 180. It's just like "hey" as if like we literally cannot stand each other, but we

can, but you know it's just it's the weird... it's very very odd.

Steve - Obviously, the kids

Alyssa - Mhmm.

Steve - are little it's a little harder for them to maintain that distance there. They're hugging you and then they're running and hugging him.

Alyssa - Exactly, so it's, I don't know, it's kind of a gamble.

Steve - What are some other things you're doing to cope during this quarantine period?

Alyssa - Um, I've been catching up on a lot of rest. Sleeping as much as I can. More so when I don't have the kids, so my schedule's been two days on two days off, so when I don't have the kids, I try to sleep as much as I possibly can. I would say I'm not coping very well more so negatively maybe just more watching the news and like being obsessed over that stuff and watching TV instead of like maybe drawing or reading a book or you know maybe just going outside for a walk or something or even outside just to sit on my porch. I'm always like on a screen or something instead of just realizing that this is life and I need to figure out how cope positively so I'm still actually kind of figuring that out right now. But how I've been coping the most positive way, has been sleeping, I've been trying to get as much rest as I can because I don't usually get that very often, because I'm working and going to school, I'm dealing with the children. You know what I mean?

Steve - Just to be clear, you're not binging on Netflix?

Alyssa - I am.

Steve - OK, You're doing that too?

Alyssa - Oh, it's bad. Like I don't usually watch this much TV. I'm starting to get bored of it and I never get bored of TV because I don't get to watch it very often, but oh my God it's ridic-

Tara - What has been your go to uh show or movie?

Alyssa - My favorite show Chicago PD. Love that show! And Criminal Minds is always one of my favorites too and Grey's Anatomy.

Tara - I'm also a big fan of Criminal Minds. Sounds like from what you've expressed, you're not coping with things well. Which I don't think is unique, I think that that's probably very common for a lot of people. I know that yesterday for me, I slept most of the day because I was just done

Alyssa - Yeah.

Steve - Yeah.

Tara - I was bored and I was just done with everything.

Alyssa - Eating a lot more. Probably more unhealthy. Snacking constantly.

Tara - Given this situation though, have there been any unexpected positive outcomes in this situation?

Alyssa - I'm noticing I get to actually bond with my kids a lot more than I normally do. Like I said, I'm more distracted with school and work and all that, so it's like obviously "I love you, have a great day at school" Now I can actually like get to see what they do at school. I get to really realize like I really get to see the excitement that they're learning. I get to show them and I get to bond with them like that, so that makes me really happy. We get to snuggle up and watch family movies, Disney movies, so that's been really fun and communication's been a lot better with them too. Like on how they're feeling throughout the day or like I said, I mean I'm not proud of it, but I'm really distracted with work and school and I'm just trying to be a good mom, but you know, you have all those things coming in that are kind of side tracking me from really focusing on what's more important. So it's been kind of nice to spend more time with my kids, I guess, and really getting to bond with them a lot more than I normally do. So that's been really nice.

Steve - You said, I think, earlier that you haven't taken online classes for years.

Alyssa - Yeah.

Steve - So you may have been taking online classes before they were even offered, but how many credits

are you taking and how are you feeling about this moving forward in this format?

Alyssa - I'm only taking six credits luckily, so and I'm really really thankful because I wanted to take more, but I was on suspension because I was nineteen and just failed college epically because I wasn't taking it serious. Now I'm twenty-six, a lot different mindset. I'm really happy I didn't take more than six credits just so I can take it easy and especially with the circumstances now I'm really thankful and the one thing that really makes me nervous is I don't actually have a laptop, I have to use my exes, so I'm a little nervous about that. He doesn't go to school right now cause he has a degree in social work. Luckily, I think I'm going to be able to have his laptop, but I was a little nervous when we found that out cause I'm like crap, I don't have a laptop. How am I going to make this work? Then it makes me wonder for all the other students out there who don't have laptops or resources for computers, you know what I mean? How are they going to do this?

Steve - Right. So you're at home with three boys? Oh my God.

Alyssa - Yeah. I know. It is busy.

Steve - Got really juggling chainsaws that are high on sugar.

Alyssa - For sure, but they're such good behaved they're such well-behaved kids, so I am very blessed, very blessed.

Steve - What advice do you have for other students as we proceed through these uncharted waters?

Alyssa - You know, honestly, just take it day by day and just try to find something that keeps yourself busy. Always reach out, there's so many resources to reach out with to talk to your teachers about if you have questions or anything like that. They're really great with communicating. Especially with Zoom and all that. I mean we have so many sources that we can reach out and ask for help, so that's really nice cause I'm a people person and I'm very hands on, so this is going to be really different for me, so it's really nice that we can FaceTime pretty much so that makes things really really helpful for me when I'm learning and doing things, um, for my class and all that. So I'm very happy about that.

But just taking it day by day and just breathe. It's not going to last forever, so.

Steve - That's good to know.

Alyssa - I don't really have any complaints. I am bored like crazy when I'm at home, but I'm trying to find fun things to do and do some fun educational things for my kids and just spending time with them, so I try to look at the positive cause it's like how often do we get to really stay home with our kids and really get to bond with them like this? I mean we never really get this opportunity. Only on weekends, now it's like everyday, so I can't complain.

Steve - Like a twenty-one day weekend.

Alyssa - That's pretty much what it is. Pretty much what it is. Absolutely.

Steve - Okay. Thank you very much. You carry on and we'll keep in touch.

Steve - That was Alyssa back in March of 2020 during our extended spring break and the very next day, Alyssa checked herself in to a facility for mental health. We catch up with Alyssa again April 17th, roughly a month later after she's been in treatment and back in school.

Tara - Oh yeah. I forgot. Steve, don't forget to record.

Steve - Okay, we got it. Well, anyway thanks for coming back. I know you went into the hospital, but I'm glad you are no longer there. And to just note, baby Liam joins Alyssa here. Rides her hip for the rest of the interview. There we go, that's what I'm talking about.

Tara - Oh my God. So cute.

Alyssa - Thank you, can you say hi? Can you say hi?

Steve - And the baby's name is?

Alyssa - Liam.

Steve - Liam.

Alyssa - Okay, I am ready.

Tara - Alyssa, how are you doing today? I see that you have your one-year-old, Liam, with you, so I'm happy he can join us for the interview as well.

Alyssa - I'm doing okay. A lot better. I'm able to concentrate a lot better now. Mood-wise, I'm doing really good too, but I'm able to keep on task a lot better. More calmer on my kids. Better parenting and I'm able to do my homework and all that so, but mood-wise overall I'm pretty mellow and chilled out.

Tara - Good! So could you explain a little bit of background about what happened a couple weeks ago after we first did our recording initially?

Alyssa - Yeah, yeah. I can't go into detail about what exactly happened, but some personal stuff happened between my family and me and I was kind of at my breaking point. I was doing stupid impulsive decisions that were definitely self-destructing. I think I finally hit my breaking point and I wanted to commit suicide. I called my dad during that period and he told me to bring myself into Miller-Dwan. At first, I didn't want to go because I was ashamed and embarrassed and all that, but I thought about my kids and I just thought like I really don't want to die, but I was in that mindset of maybe I would be better off like my kids deserve a better mom, I, you know, all that stuff, so I finally went in and they did an assessment and all that and from then on out there's a little bit more severe cases when I was there and I was more of a low, I was a high risk for suicide, but like mentally, I wasn't like insane. Like I wasn't screaming, I wasn't incoherent, like I was still able to lay on the bed, relax, and watch a TV while there was like one TV in the room and like a bed and that was it. There was nothing else. It was like four white walls. So they ended up suggesting that I go to Brainerd because they're more lower case facility, so I went over to the hospital at St. Joseph's in Brainerd and yeah, it went all up hill from there.

Tara - So it sounds like emotion-wise, initially when you knew you needed some help, but it sounds like your dad was the catalyst to what led you to seek treatment. Is that correct?

Alyssa - Yes, my dad and my mom, honestly.

Tara - Well good, I'm glad that you had that support at that time.

Alyssa - Me too.

Tara - Is there a reason or was there something that kept you from seeking treatment earlier?

Alyssa - I was ashamed and I didn't want to believe I needed help at the time. I was too head strung I guess like I was sure that I was fine, I was just going through a little phase of and being divorced and having more freedom to be able to leave when I wanted to when I didn't have the kids. I was able to go up to the bars and drink with my girl friends and I got married at eighteen and I had my kids at eighteen, nineteen, and then twenty-four or twenty-five, so it's like I never really got to experience the bar scene. I never got to go on dates with guys, so I think I was around twenty-six now so it's kind of unrealistic to look at that, but I went through a phase of like going to parties and stuff when I never got the chance when I was eighteen, so I think it was all kind of spewing out at inappropriate times when I should've been more focused on becoming more stable, trying to figure out how to grieve through this process and all that and I was hiding it with alcohol and you know just not facing the pain of dealing what I had to deal with in my personal life.

Tara - Correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like you were you know attempting to both cope with the situation

Alyssa - Yes.

Tara - Your family situation that you're going through. Sounds like you're trying to see some of the positives by enjoying things that you didn't get to enjoy as a young woman, but it kind of spiraled a little bit.

Alyssa - It spiraled down for sure. So when I was at the Grace Unit, I actually got diagnosed with bipolar 2 disorder which I never knew I had. There's a lot of signs, previously, that definitely I was kind of surprised that no one diagnosed me sooner, which I'm a little disappointed in because it might have helped the issues I was dealing with in my past. It could helped probably a lot of that, but I mean I'm glad I found out now so I found out about that and I definitely drink for the wrong reasons. I still don't think I'm an alcoholic, but I definitely I notice I'll drink when I am stressed out and so I am more aware of that so I don't do that anymore and that's I've been dry for over a month now and I

haven't had like any cravings for alcohol or anything like that so that's been really good too.

Tara - Well, that's amazing. Congratulations.

Alyssa - Thank you. Yeah, I don't think that it's uncommon for people to self medicate

Tara - Exactly.

Alyssa - With substances they have to their access. Yeah.

Tara - Exactly. I kind of want to know a little bit more about the day that you sought treatment.

Alyssa - Yeah.

Tara - What was going in your mind when you walked in to the treatment facility?

Alyssa - I was really desperate to find help. I didn't trust myself. I was literally thinking that my life was ruined from the decisions that I made. I was never going to be close with my family anymore, certain people in my family, I thought I ruined the relationship with them. I ruined my relationship with Andrew. I figured I'd get my kids probably taken away and just a bunch of stuff like that. Like I was having panic attacks, I was crying throughout the night, I felt nauseous, sick to my stomach about decisions I've made, regret, a lot of pain to the point where it's like I didn't want to deal with that pain anymore I just wanted to die. It was so overwhelming the amount of stress and anger, disappoint on myself, regret. There was so many emotions I can't even explain. It wasn't just one it was just a bunch of them. My thoughts were just racing.

Tara - You know it doesn't sound like the reason why you sought help was directly related to COVID-19. Do you think you still would've sought treatment if COVID-19 pandemic wasn't going on?

Alyssa - You know, honestly, I would've said I would've probably sought help before COVID-19. I think it's the opposite. I think I wouldn't have gone in because of COVID-19. Just because I mean it's kind of unrealistic, but like, well not unrealistic, but just kind of unrelated, but I wouldn't want to get sick myself. You know what I mean? I don't know. So I think that the flu was kind of a big excuse of not going in so, but I did and I actually got

tested for COVID-19 when I was there and it turned out negative, so that was really good too. So they actually secluded me in a they quarantined me in a room for like a day. It was insane.

Tara - Wow. It sounds like they were taking necessary precautions.

Steve - Tara, when I listened to Alyssa's first interview again, it struck me that even then she was struggling, but before I listened to it a second time, what I remembered was that she seemed to be doing pretty well, so you know what my first impression kind of wrong, but through the lens of knowing that she sought help for mental health, I listened to that differently.

Tara - Yeah, I think she did a good job at masking her struggles. I remember I mean we were able to speak with her face to face, obviously, our listeners don't have that opportunity and she looked well too and as a woman, I know that it can be a misconception that if we have makeup on then we're doing fine and if we don't have makeup on, we're struggling, so it's pretty easy to fool others with our physical appearance as well.

Steve - Well she certainly fooled me the first time. Knowing what I knew in hindsight, the second time I could sort of see trouble.

Tara - Yeah, there were a few points throughout the interview where she would pause or she would state the same thing multiple times as if she was trying to convince herself that things were fine when they really weren't.

Steve - Well, let's continue with Alyssa in Episode 7.2 and then see what Marie Carter Brooks has to say about what assistance there is for students at LSC and how best to confront this quarantine time.

Tara - Sounds good, Steve. Let's go there.

Steve - You've been listening to Going There: A Lake Superior College Podcast of Equity and Mindfulness. A special thanks today to Alyssa and baby Liam and the rest of the Hanelines. If you have questions about Going There contact me at steven.dalager@lsc.edu and that would be D-A-L-A-G-E-R for those who can't spell. Mic drop.