

CONNECTIONS

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When Should We Be Over Our Trauma?

How long is too long to be affected by trauma? Is getting over it realistic?

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Key points

- Abuse survivors are often told they should be over their trauma, or that their experience was not real trauma.
- Healing is largely shaped by available support, safety, and resources, which not all of us have access to.
- Time alone does not heal what we have not yet processed.

I was on social media yesterday—as one does.

I had posted a reel in support of survivors of rejection, using my personal experience as an example. And while I was scrolling, I noticed someone had commented on it:

“Why are you not over this yet? This happened, what, 20 years ago?”

My first thought—besides *Yikes, I guess my anti-aging cream isn't working as well as I thought*—was to keep scrolling and ignore it—one of those things I try to teach all my younger clients, but often struggle to do myself.

But then I noticed they had commented again:

“People really overuse the word trauma lately. Family rejection isn't even real trauma. Many people get over that type of trauma, or something similar, in less time. If you're still harping on it, then you're stuck.”

So of course, like any emotionally strong person who absolutely knows better than to seek external validation on social media, I immediately went down a rabbit hole seeking validation on social media. I found myself scrolling through the accounts of other well-known trauma therapists and combing through hashtags, looking for validation. But validation never came. Instead, my mind flooded with questions:

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As we step into spring, we're reminded that even after the longest winters, change and renewal are always possible. Longer days, warmer weather, and fresh starts can bring new energy and perspective and we hope you're able to find small moments of positivity in this season.

We also recognize that the world can feel uncertain right now, with so much happening both close to home and beyond. It's natural to feel the weight of that at times. Even so, there is strength in staying connected, supporting one another, and taking intentional steps to care for your well-being.

We're excited to share that our team will be back to full staff this April, with two new team members joining us. This means we can continue providing the same high-quality services you rely on, including in-house couples counseling.

In this quarter's newsletter, you will find:

- When Should we be Over Our Trauma
- Psychological Safety: The Secret Sauce for Workplace Success
- 6 Ways to Protect your Relationships as a First Responder
- Talking to Adolescents and Teens- Starting the Conversation
- Spring Coloring Activity

As you move through the season ahead, remember that you don't have to do it all on your own. Support is here when you need it, whether you're looking for guidance, connection, or just someone to listen.

Wishing you a season of renewal, balance, and brighter days ahead.

Warmly,

The EAP Team



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Are they right?

Am I really stuck in my trauma?

Is this something I should be over by now?

Was it even “real” trauma?

I found myself doing what I know so many survivors do: intellectualizing, explaining, excusing, and slipping into a familiar pattern. I spend my days providing validation to survivors of abuse who have spent years, even decades, being told that their experience was *not that bad*. I provide training to educate other clinicians and healthcare workers on how profound and long-lasting this type of trauma can be.

So, why was I spiraling? It’s like I had regressed in that moment. Who was this person?

Survivors of abuse are often told that their experience wasn’t really traumatic

One of the biggest fears many survivors carry is the **fear** of “overreacting.” I see this especially in survivors of abusive families and relationships, where their reality was denied, minimized, or gaslit for years. When you’ve been taught not to trust your own experience, even one careless comment (such as one from a keyboard warrior, for example) can reopen the wound. Especially when their words echo the kinds of messages survivors hear all the time:

You should be over it.

It happened so long ago.

Other people have had worse.

So when should we officially be “over” trauma experiences?

The answer is: *It depends.*

For some people, they may only be beginning to unpack what happened, even if decades have passed since the original events. They may have spent years surviving through coping mechanisms like food, overwork, substances, or emotional numbing. Then, in sobriety or safety, they are finally able to confront the demons that have haunted them all along. Time alone does not heal what we have not yet processed.

Others may have had strong external supports, things like safe family, **therapy**, faith communities, support groups, or chosen family, that helped them metabolize the pain sooner. All of these factors matter because healing is shaped by support, safety, timing, and resources. These things all impact whether something continues to stay with us. In fact, some research shows that symptoms can stay with us for decades following the event, especially if the event was catastrophic and survivors were not given adequate support to process what happened.^{1,2}

So, what does “getting over it” even mean?

Does it mean we no longer think about it?

Does it mean we are never triggered by it?

Does it mean we stop naming it as trauma because it makes other people uncomfortable?

None of those standards is realistic.

Now that I’ve had time to breathe and reflect, I keep coming back to that keyboard warrior’s comment. Would they say the same thing to a veteran decades removed from combat? To a child forced to flee a war-torn country? Which traumas are considered legitimate enough to deserve compassion? I do agree that the word *trauma* can be overused, especially lately, where it has become a sort of buzzword. But I also believe some experiences are undeniably **traumatic**—though even that word sometimes feels too small. To me, being rejected and abandoned by one’s own family falls into that category. Even if Bob from Ohio doesn’t agree.

The truth is, some people will always find a way to dismiss pain. All survivors encounter this. So when it comes to healing—and being “over it”—there’s no universal deadline. It depends on the person, the trauma, and the journey they’ve had to navigate.

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www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/invisible-bruises/202604/when-should-we-be-over-our-trauma

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LEADERSHIP *Matters*

Psychological Safety: The Secret Sauce for Workplace Success

Why Psychological Safety is the Key to Thriving Teams and Happy Workplaces

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If you can't wait for some time off, feel less than enthusiastic about going to work, fantasize about quitting your job, or worry about your ideas or contributions being dismissed, it may be more than just workplace stress. The issue might be a lack of psychological safety in your workplace.

Sounds like a corporate buzzword? Psychological safety in a team is about creating an environment where open communication thrives, respect is mutual, and vulnerability is welcomed. This magical ingredient lets people take risks, share ideas, ask questions, and admit mistakes without being side-eyed or shut down. This culture boosts individual and professional growth and strengthens team dynamics and outcomes. Moreover, according to British business psychologist Heather De Cruz-Cornaire MSc, BSc (Hons), "The impact of psychological safety in the workplace is powerful and transformational, even magical!"

The Data Doesn't Lie

You may think, "This sounds nice, but why should I care?" Yet here's some food for thought. A 2023 Lyra study revealed that 65 percent of U.S. workers said their mental health affected their job performance, up from 60 percent in 2022. The top factors were feeling unappreciated and concerns about fairness. Yikes. The pandemic made one thing very clear, mental health can no longer be ignored in the workplace. It affects work performance, attendance, team cohesiveness, and the bottom line. The message is clear: Organizations must get serious about mental health and fostering a culture where employees feel valued.

Lessons from Amy Edmondson

Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School professor and psychological safety guru researched teams in hospitals and discovered something surprising: the best teams weren't the ones making the fewest mistakes; they were the ones owning up to their mistakes and learning from them. Why? They felt safe to speak up without fear of backlash. Imagine a work environment where mistakes are valued. That's the power of psychological safety—it turns errors into learning opportunities.

The Key Components of Psychological Safety

How do we build a healthy and collaborative environment? It starts with these key elements:

1. Open Communication

This is the foundation. When employees feel safe to share ideas or concerns without fear of judgment, it paves the way for trust and creativity. Encourage honest dialogue, and watch your team's potential soar.



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2. Mutual Respect

When team members treat each other with dignity and value everyone's contributions, it creates a supportive atmosphere where people can express themselves without fear of being dismissed.

3. Humility

Leaders, listen up: admitting you're not perfect and seeking input from your team isn't a weakness—it's a superpower. Humility empowers teams to take risks and learn without fear of judgment.

4. Encouraging Risk-Taking

Taking risks is essential for growth and innovation. When employees know they can propose bold ideas or ask tough questions without backlash, your organization becomes a playground for creativity.

Why Psychological Safety Matters

According to a McKinsey survey, 89 percent of employees believe psychological safety is essential in the workplace. Research from Pricewaterhouse Coopers has shown an average of 230 percent return on every dollar invested in creating a mentally healthy workplace.

Here's what organizations gain:

- **Stronger Teams:** Collaboration and trust lead to cohesive, effective teams.
- **Happier Employees:** A supportive environment boosts well-being and confidence.
- **Lower Turnover:** People want to stay where they feel valued.
- **Better Performance:** Safe spaces unlock bold ideas and smarter decision-making.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** When everyone feels heard, workplaces become more inclusive.

Leadership That Creates Safety

If you're a leader, psychological safety starts with you. Four leadership styles help cultivate this environment:

- **Collaborative Leadership:** Actively involve your team in decision-making by inviting them into the process.
- **Compassionate Leadership:** Show empathy and care for employees' well-being rather than judgment and criticism.
- **Responsive Leadership:** Approach challenges with curiosity, not blame. Become aware of your own tendencies to believe you know what others are thinking or what their motivations are.
- **Vulnerable Leadership:** Acknowledge your own challenges and uncertainties to model openness and connect to others' common humanity.

Let's Get Personal

Finally, if you're curious about your own psychological safety—or that of your team—try **Edmondson's survey**. This science-backed tool offers insights into how you're doing compared to global benchmarks. Spoiler alert: The results could be a game-changer for your workplace.

The Bottom Line

Creating a psychologically safe workplace isn't just a nice-to-have; it's a must-have for the well-being of your people and the success of your organization. By fostering open communication, mutual respect, humility, and a willingness to take risks, you're not just building better teams—you're transforming your entire organization. Now, go ahead and be the leader your team deserves!

About the Author

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www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-dynamics-of-love/202412/psychological-safety-the-secret-sauce-for-workplace-success

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FIRST RESPONDER FOCUS

6 ways to protect your relationships as a first responder

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A career in public safety or emergency response can take a toll on your loved ones; here's what you need to know

First responders face immense physical and emotional demands, often witnessing humanity at its most vulnerable. Having a strong support system isn't just helpful; it's essential. Here's why:

- **Emotional support:** A loving partner provides a safe space to decompress and feel understood.
- **Stress relief:** Healthy relationships help lower stress levels and promote resilience.
- **Burnout prevention:** Supportive connections reduce the risk of emotional exhaustion and unhealthy coping mechanisms.
- **Improved communication:** Open, honest conversations prevent stress from turning into detachment or conflict.

However, the emotional toll of serving as a first responder doesn't just affect the member; it can also impact their loved ones. The weight of traumatic calls, high-pressure decisions and witnessing human suffering can create an invisible burden that, if left unchecked, seeps into personal relationships. Responders must learn to:

- Balance the stress of work without letting it negatively affect loved ones
- Avoid emotional withdrawal or unintentional strain on relationships
- Find healthy ways to express emotions and process trauma

Prioritizing strong, open relationships can make all the difference in a first responder's well-being. Take the time to communicate, seek support and nurture the connections that keep you grounded — because no one should carry the weight of the job alone.

Make your relationships a priority

While the demands of the job can challenge even the strongest relationships, prioritizing time together, open communication and mutual understanding can strengthen the bond. First responders give so much of themselves to their communities. Having someone beside them offering love and support helps ensure they don't carry the burden alone.

1. Set goals and expectations together

First responders' schedules and emotional demands can make relationships feel unpredictable. Setting shared goals and expectations creates a sense of stability, ensuring both partners are on the same page about time together, communication and support needs.

What you can do:

- **Schedule flexible date nights:** Consistent quality time is critical to maintaining a loving relationship, but consistency is always going to be in short supply when it comes to first responders and the needs of the job. Be consistently flexible, but reliable in prioritizing one-on-one time.
- **Be clear on long-term goals:** What are you both looking for in the relationship? What do you both need? If your goals don't align, that's a potential for conflict down the road. Be honest and open about what you need from each other in your lives.
- **Re-evaluate frequently:** Goals and needs also change as people grow inside relationships, so letting your loved ones know when your needs change or when something doesn't feel right is important.

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2. Communicate frequently and intentionally

The emotional toll of first responder work can make it tempting to shut down or shield loved ones from difficult feelings. However, open and honest communication is key to maintaining a strong romantic or other close relationship.

What you can do:

- **Practice active listening:** Listen to the words and tone of your partner, as well as any non-verbal cues they're sending with their facial expressions or hand gestures to truly understand not only their message, but also their feelings.
- **Check in regularly:** The pace of the modern world can sometimes get in the way of communication; ask your partner or loved one how they're doing, and look to them for the same invitation.

3. Invest in therapy

Therapy can be a powerful tool for first responders and their partners to navigate the unique stressors that come with the job. Individual or couples counseling provides a space to process trauma, learn healthy coping strategies and strengthen communication skills.

What you can do:

- **Find a good fit:** It's important to find a therapist who understands the unique toll of a career as a first responder and how that impacts relationships. Using sites like [Psychology Today](#), you can locate therapists in your area with a breakdown of their areas of expertise.
- **Be honest:** Going to therapy is only therapeutic if you're honest with yourself and your therapist. Let your therapist know that being vulnerable is difficult; they can teach you strategies to make it easier.

4. Set clear boundaries

First responders often struggle with separating work from home life, which can create stress in their relationships. Boundaries provide a framework for emotional protection, preventing burnout and keeping the relationship strong.

What you can do:

- **Create self-care routines:** By prioritizing your own needs, you pave the way to be there for others, both at work and in your personal life.
- **Limit work-related discussions:** While talking about your work life is a normal part of relationships, the work of first responders can be heavy for others to hear and process frequently. Designating a set amount of time each day for those discussions allows for the flow of communication but with a clear boundary.

5. Prioritize each other

Amidst the demands of emergency calls, long shifts and exhaustion, prioritizing the relationship is essential. Making intentional efforts ensures that love doesn't take a backseat to the job.

What you can do:

- **Schedule quality time:** A busy schedule doesn't prevent you from spending time with your partner; a lack of prioritizing your partner does. Make it a point to schedule time together, even if it's just pizza delivery and your favorite movie on a Tuesday night.
- **Check in:** Be aware of what your partner has going on in their life and ask them about it. Be present on the job and be just as present when at home.

6. Be flexible

The unpredictable nature of first responder work means that last-minute schedule changes, late-night calls and emotional exhaustion are inevitable. A flexible mindset helps couples navigate challenges with resilience, ensuring that even in a demanding profession, their relationship remains a source of comfort, connection and strength.

What you can do:

- **Embrace adaptability:** Just as you do in your career, being adaptable to the changing needs of the situation is critical inside relationships. It's important both parties understand that plans may change, but commitment remains steady, fostering patience and trust.
- **Adjust expectations:** Holidays, birthdays and other special events might look different than you had planned, but if the relationship has been prioritized and nurtured in other ways, these adjustments are expected and accepted.

Rachel Engel

Rachel Engel is an award-winning journalist and the senior editor of [FireRescue1.com](#) and [EMS1.com](#). In addition to her regular editing duties, Engel seeks to tell the heroic, human stories of first responders and the importance of their work. She earned her bachelor's degree in communications from Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma, and began her career as a freelance writer, focusing on government and military issues. Engel joined Lexipol in 2015 and has since reported on issues related to public safety. Engel lives in Wichita, Kansas. She can be reached via email.

www.police1.com/off-duty/6-ways-to-protect-your-relationships-as-a-first-responder

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Talking to adolescents and teens: Starting the conversation

Starting the conversation

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The first step in starting a conversation is to choose a good time. It’s really important to make space to be together without an agenda or pressure. Conversation tends to flow best when it naturally occurs. Consider bringing up the topic of mental health when doing chores, cooking, hanging out, or in the car. Be aware of changes in your child’s willingness to engage with you. If they are busy, or having a bad day you may want to wait until they are less preoccupied.

Conversation starters

Observations. In a non-judgmental way let your child/teen know that you’ve noticed:

- They don’t seem to be hanging out or talking to their friends as much as usual
- That their school work seems to be suffering. This may be indicated by slipping grades, assignments going undone, or a general lack of interest in anything school related. Offer extra help if it’s simply trouble with the subject matter.
- Their mood seems to have “darkened.” For instance, they may be talking about death or dying, giving away belongings, or posting pictures (or other signs of interest) in dead celebrities or other morbid topics.

Screening results. If you took the parent screen at mhascreening.org and the results indicated your child/teen may be showing signs of an emotional, behavioral or cognitive disorder print out the results and share them. You can also ask your child/teen to take the youth screen at mhascreening.org.

Information. Do some research online on health organization or government websites and print any pertinent information you want to bring up during your conversation.

Experience. Maybe you have a mental health disorder yourself and recognize some of the symptoms you’ve struggled with in your child/teen. Perhaps you have a friend or family member who has struggled and notice similarities in your child/teen. Be sure to keep the tone of the conversation hopeful and remind your child/teen that these disorders are common and treatable.

What if a child or teen talks to you?

Do...

- **Listen.** Really listening means stopping the voice in your own head and try to actively pay attention to person who is speaking. This is hard for everyone, but practice helps!
- **Ask if they’ve thought about what they might need to get better.** If they haven’t, offer to support to listen and talk it out with them. If they have, support them in following through with their needs.
- **Learn.** If they bring you information, read it. Learn as much as possible about your child’s condition and the realities of mental health disorders. The MHA website (www.mentalhealthamerica.net) is a good resource for information about symptoms and treatment options.
- Make sure to keep things **confidential**, unless it is life threatening.
- **Normalize.** Assure your child that having a mental health issue is common, and does not mean that they can’t get better.
- **Acknowledge your fear**, but don’t let it rule your behaviors. As a parent it is important that we confront stigma or discrimination directly.
- **Offer an impartial counselor**, and assure your child that information will be confidential
- **Prepare to be an advocate.** Finding the right mental health treatment is like finding the right medical provider. It takes time and effort to make sure you’re getting the best care you need.

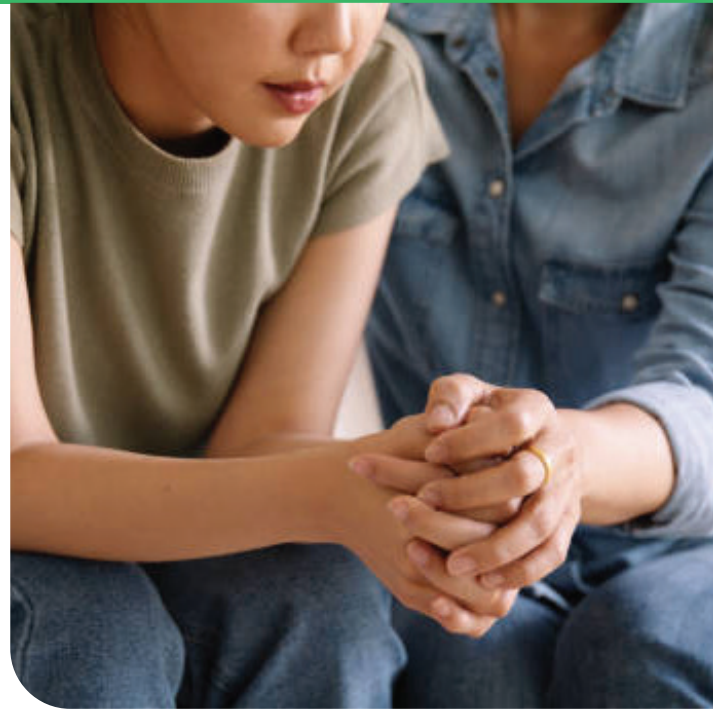
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Don't...

- **Minimize** how they are feeling or tell them “you shouldn’t think that way.” It’s quite difficult to bring up this conversation, remember that they probably worried over it for some time before coming to you.
- **Let your emotions rule your response** – especially if you’re angry. Negative words (“You’re never gonna get it together, are you?”) can set someone back for a long time and adds to stress and problems. It’s also not uncommon for parents to feel guilt and blame themselves. If your child has a brain based illness, it is not your fault, but you can be part of the solution.
- Use the word **“crazy”**.
- **Tell your child what they SHOULD do**; instead, ask what they want you to help them with.
- If your child shares about **bizarre thoughts or asks about strange sounds**, PAY ATTENTION and EXPLORE. These experiences are early warning signs of more serious mental health problems. Acting early can change the trajectory of their lives.
- **Argue** if you encounter resistance from your child. Go back to listening, asking open ended questions and just repeating what they’ve said.
- **Make excuses or blame others.** “This is the school’s fault, they should have given you more individual attention”
- **Compare your child to their siblings.** “Your brother doesn’t have these problems. Why can’t you be more like him?”

What if it’s not your kid?

Ask if the young person has told their parents yet. If not, delicately try to figure out why. You may hear reasons like, “My parents have too much going on” or “They won’t believe me.” MHA’s Time to Talk: Uncomfortable, but Important – Guide for Adolescents and Teens has more information about common concerns young people have about talking to their parents and tips for talking. Offer to help the young person start a conversation with their parents if they would like. Explain that you can provide advice and information, but only a parent or guardian can get them certain kinds of help, like a visit with a doctor or mental health professional. If you suspect abuse or neglect, call the Childhelp National Abuse Hotline at 800.422.4454 to get guidance from a trained volunteer about what steps you should take.



References

<https://mhanational.org/resources/talking-to-adolescents-and-teens-starting-the-conversation/>

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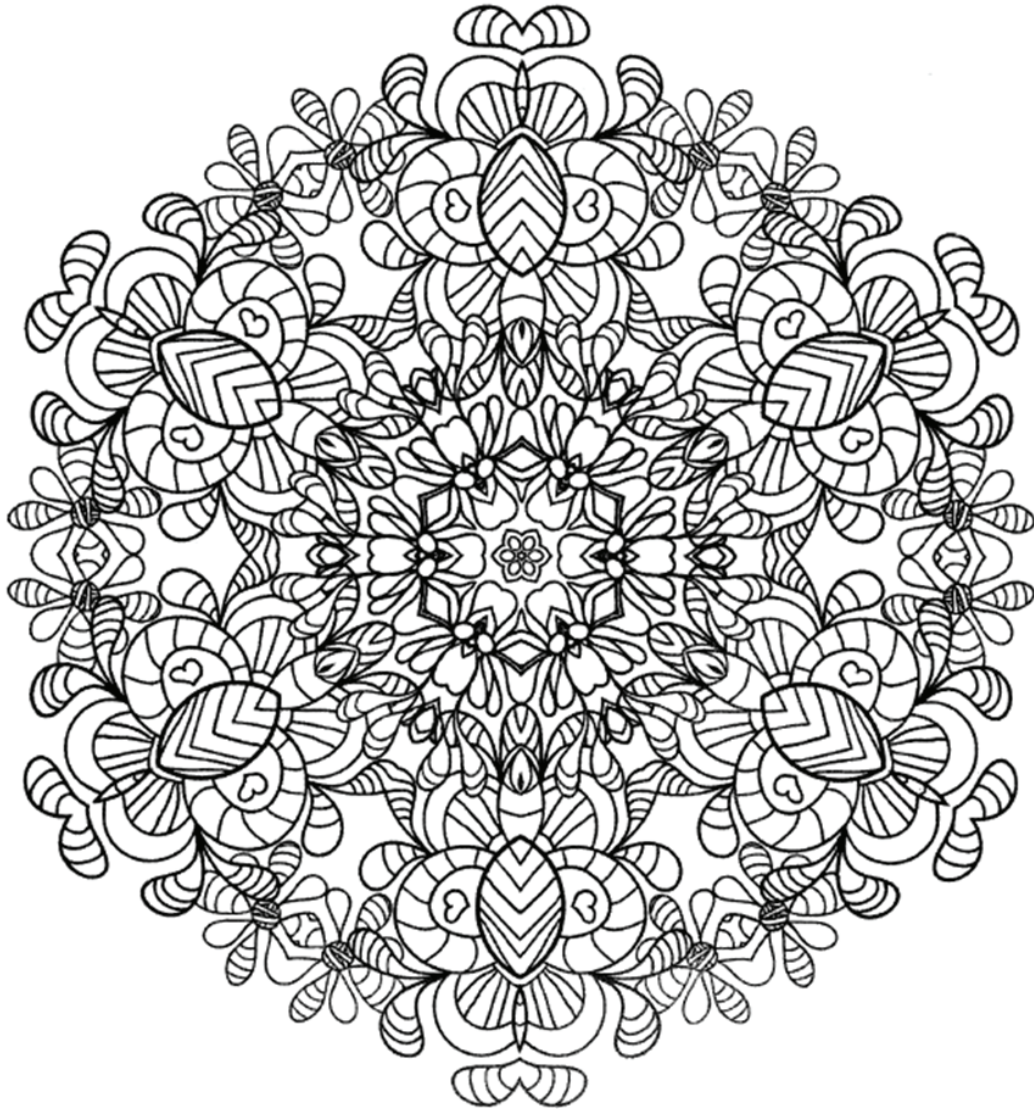
Please remember, AllOne Health has resources for you to use:

As a City of Madison employee you have access to our external EAP (AllOne Health), which offers newsletters, webinars, resource information and training. You must create an account, log in, and register for the webinars. AllOne Health: <https://cityofmadison.allonehealth.com/>

Some sample webinar topics include, (please visit AllOne Health website for current webinars):

- Avoiding Burnout in the Workplace: A Four-Part Approach to Sustainable Success
- Strengthening Team Communication and Engagement in Uncertain Times
- Digital Detox

Spring calming coloring activity



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

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To learn more about your external EAP services, please contact AllOne Health at 1-800-236-7905 or sign in to **AllOne Health member portal** (for instructions on how to create your account, please visit the **EAP website**).