

CONNECTIONS

MAY, 2017

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 5

Managing Stress for a Healthy Family

American Psychological Association

As the nation continues to face high levels of stress, families are susceptible to mounting pressures from finances and work. Raising a family can be rewarding and demanding even in healthy social and economic climates, so stressful times can make things much more challenging. An **online survey** by the American Psychological Association (APA), conducted by Harris Interactive in August 2010, found that 73 percent of parents report family responsibilities as a significant source of stress. It was also found that over two-thirds of parents think their stress level has slight to no impact on their child's stress level. However, only 14 percent of tweens and teens reported that they are *not* bothered when their parent is stressed. Furthermore, the connection between high stress levels and health is alarming, with 34 percent of obese parents experiencing high levels of stress (defined as an 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point

scale) as compared to 23 percent of normal-weight parents. It is important to consider the way a parent's stress and corresponding unhealthy behaviors affect the family. For example, the APA survey found that parents who are obese are more likely than those who are normal weight to have children who are obese. In addition, overweight children are more likely than normal-weight children to report that their parents are often worried and stressed.



Children model their parents' behaviors, including those related to managing stress. Parents who deal with stress in unhealthy ways risk passing those behaviors on to their children. Alternatively, parents who cope with stress in healthy ways cannot only promote better adjustment and happiness for themselves, but also promote the formation of critically important habits and skills in children.

Parents know that changing a child's behavior, let alone their own, can be challenging. By taking small, manageable steps to a healthier lifestyle, families can work toward meeting their goals to be psychologically and physically fit.



Greetings City Employees!

Over the past few months, we have had some inquiries about when to utilize EAP's Critical Incident Stress Management services if an event takes place that doesn't rise to the severity level commonly thought of for a critical incident, such as death, serious injury, or witnessing a traumatic event. In the *Leadership Matters* newsletter segment, we have included an article in question/answer format to discuss questions we have been asked by employees and supervisors regarding critical incidents, and raise awareness of instances of when and why to call EAP.

Additionally, May is Mental Health Awareness Month so we have included a review of a TED Talk by Andrew Solomon on his experience with depression, provided a depression screening tool, and listed mental health resources to contact if you are, or a loved one is, experiencing depression or another mental health issue. On that topic, we also have provided you with information on how to support and talk about mental health with friends and family, as well as ideas of how to manage stress within your own family.

As always, I wish you peace and all good, and know we are here for you and your families when needed!



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APA offers the following tips to get you and your family started down a healthy path:

Evaluate your lifestyle.

As a parent, it's important to model healthy behaviors for your children. Children are more likely to lead a healthy lifestyle and less likely to associate stress with unhealthy behaviors if the whole family practices healthy living and good stress management techniques. So, ask yourself—How do I respond to stress? Do I tend to overeat or engage in other unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking and drinking alcohol, when I feel stressed? In what ways could my stress coping skills be improved?

Talk about it.

If you notice that your children are looking worried or stressed, ask them what's on their mind. Having regular conversations can help a family work together to better understand and address any stressors children are experiencing. Low levels of parental communication have been associated with poor decision making among children and teens.¹ Talking to your children and promoting open communication and problem solving is just as important as eating well and getting enough exercise and sleep.

Create a healthy environment.

Your home, work space and even social environment can influence your behaviors. Altering your environment can help alleviate stress. For example, cleaning up a cluttered environment can help. Look around your home and even your car and ask yourself, does this space feel clear and relaxing? Clearing up your home space for the family is something you and your children can control, and it teaches children to focus on those things they can control when feeling stressed.

Focus on yourself.

The correlation between health, obesity and unhealthy choices is strong. When you and your family are experiencing stress, make a conscious decision to take care of yourselves. Get adequate doses of nutrients, physical activity and sleep. When you feel overwhelmed, it is easy sometimes to fall into cycles such as eating fast food, plugging into sedentary electronic activities like playing video games or watching TV, or not getting enough sleep. Research shows that children who are sleep-deficient are more likely to have behavioral problems.² And, parents have an extraordinary amount of influence on their children's food choices.³ A healthy dinner followed by an activity with your family, such as walking, bike riding, playing catch or a board game, and topped off with a good night's sleep can do a lot to manage or to lessen the negative effects of stress.

Change one habit at a time.

You may aspire for your family to make multiple important changes at once such as eating healthier foods, being more physically active, getting a better night's sleep or spending more time together. However, if you are already overextended from juggling many different responsibilities, doing all of this at once can feel overwhelming. Changing behaviors usually takes time. By starting with changing one behavior, you and your family are more likely to experience success, which can then encourage your family to tackle other challenges and to continue making additional healthy changes.

If you or a family member continues to struggle with changing unhealthy behaviors or feels overwhelmed by stress, consider seeking help from a health professional, such as a psychologist. Psychologists are licensed and trained to help you develop strategies to manage stress effectively and make behavioral changes to help improve your overall health.

References

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Special thanks to David Palmiter, PhD, and Mary K. Alvord, PhD, for their assistance in creating this fact sheet.

LEADERSHIP *Matters*

Critical Incidents: A Guide for Managers

by City of Madison EAP staff

What is a Critical Incident?

A Critical Incident is a situation affecting one or more individuals that may result in unusually strong emotions and has the potential to interfere with the ability to function during the incident, immediately following the incident, or even later. A situation does not have to be a major disaster to be classified as a critical incident, but may involve serious injury or death of an employee or member of the public, prolonged rescue efforts, unusual media coverage, or a series of distressing incidents that may have a cumulative effect.

When should I call EAP?

Critical Incidents can happen to individual employees, as well as groups. If an event has occurred that in some way makes you wonder about the mental wellbeing of an employee, or if you have the thought "I wonder if I should contact EAP about this?" it may be beneficial to just call. We can help you determine if the situation warrants our Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) services, and whether a Critical Incident Debriefing should be scheduled.

A Critical Incident Debriefing may be one-on-one contact between an employee and the debriefer (an EAP Specialist or therapist trained in the process) or a session led by a debriefer that includes a group of employees who were similarly impacted by the incident. Debriefings are best if held 2-4 days after an incident has occurred, so calling right away is very helpful. If the situation is highly stressful, we may even decide to send someone that day to do an initial check in with employees (known as a defusing). After a week we can still respond, but it may be in a different capacity, as the research shows that those first few days are where the most benefit from a debriefing comes from.

Why should I call EAP?

What we have found is that if an incident raises a red flag for you, it is best not to say "do any of you feel like you need EAP to come in?" because more often than not there are crickets or "nope, I'm fine," and understandably so! Not many people understand the benefit of defusing or debriefing after a critical incident has occurred. When something bad happens, it can be helpful to know a little about what to expect in terms of sleep, appetite, should I or shouldn't I work out or consume alcohol, what should I say to my family, etc.

We will work with you to identify whether the incident warrants an EAP response, and help you develop the language to say "I have contacted EAP about this incident, and we will hold a debriefing on <date/time/location> and your attendance is completely voluntary." If you are worried no one will show up, don't, because

1. It rarely happens;
2. It won't faze us if it does; and
3. The benefits far outweigh the cost of that time, because employees see you cared enough to go that extra step, and that may be what helps someone remember us in the future if they need something.

Encourage the employee(s) to attend because often people have a delayed response when exposed to a critical incident, or there may be another attendee who would benefit from their participation. The content of a debriefing or defusing will remain strictly confidential unless a participant is believed to be an imminent threat to the safety of him/herself or others.



What if it isn't really a critical incident or only one employee was impacted?

Ultimately, this is up to your judgment as the supervisor, but be mindful of more than just what is or is not said after an event occurs. What is the atmosphere like? Are people distracted from returning to work? Is there collective anger, fear, sadness, distractibility? Have multiple people come to you independently stating concern about the same event? Is a significant amount of work time being lost due to this event? Are people requesting the following day(s) off? It is possible that this could happen collectively, but it may be one person who appears to be struggling. You could simply say, "I've noticed you've been a little distracted since <event> occurred. I would like to give you the contact information for the Employee Assistance Program, it is free, voluntary, and confidential, and has helped other employees experiencing home or work stressors."

Whose responsibility is it to call EAP if a critical incident may have occurred?

Ideally the supervisor who oversees the employee(s) impacted would call, but that is not always possible or thought of. We have all been there either at work or in our personal lives where something bad happens and the last thing on our mind is to call someone to help our emotional wellbeing. That's because in that moment, those things don't really matter to us because safety, policy, protocols, and our own biochemical stress response take over. If you supervise management staff handling a critical incident, or you are a member of a management team who has heard about an incident occurring, feel absolutely free to suggest EAP or perhaps offer to make the call if the manager involved is too busy.

What if I call and it is determined that a Critical Incident Response is not needed?

We often provide supervisors and leaders with the support needed to effectively work through an event. When you call, we can discuss what you have done so far, make suggestions for next steps, and inform you if we believe there is something that may have been missed. The nice thing about working with EAP professionals is that we are not only trained in trauma and critical incidents, but we are distanced from the event itself so that we can think about the things you may not have thought of in that moment and offer unbiased advice. Have you thought about holding a grief session for the employees? Would you like an example of language to use in an email to your staff about a death or significant event? Would you like us to drop off EAP materials? Would it help to have us on site to address the emotional piece if you are tied up with other administrative duties? If dealing with particularly challenging or even hostile patrons is relatively commonplace, was it a new employee who had to deal with it? Is everyone saying they are fine, but you know that one employee in particular has had a lot going on lately at home and you want to offer additional support to him/her?

We do at times have employees come to our office who have experienced a critical incident, but it does not impact them for some time. At the very least, your call may give us some context if that situation happens. We have had supervisors and managers call to say *"Just wanted to give you a heads up that this event happened, I don't believe it rises to a critical incident, the employees involved seem fine, but we wanted you to know just in case someone was impacted more than we know."*

The City of Madison is committed to supporting employees who are affected by stressful events in the workplace. A primary factor in an employee's ability to recover from a critical incident is the level of support they perceive from the organization. By building resiliency prior to a critical incident and recognizing the benefit of providing an outlet for stress and trauma through a debriefing, City staff will be better equipped to overcome future stressors and City leaders will set an example of compassion and self-care.



“The opposite of depression is not happiness, but vitality”

A Ted Talk recommended by Hailey Krueger



In his TED Talk, “**Depression, the secret we share,**” Andrew Solomon takes us through a personal account of his own depression, and his efforts to better understand the experience of depression in others in an engaging and relatable 30 minute segment. I wanted to include this in our newsletter during Mental Health Awareness Month because it goes beyond providing a definition of depression with a self-assessment at the end (though we have that too), and instead provides a relatable experience for those who are familiar with the effects of depression, and a personal account of the disorder for those wanting to better understand and empathize with it.

Depression is now seen to be so common, that we are likely all quite “aware” of it to a degree in ourselves or someone near us. Solomon does not put the fact that depression exists into our awareness, but that connection to others and finding glimmers of hope in the face of depression is possible. This TED Talk is more about raising awareness of the need to shift our thinking on mental health issues like depression.

A piece that I personally related to is his quote, “this will be hellish, but I will learn something from it,” because it is an area of personal resilience I have chosen to build over the years in struggles I have encountered. I may not be able to control or manipulate something challenging happening in my life, but I can learn from it, so while it may not create instant control in this moment, it increases the likelihood of control, hope, and vitality in the future.

Excerpt: You don't think in depression that you've put on a gray veil and are seeing the world through the haze of a bad mood. You think that the veil has been taken away, the veil of happiness, and that now you're seeing truly. It's easier to help schizophrenics who perceive that there's something foreign inside of them that needs to be exorcised, but it's difficult with depressives, because we believe we are seeing the truth.

Facts About Depression in the Workplace

Per **Mental Health America**, Clinical Depression has become one of America's most costly illnesses and tends to affect people in their prime working years. If left untreated, the illness may last a lifetime but with early recognition, intervention, and support it can be overcome in more than 80% of cases.

Learn to recognize the symptoms of clinical depression. Symptoms and severity will vary, but see your doctor or speak to an EAP counselor if five or more of the following symptoms are experienced for more than two weeks:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood.
- Sleeping too little, early morning awakening, or sleeping too much.
- Reduced appetite and/or weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain.
- Loss of interest in activities once enjoyed.
- Restlessness, irritability.
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain or digestive disorders).
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless.
- Thoughts of suicide or death.

You can also take a self-assessment by printing and self-scoring the **Beck Depression Inventory**. If you have any questions about your scoring or want to discuss it confidentially, you may contact your EAP at 266-6561 (internal) or 1-800-236-7905 (external available 24/7). For additional mental health resources, check out the website for **NAMI-Dane County** and/or the **City of Madison EAP**.

Supporting a Friend or Family Member with Mental Health Problems

MentalHealth.gov

Anyone can experience mental health problems. Friends and family can make all the difference in a person's recovery process by recognizing the signs of mental health problems and connecting them to professional help.

If a friend or family member is showing signs of a mental health problem or reaching out to you for help, offer support by:

- Finding out if the person is getting the care that he or she needs and wants—if not, connect him or her to help
- Expressing your concern and support
- Reminding your friend or family member that help is available and that mental health problems can be treated
- Asking questions, listening to ideas, and being responsive when the topic of mental health problems come up
- Reassuring your friend or family member that you care about him or her
- Offering to help your friend or family member with everyday tasks
- Including your friend or family member in your plans—continue to invite him or her without being overbearing, even if your friend or family member resists your invitations
- Educating other people so they understand the facts about mental health problems and do not discriminate
- Treating people with mental health problems with respect, compassion, and empathy

How to Talk About Mental Health

Do you need help starting a conversation about mental health? Try leading with these questions and make sure to actively listen to your friend or family member's response.

- I've been worried about you. Can we talk about what you are experiencing? If not, who are you comfortable talking to?
- What can I do to help you to talk about issues with your parents or someone else who is responsible and cares about you?
- What else can I help you with?
- I am someone who cares and wants to listen. What do you want me to know about how you are feeling?
- Who or what has helped you deal with similar issues in the past?
- Sometimes talking to someone who has dealt with a similar experience helps. Do you know of others who have experienced these types of problems who you can talk with?
- It seems like you are going through a difficult time. How can I help you to find help?
- How can I help you find more information about mental health problems?
- I'm concerned about your safety. Have you thought about harming yourself or others?



When talking about mental health problems:

- Know how to **connect people to help**
- Communicate in a straightforward manner
- Speak at a level appropriate to a person's age and development level (preschool children need fewer details as compared to teenagers)
- Discuss the topic when and where the person feels safe and comfortable
- Watch for reactions during the discussion and slow down or back up if the person becomes confused or looks upset

Sometimes it is helpful to make a comparison to a physical illness. For example, many people get sick with a cold or the flu, but only a few get really sick with something serious like pneumonia. People who have a cold are usually able to do their normal activities. However, if they get pneumonia, they will have to take medicine and may have to go to the hospital.

Similarly, feelings of sadness, anxiety, worry, irritability, or sleep problems are common for most people. However, when these feelings get very intense, last for a long period of time, and begin to interfere with school, work, and relationships, it may be a sign of a mental health problem. And just like people need to take medicine and get professional help for physical conditions, someone with a mental health problem may need to take medicine and/or participate in therapy in order to get better.

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

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