

BALANCE

Volume 10, Issue 3

Your Self-Care Plan

“Self-care” is not something we are usually taught. Instead, we often realize the need to take better care of ourselves when we are already feeling stressed or exhausted. There are many ways to feel better, have more energy, think more positively, and gain resiliency. Do you have a self-care plan or set of strategies and tactics that you can rely upon to nurture yourself and regain balance in your life? Consider the following list of life management “targets”. Do any of them stand out? Are any missing? If so, consider ways in which you can incorporate the missing targets into your daily life:

- Improved sleep
- Proper nutrition
- Regular exercise
- Social support
- Enjoyable hobbies
- Pamper-yourself techniques
- How you think: Intervening with negativity and shifting to a positive attitude
- Nurturing your intellectual self
- Managing your feelings and emotions
- Fostering your spirituality

Toxic Friendships

Toxic friendships are close relationships with persons who continually create emotional distress for you. These are friends who break promises, betray confidences, or undermine relationships. When others criticize this friend, you may defend them. There are many types of toxic behaviors, but the bottom line is that these friends don’t leave you feeling good about yourself. Feeling trapped with an inability to let go or be assertive in these relationships is a never-ending struggle. Change starts with recognizing the toxic relationship exists, that you do have choices, and that you are doing things that keep change from happening. For example, you may feel rewarded for acting in a way that pleases this person and meets their needs, even though you don’t feel it is reciprocated. Do you have friends who are not toxic—people you trust, and who support you? Rely upon them to be honest with you in your goal of making changes or taking the steps necessary to conclude or end a toxic friendship. The Employee Assistance Program can also help. Take the action steps to learn about yourself, the choices you make, and how you can get happiness back in your life.



Conflict Avoidance

Conflict can be unpleasant, but it's natural and can be a positive force. If you avoid conflict, you don't really prevent conflicts. Instead you attempt to dispose of them by deciding that your needs or wishes are subordinate or less important. Avoiding conflict may have been useful in your past, but in the workplace, it is a roadblock to job satisfaction that may cause problems to fester and resentments to build. You can overcome your fear of conflict by learning the skills involved in "managing differences" (an easier way to think of conflict). Next, test these skills and observe your successes. For resources or tips to overcome conflict avoidance, consider contacting the Employee Assistance Program.

The Proactive Mindset

Taking initiative is so valued by employers that it is often graded on performance reviews. Periodically, most employees will take initiative—acting without being prompted. However, fewer will develop a mindset that makes taking initiative a habit. This is the "proactive mindset". Consider the following:

- Do not retreat from challenges on the job. Instead, see them as new frontiers needing leadership — possibly yours.
- When negative and undesirable events transpire, think "What's the opportunity for everyone in this picture?"
- Learn the art of distinguishing between those things that will respond to your initiative and those which you cannot change.

Secrets to Better Speeches

To reduce anxiety and feel more confident when speaking in public, arrive early and walk around the room to get familiar with it. Greet as many individual attendees as possible. To sound more inspirational, decide what part of your speech is most interesting, and then crank up the intensity and show your enthusiasm at those points. Finally, avoid slip ups

better by memorizing one-liners in advance to appear cool and in control.

Anti-Stress Garden

Start a garden and grow your own anti-stress foods in season! Many foods can help you manage stress because of the nutrients they contain. One of these "anti-stress" nutrients is magnesium. Foods high in magnesium include spinach, beets (especially the stems), blackberries, and raspberries. Magnesium plays a role in relaxing muscles and works in concert with other metabolizing functions of the body that contribute to reduced stress. It also aids sleep and helps reduce anxiety. Discover more about foods and their contribution to your health at www.nutrition.gov.

Signs of Bullying

The serious issue of youth bullying can have devastating effects on its victims. Unfortunately, some children will not tell about their victimization, which makes it important to know the subtle signs of bullying. Things to watch for include:

- Coming home with missing personal items
- Unexplained dirt stains or torn clothes
- Appearing cautious or afraid of walking to and from school or riding the bus
- Unexplained injuries or cuts
- Sadness, moodiness, tearfulness
- Stomach aches and other physical ailments
- Sleep problems or bad dreams
- Loss of appetite
- Self-critical statements
- Vandalism of your home

If you see one or more of these signs and symptoms, ask about bullying. Example: "I'm worried about you. Are there any kids picking on you or bothering you?" Never discount, minimize, or disbelieve a child's report of abuse. Instead, follow up with another question, to learn more. Resource: www.stopbullyinnow.hrsa.gov.

Road Rage

As the number of cars on the road increase during the summer vacation season, the likelihood to encounter or experience road rage also increases. Road rage is loosely defined as the condition in which a person becomes extremely bothered by road conditions or other motorists. Road rage can sometimes lead to aggressive driving, which can be very dangerous for everyone on the road. Surveys have identified the four most annoying habits that make other drivers angry, and perhaps angry enough to provoke road rage:

- Cutting someone off. Defensive drivers check both mirrors before changing lanes, use turn signals, and allow ample room to merge.
- Tailgating. If you are being tailgated, either speed up if possible, or make it easy for the tailgater to pass your vehicle. Leave plenty of distance between your car and the car ahead of you. If that car is going more slowly than you like, leave extra room between you and the other car to allow yourself enough room to pass when the opportunity arises.
- Driving too slow. Although “slow” is a relative term, there are steps you can take to reduce antagonizing other motorists. It is safer to drive in the right lane, using the left lane for passing. In some states this is the law; however, it is a good driving habit to observe this courtesy generally.
- Making rude gestures at other drivers. Some gestures are acceptable and even appreciated, such as wave of “thank you” for favors, or an apology for an error.

If you observe another driver who is pursuing you and seems bent on taking revenge, there are some steps you can take to protect yourself:

- Don't personalize the situation—avoid eye contact with the driver.
- Find a police station, a 24-hour convenience store, a hospital, or other place with people

around to help.

- Don't go home.
- Don't get out of your car until you are in a safe place.

Other tactics to ensure safer highway travel and avoid your own short fuse include:

- Allow more time to compensate for minor delays.
- Be comfortable in your car—listen to music, be sure your car is in good operating condition (seats adjusted, air conditioning/heater working properly, rear view mirrors adjusted properly).
- Let it go. You cannot control traffic or other drivers, but you can control your reactions to both. Think beyond the immediate by asking yourself how reacting to this frustration with anger will make your life worse. What if you knew everyone in the other cars, how would you react?
- Use your horn sparingly. Honking can further infuriate a driver who is already stressed.

If the stress of driving in traffic makes you want to explode in anger, contact your Employee Assistance Program to learn more about stress control.

The Value of Checklists

If you've used a grocery list, then you know the value of a checklist and the relief that comes from not having to remember details. Apply this stress-reducing tactic to other areas in your life and watch relief flow. What to do, what to bring, how to do it—whether it's planning a party or social event, fishing, camping, boating, cleaning a house, repairing an engine, or baby-proofing a house—your checklist can be about almost anything. To make a checklist, track and record each step as you plan any event that has details associated with it.



Smooth Move

Summer is a time when people move away, change jobs, change careers, switch schools, and leave old friends. Moving can be surprisingly stressful. If you're moving, follow a few tips:

- First, make a To-Do list, and then allocate the chores over a period of weeks until the move.
- Don't just start packing. Get rid of all the junk and clutter first for a fresh start in your new home.
- Plan a few local trips to favorite places to recall memories and have social get-togethers with old friends to experience closure.
- If your budget isn't too tight, reduce stress during this period by treating yourself to a couple of meals out.
- Seek resources to help you and/or your children cope with moving stress (and loss).

Worse than a Computer Virus?

A computer virus is a program that can replicate itself and infect a computer. However, there are other types of harmful computer code to avoid. One is called a "rootkit." A rootkit is not a virus; it is "malware." You can unwittingly transfer a rootkit to your computer when you land on an "attack" Web site while surfing the Internet. A rootkit hides inside critical files that you can't delete without making your computer nonfunctional. The rootkit then permits third-party criminals to steal personal information on your computer without being detected. At home, use virus-protection software that will spot rootkit malware. If your computer becomes infected, you may need an expert to help remove it. At work, follow your employer's computer use policies.

To speak with an EAP professional,
please call: **800.765.0770**

