

A Mental Health Roadmap for Navigating Election Season

GET DIRECTIONS FOR:

- ✓ Staying balanced
- ✓ Managing your media intake
- ✓ Having hard conversations
- ✓ Keeping your cool online
- ✓ Setting boundaries
- ✓ Supporting children and teens

What's Driving Election Anxiety?

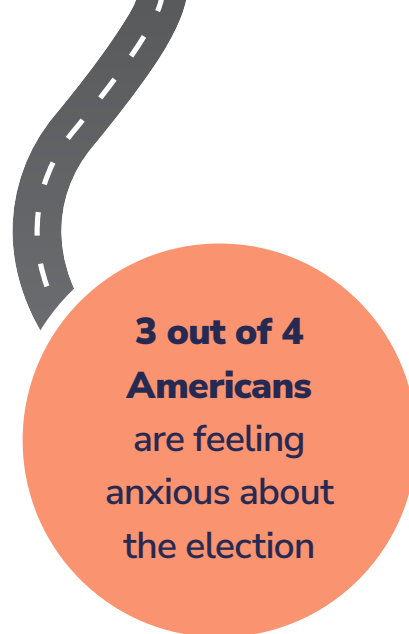
Election season is here, and emotions are revving up. Between fear of the unknown, the 24/7 news cycle, and the politically charged comments in our social media feeds, Americans experience such increased levels of stress and anxiety during the weeks leading up to a major election that mental health professionals have a name for it—election stress disorder.

Are you or a loved one experiencing any of these symptoms of election stress disorder?

- Heightened anxiety and/or depression
- Body tension
- Trouble sleeping
- Increased heart/pulse rate while online or talking about politics
- Unable to turn off intrusive thoughts about the election
- Irritability, anger, and resentment
- Headaches, stomachaches, or other physical pain

While election stress disorder isn't a clinical diagnosis, these symptoms indicate you might need to set some boundaries and build new habits for yourself or for your family—online, in conversations, and in daily life. In this roadmap, we offer ways to protect your own and your loved ones' mental health, so you can get through election season with less anxiety, more support, and greater peace of mind.

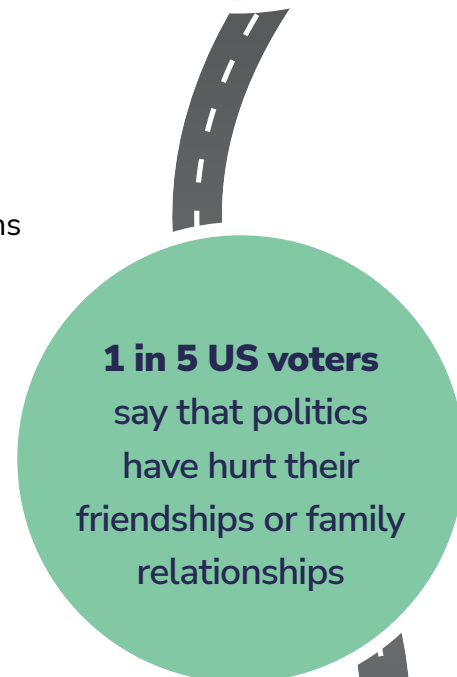
Stat sources: American Psychiatric Association, Myriad Genetics, Siena/NY Times poll



3 out of 4 Americans are feeling anxious about the election



40% of Americans say they are “checked out” due to the amount of news and social media focused on politics



1 in 5 US voters say that politics have hurt their friendships or family relationships

Tips for Staying on Course During Election Season

For Parents, Professionals, and Young Adults

Steer into the skid. When we feel out of control, it can be helpful to exert the control we do have. Decide on a few concrete ways to take action—like making calls to get out the vote, volunteering for a cause you care about, or scheduling an unplugged vacation.

Rideshare through rush hour. Set up a regular check-in with one or more friends to see how you're all doing, share difficult moments, and make each other laugh. It could be a meetup for coffee, a group chat, or just a quick text a few times a week.

Take your foot off the gas. During times of upheaval, self-care often goes by the wayside, increasing our stress levels. Give yourself permission to take it easy during this challenging time.

Keep your eyes on the road. When we're feeling uncertain about the future, we tend to jump ahead and ruminate on the potential disasters to come. If you feel yourself spinning, pause and take three deep breaths to help your body and brain come back into the present moment.

Explore a relaxing detour. Find fun, fulfilling distractions—take pickleball or guitar lessons, join a book group, read a fantasy novel ... anything that takes you off the information superhighway.



How to Help Children and Teens Stay Balanced During Election Season

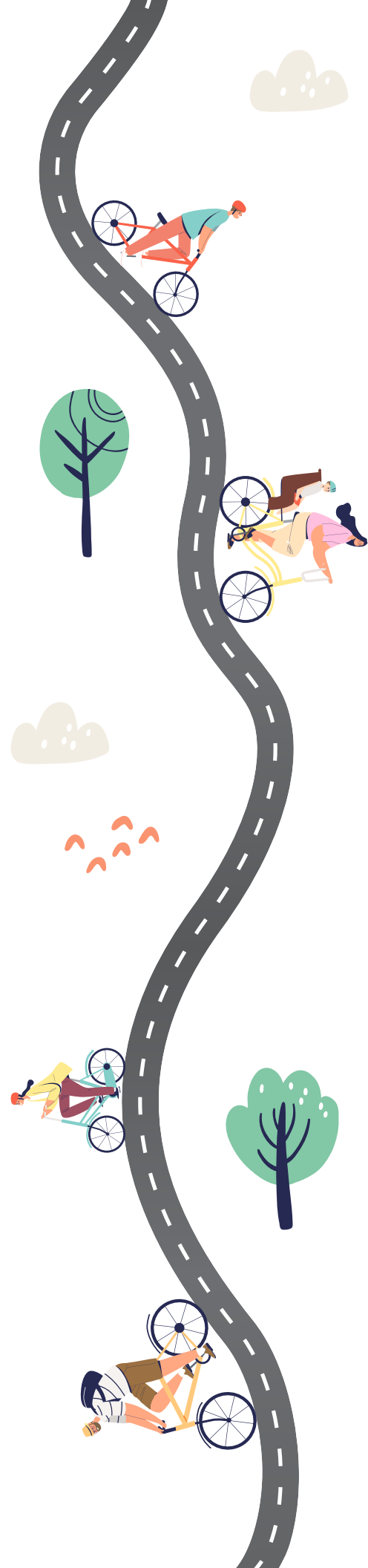
Put the training wheels back on. Remember that, just like grown-ups, kids may need extra support to get through this time. To help kids feel secure, maintain a regular routine at home, check in often, and be patient with potential backsliding in their responsibility and maturity levels.

Let them map a route forward. Encourage them to get involved in a cause they care about, like protecting animals or the environment; join a club at school; or start a weekly check-in with friends to talk about their thoughts and concerns with peers.

Encourage them to steer toward their values. Parents can take this opportunity to engage older kids and teens in a conversation about the qualities and ways of being that they believe are most admirable and worthwhile.

Help them manage bumps in the road. Being exposed to the tension and uncertainty of election season can trigger kids' anxiety or fear. "Kids will look to their parents to learn how to manage challenging emotions, so be willing to talk with them even if you're uncomfortable," says Newport's Jennifer B. Dragonette, PsyD.

Let them feel the wind in their hair. Set up tech-free times at home (like meals and before bedtime) and tech-free zones in the house—and get the whole family outside to soak up the benefits of nature.

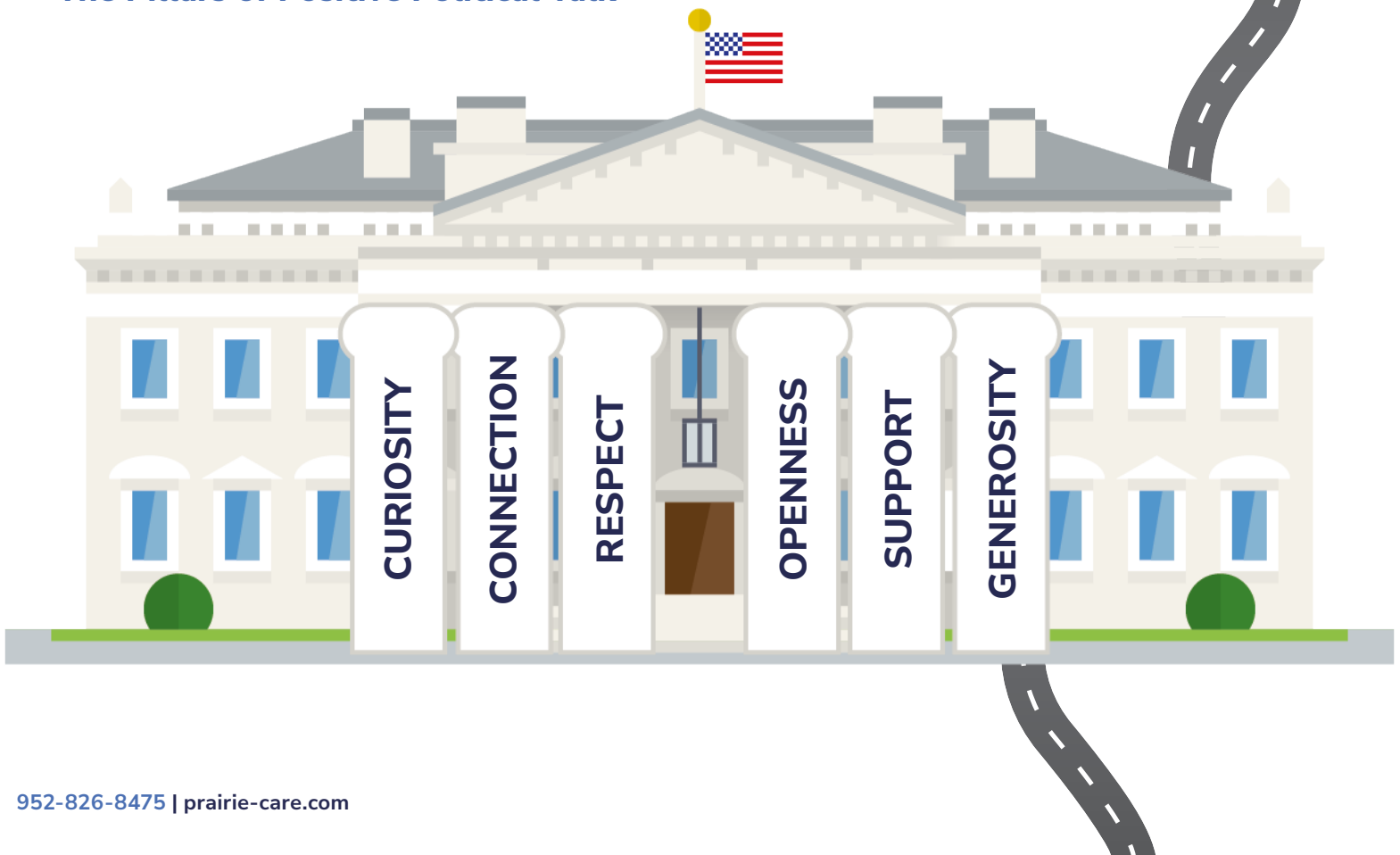


Navigating the Oncoming Traffic of Election Conversations

Almost half of adults have entirely stopped talking about political and election news based on a negative conversation they had in the past, according to a Pew Research poll. But a recent study shows that discussions between those with differing opinions can be powerful.

In fact, having productive conversations may be one of the best things we can do to break down election anxiety. It helps us find community and make connections, and allows us to voice our opinions in thoughtful ways rather than bottling them up until we explode (or implode).

The Pillars of Positive Political Talk



Here's how to recognize the “signs” of political talk and maneuver them carefully to avoid a conversational traffic jam and potential mental health crash.



Green Light Go-Aheads

If you're with someone who you feel comfortable talking about politics, that's great! These connections can ground us and allow us to express our feelings during a time that can feel so divided.

Use these pointers for a respectful interaction:

- **Be an active listener:** Make sure you allow them to talk. Part of this includes positive body language that shows you're interested in them as well as what they have to say.
- **Stay curious, not combative:** If someone's opinion differs from yours, engage your curiosity about why that may be, and don't make assumptions. This can include asking open-ended questions to learn more.
- **Emphasize values rather than a party or person:** Instead of talking about who you're voting for, express what's important to you, like education, healthcare, or economics. Finding common ground on what we care about can show us just how similar we are, rather than creating a bigger divide.





Middle-Ground Go-Tos

Let's say you're with a stranger or a family member you don't want to upset, or you just don't have the mental capacity to get into an intense discussion. You can always pivot the chat to something less polarizing.

Anastasia Ristau, PhD, LP, a psychologist with PrairieCare, a division of Newport Healthcare, says it's important to remind yourself that you ultimately get to choose what you believe, think, and feel—no matter what anyone else says or believes. “This can be very freeing and can help you ride the waves of emotions without getting dragged down by them,” says Dr. Ristau.

Dr. Ristau shared some ways you can steer the conversation toward safer ground:

- “I respect your right to your viewpoint, but I’m just not in the right mindset to talk about this right now.”
- “I can see you have strong feelings about that! I respect that you have your own perspective.”
- “I can see you have lots of reasons to believe the way you do, just like I have lots of reasons to believe the way that I do.”





Hard-Stop Situations

Context is everything when determining if it's really the right time to talk politics. Consider what's happening around and inside you—the environment, the people you're with, and your current level of well-being.

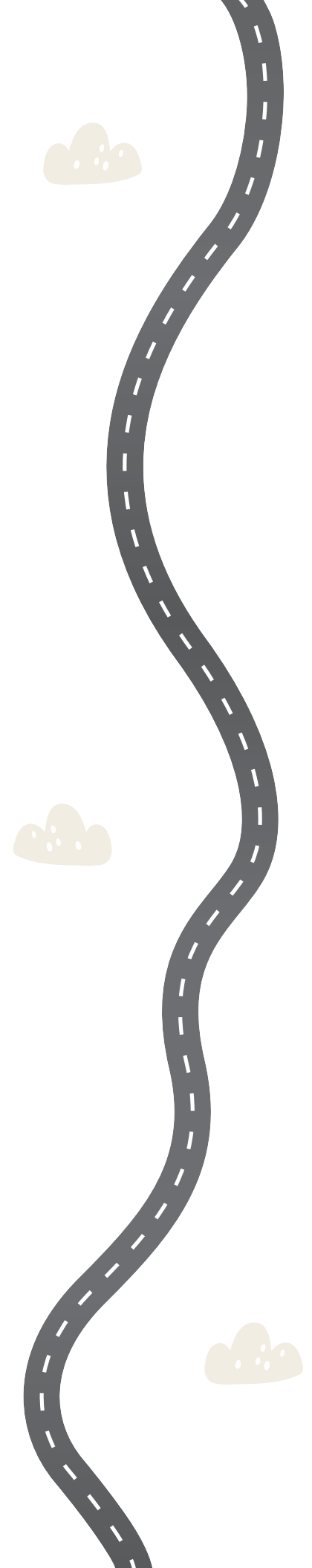
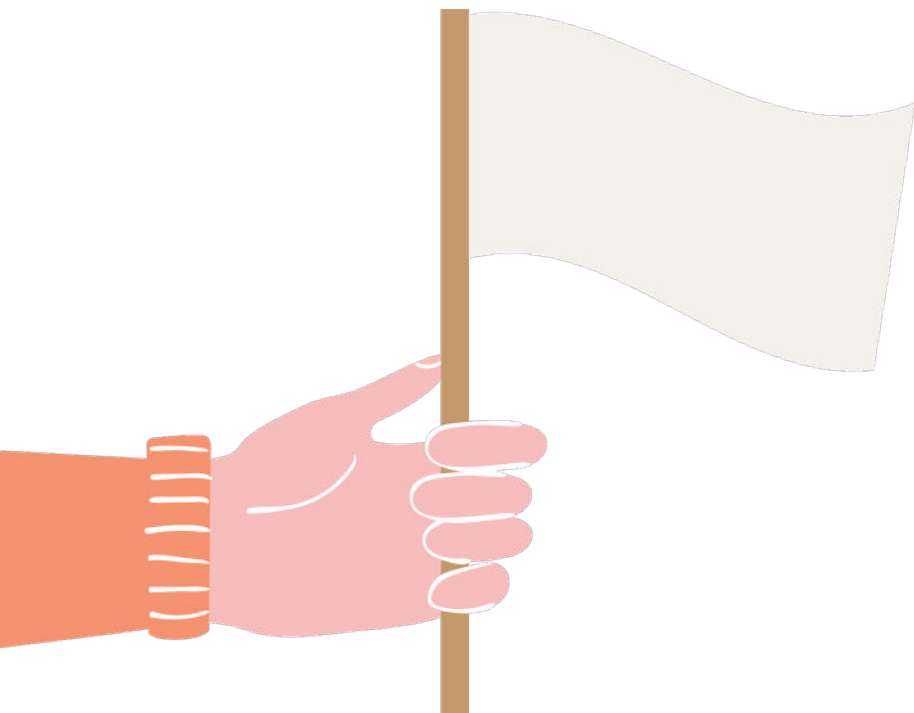
There are lots of reasons why you might need to stop or avoid a conversation, but we've identified the top four:

- 1. In the workplace:** Being professional is all about respect, which can be tricky in politics. Avoiding the topic is wiser. Close to half of people in a recent CNBC survey said they would prefer to ban political talk at work.
- 2. If you feel physically or mentally overwhelmed:** Protecting your own health and well-being may be enough to deal with already—you don't need to add extra stress. If you're feeling fragile, there's also a higher chance that you'll have less tolerance for others.
- 3. When you know it won't go well:** If a previous conversation with this person went awry or you know they won't tolerate other POVs, stick with neutral conversation topics and stay away from politics.
- 4. If you feel targeted or fear for your safety:** Unfortunately, certain populations can become targeted in an election and take center stage. You should never feel that you have to fight for a particular group if putting yourself out there puts your safety at risk.

The “White Flag” Method of Ending Conversations

Coined by renowned matchmaker Rachel Greenwald, the white flag approach can be used to signal your final lap of conversation—just like NASCAR does it.

No matter how your conversation went, try to bring it back to the person and away from politics. Let them know you are about to leave, ask about something in their life, and actively listen before saying goodbye. That way, you’re making a connection outside of politics.



Election Coverage Overload: How to Manage Your Media Intake for Better Mental Health

When it comes to election-related stress and anxiety, perhaps the biggest trigger is media, including social media. You can protect your well-being by establishing limitations and boundaries for online activity.

But you also need to set boundaries when you're online. People are passionate about their views and about the candidates, and whether you're scrolling through social media posts or the comment section of a news story, things can get heated quickly. Instead of working yourself into a lather, it's vital to maintain online etiquette during this sensitive time.

Here's how to set boundaries in real life and online.



Setting Boundaries IRL

Don't believe everything you read. With the rise of AI and viral content, it's getting harder to determine what's real and what's not. Be mindful of your sources and think before you share.

Limit news and social media consumption. "It's critical to continually evaluate our relationship with social media, especially during challenging times," says Don Grant, PhD, Newport's National Advisor of Healthy Device Management.

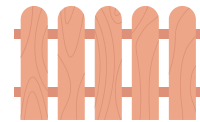
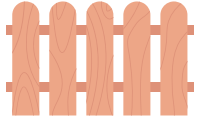
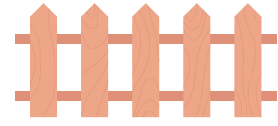
Set a timer. A quick check of social media can easily turn into 20 minutes of mindless scrolling. Setting an alarm on your phone ensures you stick to your self-imposed time limit.

Turn off notifications. Silence the distractions and the temptation to reach for your phone. Disabling notifications on select apps helps you control your online time and protect your offline time.

Take a walk outside. Get your mind off the news and the political discourse running through your social network. Turn your 10-minute scroll into a 10-minute walk.

Spend time with family. Establishing offline boundaries allows space for more quality time with those you love. Recharge with some outdoor activities, game nights, or movie nights at home.

Choose media that will reduce your anxiety. Instead of turning on the radio in the car, listen to a mood-lifting playlist. Skip the news, put down your phone, and watch your favorite comfort TV instead.



Setting Boundaries with Online Engagement

Be careful what you say. Remember, what goes on the internet stays on the internet. Saying the wrong thing in the heat of the moment could lead to severe consequences.

Be respectful. When commenting, don't attack or insult the other person for their view. Rather, ask them more about why they feel that way or say, "That's an interesting viewpoint. I have a different way of looking at it. May I share?"

Leave positive feedback. If you notice someone is being bullied for posting their opinion, leave a positive comment. Even if you don't agree, you can help make it clear that bullying is unacceptable.

Agree to disagree. If an online discussion takes a turn for the worse, let them know you appreciate their viewpoint and would like to end the interaction now, on a positive note.

Turn off your comments. If you like to share your political views on social media, but don't want the barrage of negativity that could follow, simply remove the option for others to comment.

Refrain from political discussions. Let your friends and family know that you will be protecting your well-being by not engaging in political discussions online. This may mean unfollowing some people until the election is over.



You don't have to white-knuckle it through election season.

Stressful events can make existing mental health issues worse, or trigger new symptoms. If you or a loved one would benefit from mental health support to navigate current stress or address underlying trauma, depression, or anxiety, we can help. Contact us to discuss treatment options and learn more about our full continuum of care for all ages.



NEWPORT HEALTHCARE

Empowering Lives. Restoring Families.™



NEWPORT ACADEMY

A Newport Healthcare Program for Children & Teens



NEWPORT INSTITUTE

A Newport Healthcare Program for Young Adults



PrairieCare

A Division of Newport Healthcare



CENTER FOR FAMILIES

A Division of Newport Healthcare

We'll help steer you toward the right care. Contact us today.



952-826-8475



prairie-care.com