

# CONNECTIONS

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## Back to School Blues

Allan Schwartz, LCSW, Ph.D.

Labor Day is approaching and as it does the remaining schools around the nation that have not yet opened will do so after that holiday.

When I was a boy growing up in the Bronx, New York, there was a department store that especially catered to children. It was known as "Robert Hall." I will never forget the then famous radio and television jingle that always appeared at the end of August and into September. Here are a few of the lyrics but I cannot recreate the music:

"School bells ring,  
and children sing,  
its back to Robert Hall again,  
etc."



Ah, what memories.....I hated the jingle and the entire notion of "back to school!!!!!" Parents were happy we were all returning to school. Me??, No. What could possibly be happy about homework, long boring school days and unfriendly friends. There was another little jingle that, was handed down to us from previous generations of school children. It was a chant more than a jingle, kind of like a football chant:

"Bars on the windows,  
bars on the doors,  
next thing you know,  
there'll be bars on the floors!!!!!"



The fact is that then, as now, many children feel anxious and depressed as school approaches. There is no way for parents to protect children from the inevitable process of growing up. In fact, it would not be desirable to protect children from life. However, there are things that parents can do to help ease the way for their children as they return to school:

1. Many children worry about making friends in school. They fear rejection and isolation. This is true not only for children who are beginning school for the first time, but for those who have moved and now begin attendance at a new school where they do not know anyone.

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The City of Madison Employee Assistance Program is excited to announce new services for City of Madison employees. We've been committed to providing more information and resources in a way that is accessible to everyone. We know lives are busy, stresses can come from work or home, and it can take many forms. Knowing this, we wanted a way for employees to have a one stop shop for free, up-to-date, relevant information that meets the diverse needs of life.

Every few months you can expect to start seeing this newsletter. It will offer articles on all sorts of topics. We'd love to hear from you if there is anything specific you'd like to have included, but we will try to hit a wide spread of content that hopefully you will find helpful.

Even more exciting is the launch of our **Work/Life Resource Library**. Clicking on the orange and white login tab will direct you to a page that will ask for a username to login. Use the word "Madison" and you'll be logged in. This library has a vast wealth of articles, videos, webinars, questionnaires, assessments, training, and much more. There are sections geared for personal life, work life, supervisors and managers, as well as searchable databases for nearby community resources. You can access this from any location or device that has Internet access. This is **FREE** to use and we encourage everyone to spend some time checking it out.

Be well,

*Patrick Nottingham*



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To help ease the way for younger children, it is a good idea for parents to befriend the mothers and fathers of some of the other children in class. That way, they can arrange play dates for their kids and that can help adjustment in school.

For older children in Middle and High School, it's important to encourage participating in as many extracurricular activities as possible. Most of these take place after school hours and enable students to get to know one another.

2. It is important for parents to be reassuring to children as the summer comes to a close. One way to do this is to remind them of the successes they had last year. This is true even for the youngest who may have attended nursery school or pre kindergarten the previous year.
3. I have always encouraged parents and children to have several trial runs prior to when schools officially open. This is especially important when youngsters begin a new school. For example, learning the route to school, visiting and touring the inside of the school building and identifying such places as the classrooms, bathrooms, gymnasium, principals office, etc. can be very assuring for young people.  
As part of this, it is not a bad idea to see if it's possible for your child and you to meet the new teacher and get to know that person. This also helps make the first day of school feel less intimidating.
4. It's important for parents to convey a positive attitude about school and to be upbeat. This can help reassure children.
5. Allow your children to express their worries, fears and concerns. If possible, see if you can help address these worries in ways that are positive.
6. Once school begins, help your children with their homework. Parental help can be very reassuring for kids. However, it's important that parents be very patient with their children. It is counterproductive to get angry with a child if and when they have difficulty understanding something in the homework.

I believe that part of the problem I had with school during my very early days was that I had no one I could really talk to about my fears and self doubts. The attitude that my family conveyed to me or that I interpreted, rightly or wrongly, was that I was supposed to love school and want to attend. After all, everyone else in the family had done so, or so I was told.

Be there for your children by being supportive, encouraging and enthusiastic while also listening to what they have to say.



**October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Domestic violence thrives when we are silent, but there is a much needed growing trend to bring awareness, resources, and advocacy to the forefront.**

## Introduction to Domestic Violence and Rape

Kathryn Patricelli, MA

Domestic violence is a variety of abuse that occurs within the home, between family members or couples. The typical image of domestic violence involves an adult male perpetrator and a female victim, often his wife or girlfriend. However, there are also women perpetrators of domestic violence, and men are sometimes victims. Really, any violence done by any family or group member towards another could qualify.

Domestic violence may take many forms. Destruction of property, psychological and emotional abuse, and physical and sexual assault are all common forms. On the milder but still quite serious side, perpetrators of domestic violence may threaten victims or use verbal put downs and bad names, attempt to publically humiliate them, or play manipulative mind games. Abusers may act jealously, and work to control victims' access to family and friends or employment. The abuse may be extreme enough so that the victim loses a job because of absenteeism or decreased productivity while at work, or is prevented from working at all. In its most violent form, domestic violence will involve actual physical and sexual violence, kidnapping of children, torture or murder of pets, etc. Some victims are driven to suicide.

Rape is a crime involving forced sexual activity, usually including sexual penetration, against the will of the victim. Rape can occur in the context of ongoing domestic violence (where a partner sexually assaults another partner against that partner's will), but it may also be perpetrated by acquaintances (e.g., date rape) or by strangers.

Domestic violence and rape are serious societal problems disproportionately focused on women. According the US Department of Justice, there are approximately 572,000 violent victimizations of women by persons they are intimate with annually. Only 49,000 similar complaints are filed by men. These official numbers are likely to seriously underestimate the actual number of assaults made on men, however, as it is known that men tend not to report such assaults due to shame and fear of ridicule.

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## Consequences of Domestic Violence and Rape

In addition to the financial and social adjustment difficulties that are often associated with removing one's self from an ongoing abuse situation, survivors of domestic violence or rape can develop emotional and psychological concerns that last well after the physical injuries have healed. Memories of victimization may be overwhelming, and return again and again, unbidden, to torture the victim long after actual victimization has passed. Victimization removes any illusion of safety that victims might have previously enjoyed. Self esteem and self-worth may have been damaged as well. Physical assaults may also have resulted in disfigurement or lingering chronic pain.

Being a victim of violence in and of itself is not sufficient in itself to cause a person to develop a psychological or emotional disorder. However, being victimized often leaves people more vulnerable to developing psychological disorders such as post traumatic stress disorder, depression, and other anxiety disorders than they were before having been victimized. This is particularly so if the violence occurred while the victim was a child, or still forming his or her personality in significant ways. Each individual will react differently, even to highly similar victimization events. Some but not all, victims of domestic violence will develop disorders while others will emerge relatively unscathed.

Just as there is not any definitive disorder that a victim of domestic violence or rape will develop, there is also not any definitive way that victims should respond to having been hurt. Most all means of grieving and coping with having been victimized are okay, except for ways that might result in self-harm or harm towards other.

In reality, **no one** deserves to be beaten, assaulted or otherwise intimidated. **Nobody** deserves to be physically, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually abused as a child or as an adult.

## Help is Available

Literally millions of people have been victims of domestic violence and/or rape. Many of them have gone to some lengths to try to help others recover from such victimization. Information and help are available to assist you in getting out of abusive situations or dealing with the aftermath of violence. Effective psychotherapy treatments exist that can assist you in dealing with any emotional or psychological symptoms you may have as a result of having been abused or assaulted. There are also numerous resources available for those who wish to assist someone else who has been a victim of violence.

No matter what type of violence you may have experienced (or are experiencing) or variety of emotional difficulty you may have incurred from such trauma, it is important that you not blame yourself for having been victimized. Thoughts like, "He hits me because I am stupid and clumsy... I deserve it." or "I shouldn't have been walking out late at night alone; I deserved what I got!", occur commonly as victims try to make sense out of why they are singled out for punishment. Perpetrators are likely to feed such mistaken thinking by actually suggesting that abuse is deserved. Such thoughts are mistaken and not based in reality. In reality, **no one** deserves to be beaten, assaulted or otherwise intimidated. **Nobody** deserves to be physically, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually abused as a child or as an adult. Abusive people are unable or unwilling to effectively control or cope with their own impulses and to respect human dignity and rights. Their failure to do so reflects their own (emotional, ethical/moral, spiritual, etc.) defects. By acting out their impulses they transfer their own problem on to you and people you love. If you have been a victim of violence or rape, you are not to blame.

Domestic violence and rape are no longer taboo topics that cannot be talked about in polite society. It is okay to talk about having been raped or assaulted, if you want to do that and to seek resources and help. Further, more is known today about how to recover from the effects of such assaults, and how to help insure that such assaults will be less likely to occur again than ever before. DAIS (Domestic Abuse Intervention Services) has developed the information, experience, and resources to act as a guide to help everyone better understand domestic abuse and to provide ways to discover more information with ways to intervene, plan, heal, advocate, and educate.

For more information, check out these resources:

- **Domestic Abuse Intervention Services (DAIS)**
- **National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV)**

# Top 10 Mental Health Apps

By Sandra Kiume

With so many apps on the market, it's hard to know which are useful. Many are designed by software developers instead of psychologists, without scientific testing. They range from beneficial, to harmless but useless, to bordering on fraudulent.

The apps selected for this list make no hucksterish claims and are based on established treatments. Progressive Muscle Relaxation, for example, has been used for a century and is likely just as effective in this new medium. Knowledge from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Dialectical Behavior Therapy enrich two apps on this list. Others mix solid information with ingenuity.



## 1. BellyBio

Free app that teaches a deep breathing technique useful in fighting anxiety and stress. A simple interface uses biofeedback to monitor your breathing. Sounds cascade with the movements of your belly, in rhythms reminiscent of waves on a beach. Charts also let you know how you're doing. A great tool when you need to slow down and **breathe**.

## 2. Operation Reach Out

Literally a lifesaving app, this free intervention tool helps people who are having suicidal thoughts to reassess their thinking and get help. Recommended by followers of **@un suicide**, who report that this app has helped in suicidal crises. Developed by the military, but useful to all. Worth a download even if you're not suicidal. You never know if you might need it.

## 3. eCBT Calm

Provides a set of tools to help you evaluate personal stress and anxiety, challenge distorted thoughts, and learn relaxation skills that have been scientifically validated in research on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Lots of background and useful information along with step-by-step guides.

## 4. Deep Sleep with Andrew Johnson

Getting enough sleep is one of the foundations of mental health. A personal favorite I listen to all the time, this straightforward app features a warm, gentle voice guiding listeners through a Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) session and into sleep. Features long or short induction options, and an alarm.

## 5. WhatsMyM3

A three minute depression and anxiety screen. Validated questionnaires assess symptoms of depression, anxiety, **bipolar disorder**, and PTSD, and combine into a score that indicates whether or not your life is impacted significantly by a mood disorder, recommending a course of action. The app keeps a history of test results, to help you track your progress.

## 6. DBT Diary Card and Skills Coach

Based on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) developed by psychologist **Marsha Linehan**, this app is a rich resource of self-help skills, reminders of the therapy principles, and coaching tools for coping. Created by a therapist with years of experience in the practice, this app is not intended to replace a professional but helps people reinforce their treatment.

## 7. Optimism

Track your moods, keep a journal, and chart your recovery progress with this comprehensive tool for depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders. One of the most popular mood tracking apps available, with plenty of features. Free.

## 8. iSleepEasy

A calm female voice helps you quell anxieties and take the time to relax and sleep, in an array of guided meditations. Separately controlled voice and music tracks, flexible lengths, and an alarm. Includes a special wee hours rescue track, and tips for falling asleep. Developed by **Meditation Oasis**, who offer an great line of relaxation apps.

## 9. Magic Window – Living Pictures

Not technically a mental health app, it makes no miraculous claims about curbing anxiety. However, there is **independent research** indicating that taking breaks and getting exposure to nature, even in videos, can reduce stress. This app offers an assortment of peaceful, ambient nature scenes from beautiful spots around the world.

## 10. Relax Melodies

A popular free relaxation sound and music app. Mix and match nature sounds with new age music; it's lovely to listen to birds in the rain while a piano softly plays.

*Don't forget to download the free PsychCentral app to keep up with the latest mental health information.*

## Methods of Stress Reduction

Harry Mills, Ph.D., Natalie Reiss, Ph.D. and Mark Dombeck, Ph.D.

Stress reduction methods can be thought of as serving two functions. There are restorative techniques for reducing the unpleasant and unhealthy emotional effects of stressful events that have already occurred, and there are preventative techniques that can help you avoid succumbing to stress in the first place (or at least buffer against and reduce the impact of upcoming inevitably stressful events).

There isn't any neat and orderly way to divide the various techniques we describe here into unique categories. While some techniques are primarily useful for their restorative function, and some for their preventative function, many may serve both functions at the same time. For instance, the diaphragmatic breathing technique described below could be used to deal with anxiety feelings that have already occurred, or it could be used to prepare for a stressful event (e.g., a speech, sporting event, meeting with your boss, etc.). Overall, the best, most comprehensive stress reduction plans consist of techniques that offer a mixture of preventive and restorative benefits.

This article of stress coping strategies focuses on methods primarily suited for decreasing the effects of existing stress symptoms. Here, the idea is to refine your ability to calm yourself down from an aroused state that the sympathetic nervous system has created.

### Restorative Strategies for Reducing Stress

In the following sections of this document, we review various techniques and practices that are useful for recovering from the negative effects of stress. We have organized our presentation of these techniques based on the basic modalities different strategies share: breath-related techniques, kinetic or movement-oriented techniques, haptic or touch-oriented techniques, useful medications, psychological interventions, and environmental awareness strategies. Our categorization is imperfect, and many strategies defy such simple placement. Nevertheless, organizing the strategies in this manner hopefully makes choosing one from among the group a much simpler prospect.

### Stress Relief via Breathing Strategies

The body's primary natural method of stress response reduction is to engage the parasympathetic nervous system to counteract the tension producing action of the sympathetic nervous system. There is perhaps no more direct route to parasympathetic nervous system activation than through the breath. Conscious deep rhythmic breathing has a calming effect on the body, and tends to help the heart rate to slow down, the mind to quiet and attention to turn inward towards the sensation of inhalation and exhalation.



### Benson's Relaxation Response

In his landmark study of the arousal and calming mechanisms of the body, Harvard cardiologist Dr. Herbert Benson discovered that the automatically triggered parasympathetic nervous system response (which he referred to as the "relaxation response") that normally ends a stress episode can be triggered in a conscious and intentional fashion through the use of a variety of stress reduction techniques. Among the various techniques Benson recommended to engage the relaxation response is this simple breath-oriented technique which can be practiced most anywhere:

- Pick a focus word or phrase. (Benson suggests the words "one" or "calm", but any word you find restful will work well.)
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
- Close your eyes.
- Relax your muscles.
- Breathe slowly and naturally, repeating your focus word or phrase as you exhale.

Continue this simple practice for ten to twenty minutes. Do not worry about how well you are doing. Try to concentrate on your breathing and your focus word. If other thoughts come to mind, gently direct your mind back towards your breathing.

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## Diaphragmatic Breathing

Another related simple and effective method for releasing body tension is diaphragmatic breathing, which involves breathing deeply from your diaphragm (a muscle located at the base of your abdomen). Adults tend to breathe in a very shallow way, using only the upper part of the chest. This tendency is exacerbated during times of stress, as breathing becomes even more shallow and rapid. Deep, slow diaphragmatic breathing releases tension from the muscles by improving the flow of oxygenated blood throughout our bodies.

You can experience the difference between shallow breathing and deep breathing by trying this exercise:

- Lie down on a bed or on the floor. Bend your knees and relax your toes. Keep your spine straight. If necessary, put a small pillow under your lower back for support.
- Place one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest (or use magazines or light books in place of your hands).
- Inhale slowly and deeply. Pay attention to which hand (or book or magazine) moves the most. Shallow breathing causes the hand on the chest to move the most. Deep, diaphragmatic breathing causes the hand on your abdomen to move the most.
- Continue breathing deeply for 5 or 10 minutes. Concentrate on moving the hand on your abdomen more than the hand on your chest.

Once you have mastered the diaphragmatic breathing technique, you can use it any time (and any place) you feel the need to release stress.

## Weight-Loss and Nutrition Myths

*"Lose weight fast! We'll tell you how!"*

*"Try the low-carbohydrate diet, the high-protein diet, the green tea diet, and the cabbage soup diet— or drink a shake and lose 10 pounds in 10 days."*

And so on, and so on, and so on. With so many products and weight-loss theories out there, it's easy to get confused.

This ongoing segment will hit up some myths about nutrition and healthy eating habits. Hopefully it'll help clear up some of the confusion about weight loss and nutrition and be a guide for making good decisions about your health. If you have any other questions, or if you want to lose weight, talk to a health care professional. Your doctor, a registered dietitian, or other qualified health professional can give you advice on how to eat a healthy diet and lose weight safely.

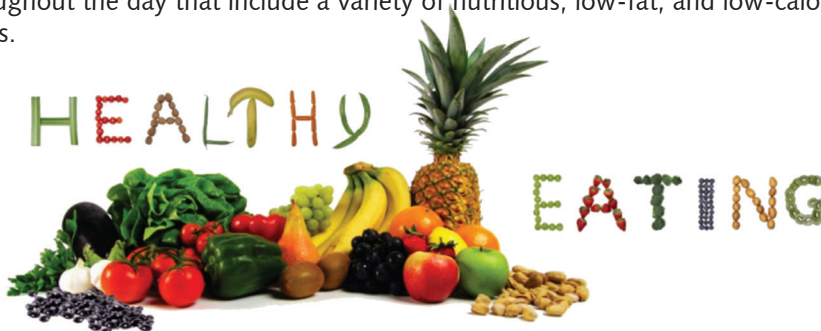
### Myth: Fad diets work for permanent weight loss.

**Fact:** Fad diets are not the best ways to lose weight and keep it off. These eating plans often promise to help you lose a lot of weight quickly, or tell you to cut certain foods out of your diet to lose weight. Although you may lose weight at first while on these kinds of diets, they can be unhealthy because they often keep you from getting all the nutrients that your body needs. Fad diets may seriously limit or forbid certain types of food, so most people quickly get tired of them and regain the lost weight.

Research suggests that losing 1/2 to 2 pounds a week by eating better and exercising more is the best way to lose weight and keep it off. By improving your eating and exercise habits, you will develop a healthier lifestyle and control your weight. You will also reduce your chances of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

### Myth: Skipping meals is a good way to lose weight.

**Fact:** Your body needs a certain amount of calories and nutrients each day in order to work properly. If you skip meals during the day, you will be more likely to make up for those missing calories by snacking or eating more at the next meal. Studies show that people who skip breakfast tend to be heavier than those who eat a nutritious breakfast. A healthier way to lose weight is to eat many small meals throughout the day that include a variety of nutritious, low-fat, and low-calorie foods.



*Thanks for reading, we hope you found the information useful!*

If you need any additional information, support, or assistance please don't hesitate to contact EAP.

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