Richmond County 4-H is a youth development program designed to help kids between the ages of 5 and 18 lead positive, productive, and fulfilling lives. Through afterschool programs, clubs, school enrichment, service projects, leadership retreats, summer programs, and now virtual platforms, 4-H teaches life skills and provides opportunities to succeed and gain new experiences.

At each 4-H event, a pledge that describes each of the 4-Hs is recited. If you recall, in a few previous articles I explained the meaning of “Hs,” Hands, Head, and Heart. The fourth and final “H” we will focus on today is Health; “I pledge my Health to better living.”

Now, maybe more than ever, our health is important to us and to those around us. When I think of health, physical health is what comes to my mind first and perhaps it does for you as well. However, it is important that we consider all aspects of our health including our mental and emotional wellbeing. The following will address these three pieces of your health puzzle and offer some advice of how to pledge yourself to better living.

Let’s start with routine. Think about yours for a minute. Is everything you do on a daily basis drastically different from this time a month ago? If so, you’re not alone. School is different, jobs are different, no soccer practice, no piano lesson, no go here, get this done type of lifestyle. These are things we don’t have control over though. For better living, it is important to focus on the part of our routine we can control. Start by choosing a sleep and wake pattern. A month ago you had one, right? If going to bed at 9pm and waking at 6am worked for you, keep doing it. You may not have a reason to get up at 6am anymore, but keeping something in life consistent and in your control may be helpful. If waking early is not your forte, consider waking at 8am if your new schedule allows for that. Regardless if you wake early or late, keep it consistent. Other thing you can do to keep your routine balanced is meal time, school time, work from home time, etc. Like sleeping, finding a consistent pattern will keep your internal clock happy. Adding some physical activity to your routine can make you feel better and reduce your stress level. Your response to this comment may be that your gym is temporarily closed. No worries. Again, you don’t have control over that. Focus on what you do have control over. Can you do a workout video at home? Maybe walking your dog is an option. Ride your bike, jump with your kids on the trampoline, practice mindfulness or yoga. Just because one option is out doesn’t mean all of them are. Finding and keeping a happy routine is key to better living.

Let’s discuss goals. When was the last time you set a goal for yourself? Probably New Year’s Eve. Did you stick to your plan? If you didn’t, again you’re not alone. Setting a goal can be simple and should always be realistic. What’s the title of that book your friend suggested reading three years ago that you never got around to? Maybe you have the time now. Mad at yourself over and over again for eating that milkshake? Start food habits at the store. When shopping (likely online now), order a few apples instead of your favorite junk food for snack. Little, but achievable goals can provide big successes! Want to lose 40 pounds? It takes a really dedicated person to do that but perhaps 10 pounds is more realistic. Set goals for yourself and possibly your family but keep the focus on things you can control and stick to the plan.

Lastly, consider communication. Communication with yourself, (that voice inside your head), it can set your mood for the whole day. Are you feeling down, worried, fearful, etc.? You are in charge of your own mindset. If the negative news is too much, consider watching something else. Read a feel-good book, watch a feel-good movie, put positive signs where they are visible throughout the day, make your mind up to be more content. The ways you talk to yourself have a big impact on your mental and emotion health. Communication is also the way we stay connected with others. Missing your family or friends? It may not replace face to face visits with nice warm hugs but a phone call or written letter can do a lot of good for both parties. Think about a time when your friend called you out of the blue or when you got a birthday card from an unexpected deliverer. Talk about pick-me-up? Those small gestures can mean so much. Call a friend, have more than a 2-minute conversation with someone important to you, or share your feelings, both good and bad, with a trusted person. Communication is key to staying connected and feeling a sense of belonging.

Pledging your health to better living can mean a wide variety of things, especially in the middle of a pandemic. Whether you concentrate on your mental, emotional, or physical health, being realistic and focusing on that which you have control over is vital. A lot of 4-H programming has recently moved to virtual platforms. To help stay connected during this time of social distancing, check out our website at Richmond.ces.ncsu.edu, like us on Facebook, a platform where various activities and videos are posted daily or call and talk about other 4-H options such as virtual club meetings and presentations with me, Catherine Shelley, Richmond County 4-H Agent at 910.417.0258. Stay healthy, stay safe, stay home!