

Balanced Living

September 2024



Suicide Awareness Month

Suicidal thoughts can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or background. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the United States, so it's important to be aware of risk factors, warning signs, and what you can do to help someone who needs it.

Risk Factors

Some risk factors include alcoholism and drug use, history of physical or sexual abuse, mental illness, recent life events, such as the loss of a loved one or ending of a relationship, previous suicide attempts, or a family history of suicide.

Recognizing Warning Signs

There are many reasons for someone's suicidal ideations. Some people give clues that they are thinking of taking their own life while others might suffer in silence. Some warning signs that could suggest someone is at immediate risk include:

1. Talking about ending their life or causing harm
2. Feeling hopeless about the future
3. Acting out or extreme mood swings
4. Isolating from others or saying goodbye
5. Increased use of drugs or alcohol
6. Irregular eating or sleeping habits

What You Can Do

If you suspect someone is suicidal or they tell you directly, try to remain calm and stay with the person until someone else can intervene, such as a family member, professional counselor, or suicide hotline. Help them establish ongoing support so they have a list of contacts available in times of crisis. This could include community resources and a counselor.

Although it might be difficult to understand why someone feels the way they do and wants to end their life, try to be empathetic toward their feelings and show compassion. Check in with the person periodically to show your continued support.

Crisis Resources

If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or suspect someone else is, there are crisis support resources available. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 988 or use their online Lifeline Crisis Chat. Both of these services are free and confidential. Check out their website for more ways to get involved: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>. Call 911 for emergency services.

How to Give Feedback

Providing an employee or colleague with feedback is a fragile yet necessary thing. By following the tips below, you can help make sure that the feedback you give is effective, constructive, and offers the employee insight on how to improve.

Types of Feedback

First, let's explore types of feedback. There is:

- Positive feedback: "You did a great job on this last project."
- Neutral feedback: "Here are diagrams you'll need for this project."
- Negative feedback: "This task could have been performed another way; you'll need some improvement here."

How to Give Effective Feedback

Use these ten tips to improve your listening skills:

- Selective: Make sure to concentrate on the areas that are most important, not giving unhelpful details or nit-picking about behavior.
- Specific: Tell the employee specifically what they did well or did not do well. For example, "The way you handled Mr. Barber was very good," instead of, "You've been associating well with customers lately."
- Timely: Give feedback right after the event happens.
- Descriptive: Tell the employee the specifics of what you observed, not what you concluded. This will help the employee know what you're talking about.
- Sensitive: Although feedback should be given as soon as possible to the employee, don't give feedback if either of you is emotionally distressed. Find the most opportune time to talk.
- Helpful: If you are giving negative feedback, suggest ways that the employee can improve. This way, you are setting a goal that the employee can work towards.

How to Give Negative Feedback

Giving negative feedback is not always easy. But following these guidelines can help the employee improve, leading to a positive experience for everyone involved:

- Be assertive. Be direct in telling the employee the situation or behavior that needs improvement.
- Ask the employee to talk about the situation or behavior and what he or she thinks about it. Be empathetic to the employee, and don't argue over points, but work toward finding a corrective response to the issue that both parties can agree on.
- Find agreement with the employee. Help the employee understand why the behavior or situation is unacceptable.
- Help the employee develop a plan of action. Be specific on how the employee can achieve improvement, and work with him or her to accomplish it. Don't push the employee too hard; focus on accomplishing small steps to reach big goals.
- Summarize. Talk about the points you and the employee went over, and ensure both parties agree and understand the plan of action.
- Talk about what would happen if the employee doesn't improve. Write down which improvements are necessary.
- Check in with the employee. Agree upon a date that you can meet with the individual to discuss and review improvement.

How Feedback Can Be Most Effective to the Employee

The employee must:

- Understand what the employer expects.
- Accept the plan for improvement.
- Be able to take action.

Written by Life Advantages - Author Dr. Delvina Miremedi ©2024

Reducing Workplace Stress

Personalize your workspace

Posting photos of loved ones, relaxing places, a vacation you've been on or destinations you want to go to also can provide a much-needed respite from stressful situations. "It's easy to get lost in whatever is going on when you're at your desk. Looking at a pleasant picture temporarily takes you someplace else," says Dr. Huberman. Fragrant fresh-cut flowers also can help you reduce stress, as can a memento from your childhood.

Take a vacation day

You don't function well at work when you're overly stressed, so take a day off to have some fun. This will recharge your batteries and keep things in perspective.

Keep a stress journal

Write in your journal for two weeks. Include what is causing your stress, the day of the week and time of the day it occurred and how you handled it. At the end of the two weeks, read your journal to determine if there's a pattern. Is your stress related to the type of work you're doing? Is the job too complicated? Do you need more training? Is your workload too much? Is the work boring with not enough challenge? Or does your stress come from people: managers, co-workers or complaining customers?

Listen

Sometimes people are so anxious to tell their side of a problem that they forget to listen. Ask your co-workers their perspective of the situation, then listen.

Go for a walk

To physically break the stress cycle, "walk around the block or to a different part of the building," says Dr. Huberman. "People often make jokes about feeling like they're chained to their desks -- but very often, they're not." If you can't leave your desk for long, you can at least visit the bathroom. "The bathroom is one of the few places where nobody will follow you, where you can actually get a few minutes to yourself," says Dr. Huberman.

Take time to reflect

Besides these short-term stress-reducing techniques, investigating the causes of your stress also can help. "It's vital to explore your life and the sources of your stress," says Dr. Edelberg. Ask yourself: Am I doing with my life what I like? Are the decisions I've made in my life genuine, or am I living somebody else's expectations? What steps could I take to improve my life? "You can be having the time of your life in a stressful job if it's genuinely what you want to do," says Dr. Edelberg. "The job doesn't affect your health adversely because you've made the decision and you have control. You start running into problems with stress-related issues when you relinquish control."

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Putting Out The Fire: Preventing and Managing Burnout

Contemporary professional demands not only cause stress, but chronic stress. Stress contributes to the development of myriad physical and mental health conditions including (but not limited to) hypertension, diabetes, depression and anxiety. Research suggests that up to two-thirds of American employees experience some degree of burnout. Burnout impacts productivity, morale and financial bottom line due to the health-related costs of burnout.



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Suicide Awareness Month

September is a month dedicated to remembering the lives lost to suicide, the millions of individuals who have struggled with suicidal ideation, and acknowledging the families and communities impacted by suicide. It is also a time to bring awareness about suicide prevention, share messages of hope, and remove the stigma around mental health. Suicidal thoughts can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, or background and are often the result of an untreated mental health condition. While suicidal thoughts may be common, they should not be considered normal.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Some warning signs may help you determine if a loved one is at risk for suicide, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change. If you or someone you know exhibits any of these, seek help by calling the Lifeline at 988.

Talking about:

- Feeling unbearable pain or hopelessness
- Feeling worthless, trapped, guilty, ashamed, angry, or like they are a burden to others
- Death or a recent fascination with death

Changes in behavior or mood:

- Recent episodes of depression, emotional distress, anxiety, and/or suicide attempt
- Increased alcohol or drug use, recklessness
- Losing interest in personal appearance or hygiene
- Withdrawing from family, friends, or community
- Saying goodbye to friends and family and/or giving away prized possessions
- Changes in eating and/or sleeping patterns
- Expressing rage and/or becoming violent or being a victim of violence

If you suspect someone you know may be having suicidal thoughts, don't wait. Take action now to let them know they are not alone.

- **ASK** - Research shows people who are having thoughts of suicide feel relief when someone asks after them in a caring way. Findings suggest acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce rather than increase suicide ideation.
- **BE THERE** – Individuals are more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to someone who listens without judgment.
- **KEEP THEM SAFE** – Studies have indicated that when lethal methods are made less available or less deadly, suicide rates by that method decline, and frequently, suicide rates decline overall.



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- **HELP THEM STAY CONNECTED** – Studies have also shown that helping someone at risk create a network of resources and individuals for support and safety can encourage them to take positive action and reduce feelings of hopelessness.
- **FOLLOW-UP** – Brief, low-cost intervention and supportive, ongoing contact may be an important part of suicide prevention, especially for individuals after they have been discharged from hospitals or care services, according to research.
- **#BeThe1To** – #BeThe1To is the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline's message, which helps spread the word about actions we can all take to prevent suicide.

Talking with and finding help for someone who may be suicidal can be difficult. These tips may help:

- **Be direct.** Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- **Listen.** Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings without judgment.
- **Get involved.** Become available. Show interest and support.
- **Offer hope** that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- **Act.** Remove means such as weapons or pills.
- **Get help** from people/agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.
- **Don't** debate whether suicide is right or wrong or whether feelings are good or bad.
- **Don't** dare them to do it.
- **Don't** act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- **Don't** be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.

It's hard to know how a suicidal crisis feels and how to act. Call 988 anytime for help if you or someone you know is struggling.

Resources: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: <https://988lifeline.org/>; Suicide Prevention Resource Center: <https://sprc.org/>

Setting Yourself Up for a Financially Responsible Holiday Season

It's never too early to start planning for the holiday season, especially knowing how easy it is to get swept up in all the excitement and spend money without thinking about the consequences. It is important to make conscious decisions about what you're spending money on, so remember to be realistic about what you are willing to sacrifice while budgeting this time of year.



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Keeping track of your spending is one way to ensure you stick with your budget and spend wisely. Even better, you can utilize your budget format year over year to help reduce unnecessary stress! Some best practices for holiday budgeting can include:

Start planning early:

- Savings in smaller chunks over a longer period can make it easier to meet your goal if your budget is already tight.
- You can utilize free resources, such as holiday budget spreadsheets, in your planning process.

Analyze your current finances:

- It may not be your favorite activity but be sure to take some time to review all current debt, especially your credit cards.
- Once you know of any debt, you can review your total holiday income – do you receive the same paycheck every two weeks, or is your pay more irregular?

Note your specific spending categories:

- Some of the most common holiday spending categories include gifts, travel, food, entertainment, and holiday décor.

Determine how much to save for each spending category:

- Reviewing last year's spending can be a helpful tool! Pull up your bank and credit card statements to see what you spent all your money on.
- Assigning dollar amounts per person can also help you avoid overspending.

By taking a proactive approach to holiday budgeting, you can ensure a joyful and financially responsible season. Thoughtful planning and conscious spending are key to a happier and more relaxed holiday season. So, start early, stay organized, and embrace the joy of giving without compromising your financial wellbeing.

Source: https://www.huffpost.com/entry/financial-boundaries-holidays_1_6539cd16e4b011a9cf7c644a

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, well-being & legal issues.

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Back to School Healthy Lunch Ideas for Parents

As the school year begins, many parents face the challenge of packing nutritious and appealing lunches for their children. This task can be made easier and more enjoyable by involving the entire family in the process. By giving kids choices and encouraging variety, parents can make lunchtime exciting and healthy. Remember, it may take up to ten exposures to a new food before a child accepts it, so patience and creativity are key. Experiment with different shapes, sizes, and textures, and always keep the experience positive. A balanced lunch should include a protein source, whole grains, and a colorful array of fruits or vegetables. Here are some delicious and nutritious lunch ideas to inspire you:

Whole Grain Tortilla Wrap

- Fill a whole grain tortilla with turkey and cheese.
- Add a side of juicy grapes for a sweet touch.

Protein-Packed Breakfast Lunch

- Include scrambled or boiled eggs.
- Pair with Greek yogurt, mixed berries, and granola for a crunchy, satisfying meal.

Pasta Delight

- Mix whole grain pasta with ground chicken and your favorite pasta sauce.
- Serve with crisp cucumber slices on the side.

Crunchy and Creamy Combo

- Combine whole grain crackers with low-fat chicken salad.
- Add cherry tomatoes and a handful of trail mix for a mix of flavors and textures.

Snackable Variety

- Pack pretzels with celery and carrot sticks.
- Include hummus for dipping, along with cottage cheese and pineapple for a sweet and savory treat.

Getting kids involved in making their lunches not only teaches them about healthy eating but also ensures they are more likely to enjoy what's in their lunchbox. Encourage them to pick their favorite fruits and vegetables and let them help with simple tasks like spreading hummus or rolling up wraps. This collaborative approach can make lunchtime a fun and nutritious part of the school day for everyone!

Source: <https://www.superhealthykids.com/50-packable-school-lunch-ideas/>



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Creamy White Chili with Cream Cheese

Ingredients

- 2 (15 ounce) cans no-salt-added great northern beans, rinsed, divided
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 ½ cups chopped yellow onion (1 medium)
- ¾ cup chopped celery (2 medium stalks)
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped (2 tablespoons)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 3 cups unsalted chicken stock
- 1 (4 ounce) can chopped green chiles
- 4 ounces reduced-fat cream cheese
- ½ cup loosely packed fresh cilantro leaves

Directions

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- ½ cup loosely packed fresh cilantro leaves

Nutrition

Per Serving: 6 Servings

Calories: 319 | Protein: 23g | Carbohydrates: 29g | Dietary Fiber: 9g | Saturated Fat: 3g | Total Sugars: 6g | Sodium: 329mg

Source: <https://www.eatingwell.com/recipe/269831/creamy-white-chili-with-cream-cheese/>

Dangers of Excessive Screen Use

Studies consistently link compulsive internet use to brain changes that foster addictive behaviors and impair intellectual and physical growth. Teens now average 4.8 hours online daily. Signs of addiction include disinterest in other activities, withdrawal symptoms when offline, and using screens to escape negative feelings. If you're a concerned parent, know that over 50 studies confirm family counseling is the most effective approach. This therapy helps establish healthier screen habits, promotes offline activities, improves family communication, and supports children's mental and emotional well-being. Don't endure the frustration of watching your teen struggle with depression, anxiety, aggression, defiance, or even bullying. These issues are treatable but require family involvement rather than sole focus on the teen. Your employee assistance program can help. Learn more at <https://greenschoolsgreenfuture.org/excessive-internet-use-disrupts-key-parts-of-the-teenage-brain/>.

Choosing a Positive Attitude at Work

Many employees think a positive attitude at work is mostly shaped by the environment, job satisfaction, and how they are treated. While a positive work environment can foster a good attitude, your attitude is also a controllable soft skill that can be developed and applied in any situation. Experiment with your attitude. Choose to approach challenges with optimism while maintaining a professional demeanor. When the work unit feels stressed or dysfunctional, clearly define your own boundaries to prevent burnout, and your attitude will remain more positive. Even in less-than-ideal conditions, you can choose to maintain a positive attitude. Why? While you may not control the conditions around you, you can control how you respond to them. The payoff is maintaining your well-being, but it will have a ripple effect that improves the overall environment.

Anxiety: It's Number One Now

The 2024 results of the American Psychiatric Association's annual mental health poll show that U.S. adults are feeling increasingly anxious. In 2024, 43% of adults say they feel more anxious than they did the previous year, up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022. This problem surpasses depression, stress, and relationship issues. Key concerns include the economy, the upcoming presidential election, and gun violence. There are many anxiety triggers, including personal economic instability, health concerns, and fear of war. Immediate personal steps you can take to manage (reduce) anxiety include setting boundaries on news consumption, writing action steps you will take to have better control over direction in your life, and using the EAP.

Suicide Prevention Month: Connections are a Key in Intervention

Everyone can help prevent suicide by knowing the warning signs, understanding how to initiate an intervention conversation, using empathy and compassion, and knowing how and when to act. You can learn more from your EAP or the new national 988lifeline.org website. Many would-be interveners ask, "What are some of the reasons a high-risk person ultimately decided against suicide?" The answers give clues to prevention and offering support. One of the most important was the suicidal person's concern about the negative effects the suicide would have on loved ones, particularly if the person had strong social connections and feelings of responsibility or concern for loved ones. People often report that thinking about the impact their death would have on family members deterred them from taking their own life. Additionally, the fear of burdening loved ones with grief and the desire to spare them pain can be powerful motivators for someone to reconsider. In some cases, even a single caring conversation or expression of support can create a vital connection that keeps someone from making a tragic decision.



Using Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage your emotions while also recognizing, understanding, and influencing the emotions of others. Maximize EI's use to enhance relationships, experience fewer conflicts, and enjoy your job more. 1) When a coworker shares a concern, listen without interrupting, and show you're engaged by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and paraphrasing what they've said. Similarly with your boss, listen carefully to feedback or instructions, and ask effective questions to ensure you understand and show it. 2) When tensions rise in the office, decide you will remain calm. Encourage others to take a break, thereby helping defuse tense situations. Likewise, if your boss is under pressure, decide to offer solutions rather than adding to their stress, thereby allowing your calm demeanor to influence their mood. 3) The most important EI skill is being aware of your own emotional triggers and managing your response to them. If a coworker's comment annoys you, pause for a moment and take a breath. You'll respond thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively. And if you feel frustrated or upset by something your boss has said or done, take time to cool down before addressing the issue. Then enter the conversation as though you are teaming with them to explore a concern.

Stress Tips from the Field: Conquer Monday Morning Blues

Feeling the Monday morning blues is common. Very simply, weekends give you control over your time and choices. It's almost like retirement for 48 hours. But the script flips on Monday, and demands you don't control take over. Overcome this overwhelming feeling by spending 10 to 15 minutes on Sunday night writing down your goals and organizing your personal to-do list for the week. This way, you can start the week feeling more in charge rather than suddenly "dictated to" by work.

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach. Your EAP is here to help with family, work, health, & legal issues.

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Create a Sustainable Exercise Routine

Exercisers experience fewer illnesses like diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease and have improved mood, cognitive ability, and reduced systemic inflammation. New research also shows a 30%–35% reduction in their mortality for any reason compared to non-exercisers. Despite the benefits, more is needed to inspire many people to engage in regular exercise. Roadblocks include inconvenience, hassle, pain, boredom, failure to see fast results, having unrealistic expectations, or even seeing people at the gym looking healthier than oneself. Stay motivated by first answering key questions about your exercise program and goals: What tangible benefits would regular exercise bring to your life? What physical activity will you truly enjoy? How can you integrate exercise into your daily routine in a way that feels manageable and not overwhelming? What small, achievable goals can you set for yourself to measure progress and stay motivated? Who in your life can be your "accountability partner" if your motivation wanes? How will you reward yourself for staying consistent with your exercise routine? Source on "all cause mortality": pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov (Search 18525377)

What Is the "National Loneliness Epidemic" About?

Remote work, digital communication, the isolation of the elderly—the time people spend socializing in person has dropped over 70% in the past 20 years. Among its ripple effects is the impact on health. Loneliness—and not just the subjective feeling of being sad from lack of social contact with friends, family, and meaningful relationships—has been linked to mental health disorders, cardiovascular disease, and decreased life expectancy. Be proactive and intentional in maintaining social connections. Relationships are resources you build for a lifetime—your future "social IRA." Counter loneliness by focusing on meaningful relationships rather than numerous casual connections. Assess your social media use—ensure it enhances, not replaces, real-life interactions. If you're concerned about isolation, whether your own or someone else's, reach out to your EAP for support. Learn more at <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html>.

