CITY OF MADISON EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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HeartMath

The Employee Assistance Office offers a resiliency building program to City employees called HeartMath that aims to decrease and manage stress and promote well-being. HeartMath employs simple biofeedback technology that allows you to watch your heart rhythm on an electronic device provided by the EAP while utilizing heart-focused breathing techniques. This allows you to physically see how stress manifests in your body, as well as watch it reduce as you practice these breathing techniques. HeartMath can be taught in individual, small group, and large group settings. Please contact the employee assistance program if you are interested in learning more about this service, and consider signing up for our upcoming two-part training session on HeartMath on October 16 and 30, 2019 on the **OD training calendar**. We have included an article from HeartMath that addresses the negative self-talk that many of us have streaming through our mind, and how HeartMath can be a positive coping strategy to address it.

What's Streaming through Your Mind? How to Change Thought Streams That Don't Serve Our Best Interests

by Doc Childre, HeartMath

We're all streaming content these days, whether it be a movie on our computer, a podcast on our phone, or the ideas streaming through our heads. We can choose the external content we want to focus on. But what about the streaming content inside? Do we allow streaming conversations of self-doubt, worry, anger or blame to play on and own us?

Streaming negative self-talk is often a constant source of personal energy drain. Let's take a deeper look and explore some suggestions that can help us take charge.

Most of us are conscious of the whisper thoughts and feelings constantly running through our awareness—whether at home, at work, sleeping, or riding in an Uber. Most of these thoughts move through quickly if we don't feed them, yet occasionally a "downer" thought will snag our focus and begin to loop and grow in feeling. Downer thoughts can crash the effectiveness of a whole day or longer once they expand into anger, harsh judgments, hurt feelings, or guilt for feeling that way. Downer projections especially, can own us for hours and it's humorous how we can be aware of this yet can't seem to do much to manage it. (That is, until from our heart, we decide that we can.)

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CITY OF MADISON EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM 2300 S. Park St., Suite 111 Madison, WI 53703 www.cityofmadison.com/employee-assistance-program

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Greetings City Employees,

It's that time of year again when employees and family members send their children back to school after dutifully checking off all of the tasks and supplies needed to prepare them for the coming school year. One task that is often overlooked is making sure kids are emotionally prepared for school, and that parents feel prepared to help them if they encounter mental health struggles. Back to school can bring feelings of excitement and reconnection with friends, as well as a more structured schedule, however, studies have shown that children, teens, and young adults can still feel a great deal of loneliness and stress. Please consider reading or forwarding this newsletter to anyone who is the guardian of a child going back to school.

Even if a child does not appear or state that they are lonely or stressed, the information in this newsletter with the accompanying attachments can offer talking points for letting children know that you care about them and the struggles they and their peers face. Because suicide is a leading cause of death in children and teens ages 10-18, we have included an article on warning signs and how to talk to kids about suicide. Though it may not be a child in your life who struggles with thoughts of suicide, talking to them may help them feel more comfortable talking to you if they ever are concerned about one of their friends potentially being suicidal. Whether you are talking to a teen or any other person in your life, how you talk about sensitive topics is just as important as having the conversation in the first place, and nonjudgmental listening skills, also found in this newsletter, can be beneficial to the success of that conversation.

If you ever want more information about child mental health and suicide, including how to talk to your children preventatively about these issues, never hesitate to call the EAP confidentially to discuss this further, and remind your family members that they can do so as well.

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Renewing Heart Qualities Can Help Us Take Charge

On the positive side, some whisper thoughts and feelings renew us and support us being our best. We can benefit by creating a conscious habit of noticing and energizing renewing thoughts and feelings. It's also helpful to take some time each day to engage in higher vibrational thoughts and actions, such as kindness, gratitude, compassion, helping others, etc. These uplifting heart qualities help to *offset* the stress accumulation from thought loops and feelings that drain our energy and strain our ability to reason and make comfortable choices.

So much is happening in shorter durations of time these days that our mind and emotions can easily get overloaded. This often triggers anxiety, worry and fear projections. It's helpful to practice shifting feelings of worry or fear into the attitude of *managed concern*. Managed concern is an *emotionally balanced state of concern* that connects us with a clearer view and effective reasoning. Worry and fear tend to overpower our access to effective reasoning and perception. They especially dim our heart's intuitive suggestions and solutions, which can be critical at times. Excessive worry is one of the stealthiest ways we sabotage our well-being, and then we worry more because we can't figure out what caused the problem.

How to Practice Managed Concern

Practice identifying some of your worries that stir fear or anxiety, then experiment with shifting them into the attitude of managed concern. The attitude of *experimenting* is a lighter approach which results in less self-judgment of your performance. Practice first with smaller issues to build your confidence. Before each practice, review the benefits of managed concern (intelligent concern) compared to the energy drain from excessive worry. Soon it will become an automatic reflex to make an attitude adjustment when you sense looping feelings and perceptions that destabilize your well-being.

Practicing managed concern along with engaging in renewing heart qualities, such as kindness, patience and compassion with ourselves and others can make a big difference in the vibrational quality of our day-to-day experience. We can feel under pressure at times, but eventually this presses us to finally realize that we have more power, in most cases, over how we choose to think, feel and respond to situations. We *can* take charge of streaming internal content once our heart's commitment supports our mind's intention. Positive results will follow genuine efforts. It's up to each of us.

Increasing Skills for Resilience in the Face of Personal and Work Stress (HeartMath)

In this two-part training series, you will learn simple, science-based resilience building techniques that you can use throughout the day. Resilience gives you the benefits of better sleep, decreased stress at work, improved teamwork, the ability to deal with and recover from difficult situations, process information, solve problems and enhance creativity. You will be introduced to the Heartmath core concepts and technology. identify everyday situations that deplete and renew your energy, and identify a personal goal for increasing resiliency.

Recommended for: All Employees, City Partners

Upcoming Courses:

October 16, 2019 10:00 am - 12:00 pm Suite 204 215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. and October 30, 2019 10:00 am - 12:00 pm Suite 204 215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

REGISTER HERE

Talking to Teens: Suicide Prevention

American Psychological Association Fact Sheet

Suicide is a difficult topic, but it's too important to ignore. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24. Despite a common belief that only teens and adults die by suicide, younger children can also be at risk.

Depression and suicide often coincide. Yet not everyone who is depressed attempts suicide—and not everyone who attempts suicide is depressed. If you're a parent, a teacher, or anyone who spends time with children and teens, it's important to learn the warning signs. These tools can help you prevent youth suicide.

If you have any concerns about a young person's mental health, take action. These steps can help:

- **Express your concern.** It's a myth that if you mention suicide, you might plant the idea. By honestly and openly expressing your concerns, you'll send an important message that you care and understand.
- **Really listen**. Parents can be tempted to shut down an upsetting conversation by saying, "I don't want to hear those things," or "I had a hard time as a teen, but I got over it." Instead, say, "Tell me more about how you're feeling." Then listen.
- Maintain Connection. You might want to safeguard a child or teen by keeping him home in a protective cocoon, but isolation can increase the risk of suicidal behaviors. Help a struggling child maintain connections with friends and loved ones. As a parent, spend extra time with your child. Even watching TV or playing video games together sends a signal that you're there.
- Be compassionate. Express your love for the child or teen. Tell her you hear her pain, that it can get better, that you will make sure she gets help and will support her every step of the way.
- **Trust your judgment.** If a young person denies that he is having suicidal thoughts, but you doubt his honesty, trust your intuition. Take further steps to ensure his or her safety.
- **Prioritize safety.** Remove weapons from the house, make sure the child or teen is not left alone and consult a mental health professional right away.

Resources

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, afsp.org
- American Association of Suicidology, suicidology.org
- Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, sptsusa.org

The American Psychological Association gratefully acknowledges psychologists Mary Alvord, PhD, Nadine Kaslow, PhD, Shane Owens, PhD, and Robin Gurwitch, PhD, for their help with this fact sheet.

Suicide Prevention Training

QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) is a suicide prevention program taught by the City's EAP that teaches employees how to identify suicide warning signs in coworkers, family members, or members of the public, offers different ways to ask the suicide question, and provides a guide for how to get someone help who may be suicidal. QPR can be done in large or small groups, can last anywhere between 45 minutes to 3 hours, and can be tailored to departments' needs based on the particular populations served. Please call the EAP at 266-6561 to inquire further about QPR in your agency.

Risk Factors

Several factors increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviors, including:

- Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety and other mood disorders
- Alcohol and substance use
- Impulsive behaviors
- History of trauma or abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Previous suicide attempt(s)



Not everyone exhibits the same signs that they're thinking about suicide, but these warning signs are cause for concern:

- Physical changes in appearance or hygiene
- Increase in alcohol or drug use
- Sudden drop in grades
- Social withdrawal
- Talking about suicide or preoccupation with death
- Risky or reckless behaviors (such as reckless driving or unsafe sex)
- Self-harm behaviors such as cutting
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having nothing to live for
- Researching suicide methods and/or acquiring weapons



Everyone experiences stress. Stress is how the body handles life's challenges—chemicals are released to increase certain bodily processes and decrease others so we can react quickly and effectively during dangerous or high-pressure situations. Sometimes being under stress can lead to good results for your child or teen, even if it makes them uncomfortable at the moment. For instance, cramming for a test can be stressful, but lead to a better grade. Or the stress of being down a few goals in a soccer game can cause a surge in performance to score more points. These stress reactions usually don't last long, and your child or teen's body can return to normal relatively quickly. But if stress doesn't let up, then the body doesn't get the break it needs – and mental and physical health can be affected.

While most kids and teens aren't dealing with bills, difficult bosses, and frustrating commutes, there are plenty of situations that can cause them stress. Some stress may seem just a part of growing up, but there are also children and teens who are dealing with more serious stressors.



WHAT IS STRESSING CHILDREN AND TEENS THE MOST?

Mental Health America surveyed 11-17 year olds who came to MHAScreening.org about what was stressing them out. Here's are the top 5 things that caused them stress.



SIGNS OF STRESS

Survey takers said they knew their stress levels were getting out of control when they experienced wanting to be alone, wanting to sleep all the time, and/or losing their temper quickly.

Here are some other things to look out for in your child or teen that signal they are feeling stressed-out:

- Headaches or other unexplained aches and pains
- More frequent visits to the school nurse
- Getting colds more than usual
- Feeling sad or moody
- Seeming "burned out"
- Sounding defeated when talking about challenges
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite
- Fighting with family and friends
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Acting nervous or anxious

If your child or teen has one or more of these symptoms, be alert. They could be signs of a physical illness coming on. If not, it's time to find out what is happening in your child or teen's life, and whether they are getting stressed out. Get tips for talking to your child or teen at **bit.ly/startmhconvo**.

HELPING CHILDREN AND TEENS MANAGE STRESS

You might not be able to stop what is stressing your child or teen, but you can help them. If you notice that they're showing signs of stress, try the following:

REMIND THEM TO BE KIND TO THEMSELVES.

No one is perfect. No one gets it right all the time. No one always has all the answers. If they are trying hard and doing their best, that's what is important.

HELP THEM MANAGE THEIR TIME.

If they feel overwhelmed with all that they need to get done, help them to set a schedule and set small goals and break down tasks into manageable chunks. If they still feel overwhelmed, it may be necessary to cut out some activities.

DON'T FORGET THE BASICS.

Feed them healthy foods, and limit caffeine and sugar. Encourage them to go to bed by a certain time so they get enough sleep for the following day.

LOOKOUT FOR SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE USE.

Teens especially may turn to drugs, alcohol, or vaping to cope with stress. If you find out that your child or teen has, remind them that substances won't solve anything and may lead to bigger problems, and keep a close eye on their behavior.

LET THEM KNOW IT'S OK TO "LET IT OUT."

They may need to cry or have a good laugh. Laughing and crying can both help release the feeling of pent up emotions.

HELP THEM RELAX.

Relaxing is essential for everybody's physical and mental health. Find out what really helps them relax and encourage them to spend at least half an hour each day doing it. It might be curling up with a good book, going on a bike ride, or listening to music.

TELL THEM YOU LOVE THEM.

Children and teens may stress themselves out because they feel as though they need your approval. It's important that they know you will love them no matter what.

REMIND THEM THAT IT'S OK TO ASK FOR HELP.

No one should suffer in silence and knowing when to ask for help is a strength, not a weakness. Make sure they know that you are there to talk if they need you and be open to finding additional help through school counselors or mental health professionals if problems with stress continue.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP?

If you have worked with your child or teen to help them manage their stress, but they still seem to be struggling, they may be experiencing the early signs of a mental health condition.

HALF OF ALL MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS START BY AGE 14.1

Take the parent screen at **MHAScreening.org** to see if your child or teen may be at risk. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with more information and help you to figure out next steps.





CHILDREN AND TEENS ARE NO EXCEPTION.

OVER 2/3 of 11-17 year olds surveyed by MHA felt stressed out about loneliness.

EFFECTS OF LONELINESS

Research shows that chronic loneliness has the following effects:²

- Increased levels of cortisol, the stress hormone
- Less restful sleep
- Negative impact on physical health (more than smoking or obesity)
- Headaches or other unexplained aches and pains
- Poor self-care (grooming, hygiene, diet)
- · Higher likelihood of alcohol or drug use
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Negative outlook on life
- Poor self esteem
- Greater risk of suicide

Furthermore, the same part of the brain that reacts to physical pain is activated by social rejection.³

COMMON CAUSES OF LONELINESS

Certain life circumstances may cause children and teens to feel lonely, such as:

- Moving to a new neighborhood
- Changing schools
- Divorce
- An older sibling leaving home
- Being "single" when their friends have boyfriends or girlfriends
- Fights with friends
- Being bullied
- Death in the family

SIGNS OF LONELINESS

YOUNGER CHILDREN MAY:

- Create imaginary friends to make up for lack of real friends
- Seem clingy or start asking you to play with them more than usual
- Seek your attention by misbehaving, acting silly, or interrupting you when they know they shouldn't
- Act timid or unsure of themselves
- Cry more often than other children their age

ADOLESCENTS AND TEENS MAY:

- Retreat to their rooms for long periods of time
- Start talking to you more than usual
- Seem sad
- Appear to not have friends to hang out with outside of school
- No longer hang out with friends that they used to spend a lot of time with
- Talk negatively about themselves

By contrast, if your child or teen seems to be spending a lot of time alone, they may not actually be lonely. There are some children and teens who enjoy reading or popping in a pair of earbuds to listen to music over trips to the mall or parties. The easiest way to figure out if your child or teen is just introverted or whether they are lonely is to ask.

GOING ONLINE: A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Most people who are parents and teachers didn't grow up using the internet the way children and teens do now. Between social media, gaming, and general internet use, there are a lot of ways that being online can impact loneliness, for better or for worse.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Fifty-seven percent of teens say they have met a new friend online and 68% of teen social media users said they received support from others during challenging or tough times.⁴ However, not all social media use is good for teen friendships.

While less than a quarter (24%) of teens find social media to have a mostly negative effect on their lives, 27% of those say that social media has caused them to be bullied or affected by rumor spreading, which can cause loneliness.⁵ Another study found that of teens who use social media, 53% said they saw people posting about events that they weren't invited to.

GAMING

If your child or teen seems to be spending a lot of time gaming, they may actually be socializing in their own way. While virtual friendships can never replace face-to-face interactions, many teens go online to communicate with existing friends outside of school and make new friends.

Both boys and girls say that they have met new friends while playing games online, with over 4x as many boys doing so than girls. Furthermore, 78% of teen gamers say that playing online makes them feel closer to friends that they already know.⁷

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

If you suspect that your child or teen is struggling with loneliness, the best way to figure out for certain is to start a conversation and ask. If loneliness is a problem, here are some things you can do to help:

Talk to them about their interests. Find out what they enjoy and then look into groups or classes that they may be able to join to further explore those interests.

Try recreational sports. Rec sports teams give your child or teen the chance to meet a group of their peers that may not necessarily go to the same school as them.

See what your faith community has to offer. There may be youth groups or classes during worship services that your child or teen could become part of.

Make time for extended family. If your child or teen has cousins or other relatives around their age that are within a reasonable distance, set up time for them to get together.

Talk to their teachers. See if they may be able to facilitate more small group interactions during class that might help your child or teen make friends or match them up with someone to sit with at lunch time.

Leverage your own friends. If your friends or coworkers have children or teens, organize a time for them to meet with you and bring their child so both adults and children can socialize. This could be just a visit to one another's homes, a meal out at a restaurant, or a trip to a local event or attraction.

Consult with a therapist. If you think that your child or teen is lonely because they struggle with social skills, a therapist can help.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE HELP? . .

Long-term loneliness can lead to the development of mental health conditions like anxiety or depression if not addressed early. If you suspect that your child or teen is already experiencing signs of a mental health condition, take the parent screen at MHAScreening.org.

It's free, confidential, and anonymous. Once you get the results, MHA will provide you with information and resources to help guide you through next steps.

SOURCES

7lbid

SOURCES "https://www.cigna.com/newsroom/news-releases/2018/new-cigna-study-reveals-loneliness-at-epidemic-levels-in-america "https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2011/03/22/1102693108.abstract "Teens, Technology & Friendships (Pew Research Center 2015) "Teens, Social Media, Technology (Pew Research Center 2018) "Teens, Technology & Friendships (Pew Research Center 2015) "Teens, Technology & Friendships (Pew Research Center 2015)



For a handout on stress and loneliness geared toward the student in your life, click here.



We also encourage you to watch the one hour documentary by PBS on the mental health experiences of children and teens in Wisconsin, which additionally addresses the mental health struggles faced by children of color, LGBT youth, and children who experience bullying. It highlights the shortage of child and adolescent psychiatrists in our state and country, and provides guidance on what caregivers can do to support the mental health of the children and teens they care for. The documentary is broken up into two half-hour segments, the first featuring four Wisconsin kids talking about their mental health struggles and recovery, and the second half hour focusing on mental health care in Wisconsin and support for parents.



Remembering Kirsten Vanderscheuren

The Department of Civil Rights has organized a team to participate in the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Muscle Walk of Greater Madison on Sunday, September 22, 2019 to honor the memory of our coworker, Kirsten Vanderscheuren, who passed away in March.

The Association is dedicated to curing muscular dystrophy, ALS, and related diseases by funding worldwide research. At just under a year old, Kirsten was diagnosed with Type 2 Spinal Muscular Atrophy, so the MDA is a nonprofit health agency that was close to Kirsten's heart. Kirsten was the Muscular Dystrophy's Good Will Ambassador for a number of years and appeared at many MDA events. We would like to honor her spirit by supporting this impactful organization. Here is a link to our team page containing pertinent information. If you would like make an impact but are unable to attend the event, **here** is a link to donate to the MDA in honor of Kirsten. Please share with your employees as you feel appropriate. We look forward to joining together with you to support the work of the MDA.

Team Name: Kirsten's Rays of Sunshine

Date: Sunday, September 22, 2019

Time: 9:00 AM

Location: Warner Park

Registration is FREE and all are welcome.

Five Tips for Nonjudgmental Listening

Mental Health First Aid

It's hard to be nonjudgmental all the time. We automatically make judgments about people from the minute we first see or meet them based on appearance, behavior and what they say. And that's okay. Nonjudgmental listening isn't about avoiding those judgments—it's about making sure that you don't express those negative judgments because that can get in the way of helping someone in need.

When you're trying to be there for your friend, neighbor or colleague, it's important to maintain a positive attitude and open mind to truly be supportive. Use these Mental Health First Aid tips to be an effective nonjudgmental listener for those around you.

1. Reflect on your own state of mind.

Before approaching someone with your concerns, it's important to make sure you are in the right frame of mind to talk and listen without being judgmental. Reflect on your own state of mind to make sure you are feeling calm, open and ready to help your peer in need.

2. Adopt an attitude of acceptance, genuineness and empathy.

Adopting an attitude of acceptance means respecting the person's feelings, personal values and experiences as valid, even if they are different from your own or you disagree with them. Taking time to imagine yourself in the other person's place can help you be more genuine and empathic.

3. Use verbal skills to show that you're listening.

Simple verbal skills can help you show the person that you're actively listening. This includes asking questions, listening to tone of voice and nonverbal cues being used, using minimal prompts like "I see" and "ah" and not interrupting the person to give them time to express their thoughts and feelings.

4. Maintain positive body language.

Positive body language can show the person that you're listening and truly care. This includes maintaining comfortable eye contact, sitting down instead of standing, sitting alongside and angled toward the person rather than directly opposite him or her and maintaining an open body position.

5. Recognize cultural differences.

If you are helping someone from a cultural background different from your own, you might need to adjust some verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as the level of eye contact or amount of personal space. Be prepared to discuss what is culturally appropriate and realistic for the person or seek advice from someone from the same cultural background before engaging with him or her.



These tips are just a place to start. You can also get trained in Mental Health First Aid and learn about other ways to listen nonjudgmentally and support those around you. The MHFA Action Plan—ALGEE—will help you approach and talk to a person in distress and respond in a safe and effective way to get them the help they need. Get trained today and #BeTheDifference in the lives of your loved ones.

SUPERVISOR SESSIONS:

Managing Difficult Employee Situations

In this two-part training series, we will provide current supervisors with an opportunity to receive a refresher training on what the Employee Assistance Program is and how it can assist supervisors in navigating challenging and sensitive issues that arise in their employees.

Recommended for: Supervisors & Managers, City Partners

Upcoming Courses:

September 11, 2019, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm 215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Suite 204

and

September 25, 2019, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm 215 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Suite 204

REGISTER HERE

Thanks for reading,

we hope you found the information useful!

You can reach any of us by calling the EAP Office at (608) 266-6561

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To learn more about your external EAP services, please contact FEI at 1-800-236-7905 or log on to **feieap.com** and type username: madison.