

# CONNECTIONS

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## LEADERSHIP *Matters*

### Return to Work Conference

City of Madison EAP Staff

After an employee has been on leave from the workplace, there is a need to help the employee and the workplace make the reintegration transition. An important element in facilitating this transition is the Return to Work (RTW) conference. Coordinated through the Employee Assistance Office, the RTW conference brings together the employee, the employee's supervisor, and the Employee Assistance staff person. On some occasions, other employees directly affected by the absence are involved. The purpose of the RTW conference is to discuss "work-related issues" related to the employee's resumption of work responsibilities.



Before the RTW conference, the EAP staff person typically meets individually with the returning employee to explain the objectives of the RTW conference. At the RTW conference, the EAP staff person will emphasize that the participants will focus on work-related issues only and that the employee has the right to share only those treatment details that seem appropriate. After the RTW conference, the EAP staff person will check in with the employee and supervisor to ensure that the transition is going smoothly.

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Hello City Employees!

This month's newsletter includes some articles that are more in line with the theme of how to support employees as they return to work after a significant event takes place, such as having a baby, losing a beloved pet, or returning to work after hospitalization or treatment for a personal problem.

We also acknowledge that many employees are at times exposed to uncomfortable behavioral situations with other employees or members of the public, so we have included the first of ten de-escalation tips from Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI). While CPI's first tip "Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental" is specific to de-escalating an uncomfortable or even hostile situation, it is a tip that I believe can assist in many of our daily encounters, including return to work situations like those previously mentioned.

Be safe, and thank you for the work you do!



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# LEADERSHIP *Matters*

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The RTW conference is a good time to discuss where things stand now. It is an opportunity to review work performance problems that may have existed prior to or during leave and develop a plan to resolve those problems. Then, identify conditions for return to employment so that everyone is on the same page.

This is also a chance to identify any special needs that the employee anticipates upon returning to work and develop a plan to address these needs, such as clarification and/or modification of job responsibilities, reduction of hours, schedule changes, etc. Encourage the employee to identify concerns about returning to work and to use support systems to deal with those concerns.

The employee should clarify what information may be shared with coworkers about their return, such as reason for absence, special needs upon return, changes to schedule, etc. (This is optional based on the comfort level of the employee.)

Another objective of the RTW conference is to update the employee on events that have occurred during their absence. This may include changes in staffing and procedure and news related to the organization as a whole.

The conference should be presented as an option available to all employees and as a way to help everyone clarify past, present and future work issues. For assistance in scheduling and preparing for the Return to Work conference, contact the Employee Assistance Office at 266-6561.



## Reintegrating a Recovering Employee

FEI Behavioral Health

When an employee takes a leave of absence from work for hospitalization or treatment for a personal problem, returning to the working world can be stressful. Initially, this can be an anxious time for all involved. Administrators may ask, "Should I go easy on the employee?" The employee may wonder, "What do my coworkers think of me?"

Returning employees may feel uncomfortable, guilty, and/or ashamed because of past behavior on the job. They may be concerned about how others perceive them, or they may feel quite the opposite. Each case will vary. With time, these questions are resolved and the initial uncertainty works itself out. However, the transitional period may cause discomfort.

In order to help ease the process for all concerned, follow these suggestions when reintegrating the recovering employee:

- Act natural and be yourself.
- Do not over-sympathize or overprotect. This behavior is a return to the old "enabling" behavior. The returning employee already feels different. Your overreaction will only exaggerate and intensify that "difference."
- Be honest. A pat on the back for a job well done is very important and can be reinforcing, if it is deserved. The employee will sense if you are not sincere.
- Be aware of mood swings and shifts in attitude. Do not ignore them because these could be symptoms of regression or relapse.
- Focus on overall performance of the employee. We all have "off" days. Rather than look at isolated incidents, notice patterns. Remember, recovery is a process.
- Be supportive of the employee's on-going treatment needs and encourage participation.
- Everyone makes mistakes. Be aware of your expectations of the employee and that it is human to make mistakes.
- Minimize the need for questioning the employee. Clarify what information is needed prior to the employee returning to work and limit the amount of personal information you request.
- Be patient with yourself and the returning employee. This process takes time.

# 5 Reasons We Should Take Pet Loss Seriously

## Why our hearts break and our lives get disrupted

By Guy Winch, *Psychology Today* (Used by permission of the author)

Losing a cherished pet can be an emotionally devastating experience. Unfortunately, on a societal level, we simply do not recognize how painful pet loss can be and how much it can impair our emotional and physical health, and even our basic functioning. The *New England Journal of Medicine* recently reported that a woman whose dog died experienced Broken Heart Syndrome—a condition in which the person exhibits symptoms that mimic a heart attack. While the story made worldwide news, it did little to change our general attitudes.

For example, few of us would ask our employers for time off to grieve a beloved pet. We fear that doing so would paint us as overly sentimental or emotionally weak. And few employers would grant such requests were we to make them.

The fact that pet loss isn't sanctioned by society at large has a significant and detrimental impact on our ability to recover. It not only robs us of crucial social support; it also makes us feel embarrassed about the magnitude of the heartbreak, and we feel hesitant to disclose our distress to our loved ones. We might even wonder what is wrong with us and question why we are responding in such "disproportional" ways to the loss.

Here are five reasons why pet loss can be so devastating, why it causes such disruption to our lives, and why we should take such events more seriously than we currently do.

### 1. Losing a pet can hurt as much as losing a family member.

Many pet owners consider their pets to be part of their family. In fact, many people who live alone consider their pet to be the closest member of their family. They might see their parents or siblings several times a year, but their cat, dog, horse, bird (or any other cherished animal we consider a pet) is part of their daily lives, and as such, the pet's death is likely to be far more impactful than that of a geographically distant relative.

### 2. All pets function as therapy animals.

Whether they are trained to do so or not, all pets function as therapy animals to some extent. Their mere presence provides companionship, reduces loneliness and depression, and eases anxiety. When we lose them, we lose a significant, and often vital, source of support and comfort.

### 3. Caretaking makes us feel better about ourselves.

Caring for another being, whether human or animal, has been shown to help our mood and self-esteem, and increase feelings of well-being and purpose. When we no longer have a pet to care for, we lose a significant source of emotional self-care as well.

### 4. Our daily routines get disrupted.

Caring for pets involves routines and responsibilities around which we craft our days. We get exercise by walking our dog, we wake up early to feed our cat, and we look forward to the weekend so we can ride our horse. Losing a pet disrupts established routines that provide us with structure and give our actions meaning. This is why in addition to emotional pain, we feel aimless and lost in the days and weeks after our pet dies.

### 5. We lose aspects of our identity.

Most dog owners are more likely to be known in their neighborhood by their animal's name than they are by theirs. They are Rosie's mom or Fido's dad, and they get attention wherever they go. Online, our pet's social media pages often have more followers than our own. As such, our pets become part of our self-definition, and losing them causes a rupture in our very sense of self. Without them, we are forced into anonymity, we become invisible.

Losing a pet doesn't just cause a broken heart; it elicits real and serious grief reactions. It's time we took it more seriously, both on an individual and on a societal level.

For more about healing from pet loss, see [How to Fix a Broken Heart](#).



## Introducing CPI's Top 10 De-Escalation Tips

Due to the variety and nature of the work that many city employees do, there are times when employees may find themselves in an uncomfortable situation with a member of the public, or perhaps even another employee who may be struggling with their mental health, has a cognitive or intellectual status different from our own, sees reality differently than we do, has a medical condition or medication imbalance, or has found themselves in an uncomfortable situation and is expressing themselves very inappropriately or perhaps even aggressively in the workplace. While we recommend calling 911 if anyone feels immediately threatened or unsafe for themselves or someone else due to the words or actions of another person in their work environment, sometimes situations do not rise to the level of contacting law enforcement, or you may find yourself in a situation where you feel uncomfortable or threatened but are unable to distance yourself from the individual making you uncomfortable, confused, afraid, or angry. Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) is a widely utilized and useful resource that teaches employees and organizations how to de-escalate disruptive and assaultive behavior in a safe, non-violent, and respectful way, and they have developed a list of Top 10 De-Escalation Tips which the EAP will be providing to you in this and upcoming newsletter articles. If you have more questions on de-escalation in the workplace, you can confidentially contact the EAP at 266-6561 or you can view upcoming trainings offered by Human Resources on their training website.

### De-Escalation Tip #1: Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental

By Emily Eilers, Crisis Prevention Institute

In an interview with LIFE magazine in May of 1963, the author James Baldwin said, "You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read...Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people."

Our instincts might tell us to react defensively to the level of energy and emotion that somebody else is pouring out in front of us, but the best thing we can do is take a mindful pause, however slight, and realize that we've been there too. We've all felt incredible pain, overwhelming stress, or been overcome by an indecipherable wave of emotion at some point in our lives. It's what makes us human, and that humanity is the same thing that makes us capable of safely and effectively de-escalating a person or situation away from crisis.

That's why the first of CPI's top 10 de-escalation tips is this: Be empathic and nonjudgmental.

Marcus Aurelius wrote, "Whenever you are about to find fault with someone, ask yourself the following question: what fault of mine most nearly resembles the one I am about to criticize?" Ask yourself: is your initial feeling of discomfort and repulsion toward an outburst simply because it's inappropriate to the situation, or could it also be the unexpected and jarring reflection of something you've been through, or are capable of, yourself?

When you encounter a person in crisis, be willing to make an earnest effort not to judge or discount their feelings even if you don't necessarily understand them or feel comfortable with them. Showing somebody else the grace and compassion you would want to be shown can go a long way toward helping them avoid escalating

#### DE-ESCALATION TIP 1



further. It also keeps the environment around you and the people working and living within it safe, by reducing the likelihood of violence.

Remember that behavior impacts behavior. The empathy you show to a person in crisis can not only transform the immediate situation, but can demonstrate a useful skill that others may someday use when they find themselves on the other side of an escalating individual or situation. The choice to be empathetic may seem simple, but it has the power to change your world.

# How to Support Nursing Mothers in the Workplace

By Hailey Krueger, City of Madison EAP

Women make up almost 47% of today's workforce, many of whom are working mothers. Approximately 70% of mothers with children under the age of 18 participate in the workforce, and 75% of those are working full-time. Despite these figures, there continue to be stigmas surrounding working mothers, particularly women who become pregnant or give birth to a child while they are employed.

While many employers and supervisors want to be supportive of an employee's decision to breastfeed their child and return to work, many are not sure how to do so or feel uncomfortable talking about the topic with an employee. Conversely, many employees are afraid to speak to their supervisors about their desire to express breastmilk at work, as they do not know their rights, are embarrassed, or may feel they will be viewed as being a burden on the workplace, weak, or not pulling their share.

There is demonstrated benefit of providing a working mother a private, secure, and sanitary place to express breastmilk (also referred to as "pumping") to both the pumping mother as well as the employer. Many employers do not realize that breastfeeding can save money. Employer benefits for supporting breastfeeding employees include:

- Breastfeeding employees miss work less often because breastfed infants are healthier.
- Breastfeeding lowers health care costs.
- Breastfeeding support helps employers keep their best employees so that less money is spent hiring and training new employees.
- Breastfeeding employees who are supported in the workplace report higher productivity and loyalty.
- Supporting breastfeeding employees creates a positive public image.

## For Employees Who Are Nursing Mothers

The chart below outlines some of the most common responses moms receive when talking to their employer, and may help you consider and prepare for any concerns your employer may have.

If your employer says...	Try responding with...
"The bathroom is the only space available."	"Breast milk is food for my baby so it shouldn't be expressed in a bathroom, but I looked into some solutions that other companies have used that I think will work here too." [If needed: "Finding a space that isn't a bathroom is required by law."]
"How am I supposed to cover your position while you are on break?"	"I thought through a schedule and how we could handle it. It's actually pretty similar to how we handle other staff breaks - can I tell you what I had in mind?"
"This will be bad for business."	"Actually, a lot of companies say that it's good for business. Breastfeeding will help keep me and my baby healthy so I can do my best work."
"Why can't you just pump when you get home?"	"If I don't pump as often as my baby eats, my supply will go down and I won't make enough to feed her. It's really important to me and it's only temporary."
"My daughter/niece/friend drank formula and she's the smartest/fastest/healthiest kid in her class."	"Lots of kids do! But this is really important to me and is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. I can't do it without your support."
"I can't make any promises if it gets busy."	"I'm more than willing to be flexible and I know we can make this work for both of us." [If needed: "Accommodating me is required by law."]



## For Coworkers

Coworkers sometimes wonder where they fit in to the equation when it comes to supporting a pumping mother in the workplace. The following are reminders and tips for you to consider if you have a coworker who has decided to pump at work:

- She needs to pump in a clean, secure, and comfortable place. A bathroom is not an appropriate place to pump.
- She will need breaks to pump every three to four hours for about 15-30 minutes each session. If she skips a session her breasts will become uncomfortably full and possibly cause her milk supply to decrease.
- Breastfeeding is an important part of having a healthy baby. This means she will miss less days of work, be more productive, and possibly make your job easier.
- Be supportive and flexible; do not be afraid to ask respectful questions about breastfeeding.
- Never make a coworker feel as though she is a burden on the workplace because of her decision to provide breastmilk for her baby, if you have concerns, privately ask your supervisor or someone in the Employee Assistance Program or Human Resources.
- Acknowledge and applaud her decision to continue providing breast milk for her baby after returning to work, let her know you support her decision.
- Offer encouragement. Pumping is hard work! Recognize the positive impact her decision has on many levels.
- Regardless of how your co-worker chooses to feed her baby, do not judge her choices.

✦ DeWolf, M. (2017, March 1). *12 Stats About Working Women*. In *U.S. Department of Labor Blog*. Retrieved July 27, 2018, from <https://blog.dol.gov/2017/03/01/12-stats-about-working-women>

✦ *What are the benefits to employers? (2018)*. In *United States Breastfeeding Committee*. Retrieved July 27, 2018, from <http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/p/cm/ld/fid=234>

✦ *How should you talk to your employer about nursing breaks? (2018)*. In *United States Breastfeeding Committee*. Retrieved July 27, 2018, from <http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/p/cm/ld/fid=236>

## For Supervisors

To better support pumping mothers, supervisors can consider scheduling a private meeting with the employee before she leaves for her maternity leave, or connecting when she is nearing the end of her leave to begin planning for her return to the workplace. At this meeting, you could discuss a Return to Work plan, which might include her need to pump. You could say something like, "some women who decide to breastfeed their babies in the first year need a place to pump while at work, is that something you would like more information on?"

Choosing to breastfeed versus formula feed a child is a deeply personal decision, and in no way should be influenced by the workplace, a supervisor, or any other employee's personal beliefs. You can also consider contacting the EAP or Human Resources for more information on hosting a Return to Work Conference with the employee to help ease her transition back into the workplace, and how the discussion around breastfeeding and pumping at work might be incorporated into this conference. Women should never have to express breastmilk in a bathroom, so if you need help identifying a private, secure, and comfortable place for an employee to pump, preferably with access to a sink and an electrical outlet, please contact Human Resources for more information.

To learn more about the benefits of breastfeeding on the workplace and how to support a breastfeeding/pumping mother, employees and supervisors have a few options:

- Visit <http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/p/cm/ld/fid=200> to educate yourself further on this topic.
- Consider joining the Women's Initiatives Committee with the City of Madison! They are currently looking at ways to support breastfeeding/pumping mothers in the City, though they discuss other issues pertinent to women in the workforce as well. You can contact Kate McCarthy at [kmccarthy@cityofmadison.com](mailto:kmccarthy@cityofmadison.com) for more information.
- To obtain information on what a nursing mother's rights are to pump in the workplace, review this Department of Labor fact sheet: **FLSA Fact Sheet #73**.
- Contact Human Resources at 266-4615 for additional support and questions.
- If you would like to confidentially ask for information about supporting nursing/working mothers, obtain guidance on how to talk to an employee about this topic, or if you are a breastfeeding/pumping employee needing support, contact the Employee Assistance Office at 266-6561.



Date	Time	Topic	A LEADING VOICE FOR CAREGIVERS
Wednesday, August 1 <sup>st</sup>	Eastern 1:00 pm Central 12:00 pm Mountain 11:00 am Pacific (Arizona) 10:00 am	<b>Compassion Fatigue with Amy Cunningham</b> <i>In this talk you will learn the how to differentiate between, stress, burnout, and Compassion Fatigue. You will learn to recognize the signs and symptoms of Compassion Fatigue, identify the trajectory, and begin to implement the 5 resilience's needed to assist you in achieving growth.</i>	
Thursday, August 9 <sup>th</sup>	Eastern 11:00 am Central 10:00 am Mountain 9:00 am Pacific (Arizona) 8:00 am	<b>Lucy Barylak, MSW as "Dear Lucy"</b> <i>Caregivers will have the opportunity to call in and ask questions, make comments and express yourself regarding the issues you face as a caregiver. <b>You can submit your questions or comments by e-mail or phone.</b></i>	
Monday, August 13 <sup>th</sup>	Eastern 1:00 pm Central 12:00 pm Mountain 11:00 am Pacific (Arizona) 10:00 am	<b>Anxiety and Depression Medication in the Geriatric Population with Rick Rayl, R.Ph</b> <i>What are medications used to treat anxiety and depression in the geriatric population? Learn about how medications affect older adults. Be able to recognize side effects and adverse reactions associated with each class of drugs. What does a caregiver need to know about the relationship between diagnosis and medication treatment? <b>***Sponsored by the North Central Texas Caregiver Teleconnection***</b></i>	
Monday, August 20 <sup>th</sup>	Eastern 12:00 pm Central 11:00 am Mountain 10:00 am Pacific (Arizona) 9:00 am	<b>Developing a Care Plan: Know your Future Now with Evalyn Greb, LCSW</b> <i>Evalyn Greb, LCSW will discuss how to properly assess your situation for you and your loved one as it is and help you understand how to prepare for the future care of your loved one. Learn about the importance of having a plan in place in order to avoid crisis situations.</i>	
Tuesday, August 28 <sup>th</sup>	Eastern 12:00 pm Central 11:00 am Mountain 10:00 am Pacific (Arizona) 9:00 am	<b>Dementia: Effective Communication Strategies with Russell Gainer, LCSW</b> <i>We will explain the communication changes that take place throughout the course of the disease, decode the verbal and behavioral messages delivered by someone with dementia and respond in ways that are helpful to the person, and identify stages to connect and communicate at each stage of the disease. Specific focus will attend to dealing with the strong personality and dementia.</i>	



A program of the WellMed Charitable Foundation  
 Register online at [www.caregiverteleconnection.org](http://www.caregiverteleconnection.org) or call 866.390.6491 Toll Free

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

**You can reach any of us by calling the  
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