

CONNECTIONS

AUGUST, 2017

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 8

Are Our Friends Better for Us than Our Families?

New research shines light on our relationships.

by Karen Riddell J.D.

When it comes to our health and happiness, friendship packs a powerful punch, enriching our lives and bolstering our wellbeing. And now, a new study shows that as we get older this effect gets even stronger—surpassing the impact of our spouse, siblings and children.

Researcher William Chopik conducted two studies exploring both friend and family relationships. First, in a study of over 270,000 people in 100 countries, he found that both family and friends positively impact our health and happiness in general, but as we get older, only our friendships prove to be beneficial.

In the second study of over 7,000 older Americans, the research showed that the quality of a relationship is what matters. If a friendship was a source of support, it brought happiness, but if a friendship was a source of stress, it could be tied to chronic illness. Interestingly,

"Friendship," said Christopher Robin,

"is a very comforting thing to have." – A.A. Milne

family relationships that were a source of strain did not link to chronic illness.

In later life, as our friends move away and pass away and our mobility declines, the risk of loneliness rises. So as we get older, it becomes crucial for us to invest time in social activities, join social groups and get to know the people we see on a regular basis whenever possible. Even simple social interactions with people at the local coffee shop or grocery store can make a big difference in a person's feeling of being connected and cared about.

This study dovetails with others that show that—at any age—we find time spent with our friends to be more enjoyable than time spent with our spouses or family members. Chopik's research advises that often family relationships are tainted by seriousness, negativity and a sense of obligation. This contrasts with the lightness, positivity and sense of choice that generally comes with friendship. After all, we pick our friends and they pick us and that mutuality brings with it an implicit affection that makes us feel secure and valued.

Big picture: All relationships that provide support are good for us, but as we get older we should take extra care to invest in friendships, because along with happiness, they can also bring us a long life!

Reference: Chopik, W. J. (2017) Associations among relational values, support, health, and well-being across the adult lifespan. *Journal of Personal Relationships*, 29 (2), 408-422.



Hello City Employees!

August 6th is National Friendship Day, and we in EAP thought it would be good to include an article on the impact positive friendships can have on our lives. Healthy and meaningful friendships can lead to a deeper sense of wellbeing, as can a good night's sleep! Read on to identify 3 habits you may have that are impacting your sleep, and what to do about them. Additionally, a service many EAPs offer, ours included, is helping employees and their families in their personal or work lives address and manage grief.

We wanted to include a more work-specific article on how to address the death of co-worker in your work environment, and remind employees that our counseling, consultation, and referral services are available to you when needed for work or personal struggles you may be facing, and talking about the death of a co-worker and the associated change and transition it can bring to the workplace is certainly part of that service.



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

Tresa Martinez, EAP Administrator: (608) 266-6561
Hailey Krueger, EAP Specialist: (608) 266-6561
Sherri Amos, Program Support: (608) 266-6561

Death of a Co-worker

by Litsa Williams of [What's Your Grief](#)

We spend a tremendous amount of time with our co-workers. They touch our lives every day. We work together, laugh together, complain to one another, experience successes and failures together, have good days together, and bad days together. Many times we consider our co-workers friends, sometimes we consider them family. And yet when we experience the death of a co-worker we often don't feel we have permission to grieve in the way we would grieve another friend or family member.

There are many reasons coping with the loss of a co-worker can present unique challenges. Co-workers are not always acknowledged for the significant role they play in our lives, so we may not feel supported in our feelings of grief. People may assume you should be over it quickly. Our family and other friends may not know the co-worker who has died; we may not know the family and friends of our co-worker. It may be unclear or confusing how involved we should be in funerals, memorials, or other remembrance events. If we cannot grieve with our co-workers we may feel completely alone, yet our employers don't always encourage us to grieve openly or together. Emotions and work are not things that usually go together. Work has long been considered a place to be productive, not to shed tears. This can be a hard habit to break.

It is important to acknowledge that as a society we are not comfortable dealing with death, so this is not an issue limited to the workplace. After a death it is not surprising to find that your boss and your HR department are not comfortable with grief, and hence totally lost when it comes to supporting grieving staff. Not to mention they may be grieving themselves. That doesn't mean acknowledging grief in the workplace is a lost cause. We may just need to be more proactive. So what can you do as a manager, HR professional, or just a "regular" employee?

Acknowledge the loss.

We know grieving in the workplace can feel foreign and unnatural. Acknowledging the impact of the death of a co-worker can make sure that everyone feels safe expressing their feelings. The loss of a co-worker is often not validated as a significant loss, so this acknowledgement can allow everyone to feel they have permission to grieve.

Set up a forum for group discussion.

Ideally this will be led by a professional counselor, either from the organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a professional grief counselor coming in to facilitate a short-term grief group. A professional is a must for a death that occurred physically in the workplace or for a suicide loss.

If your employer truly is unable to pay for a professional to come in, grief groups can be organized among staff. If the group is unable to meet during the work day, it may take the shape of a weekly lunch, breakfast group before work, or dinner group after work.

Hello cont. from page 1.

Lastly, on a more personal note, some of you may know that I am pregnant and will be having a baby this August. I mention this because between August and November I will be out of the office on maternity leave, and Tresa Martinez and our external EAP provider, FEI, will be the primary EAP providers. Fitting for me during this life transition is our final EAP article, which is on FOMO or the "fear of missing out" which made me laugh a little at first. However, I then realized that as I near the end of my pregnancy, I am trying to be more mindful and connected to the moment, not the internet, and spend quality time with my family and friends in preparation for this significant and exciting change that is soon to arrive! Whether good or bad, change is change, and practicing mindfulness can ease the discomfort that can occur when our lives inevitably change and transition.

Never hesitate to call if you need us, and I wish you peace and all good!



Take advantage of employer services.

Many companies have an EAP that offers one-on-one counseling services. If this is the case, as an employee you may wish to find out what is available and schedule an appointment. As a manager or HR professional it is important after a loss to make sure staff are aware of how to contact the EAP. Send out an email and/or post the information in a staff lounge to ensure everyone knows how to utilize these services.

Do something for the family.

For many people it is very important to send flowers or send something else to the family. Make a plan as a team or company to do this. This can be especially important if it may be a financial strain for any individual to send something, but as a group and with the support of management it may be easier. The obvious choice is to send flowers, but there are plenty of other options:

- Circulate a card (worried about what to write? [Get some advice on writing a sympathy card here.](#))
- Send a food basket
- Make a donation to a charity the person was connected to
- Send a useful item (like a gift card for a maid service, lawn service, or carry out restaurant)
- Create a memorial book for the family, with memories and work accomplishments
- Gather photos from work events that the family may not have of the person to share
- Donate to a scholarship fund for the person's children

For more ideas take a look at our post on [alternatives to sending flowers](#) for ideas.

Attend the funeral.

Co-workers can sometimes feel unsure if they should attend the viewing, funeral, or other memorial. Establishing what the company will support and making plans as a group can ease this uncertainty. As a manager or HR professional it is important to clearly establish whether staff will be allowed to attend a service during work hours or if liberal leave will be in effect. To support people in attending you may wish to plan carpooling from the office, or even a shuttle.

The reality is that many workplaces will not be able to shut down to allow all staff to attend a memorial. If this is the case, ask for volunteers to work. This will allow others to attend the service. Those who were not as close to the person who died, or who do not wish to attend the service, may volunteer. If this is the case make sure to acknowledge them for their willingness to help others who wished to attend.

Create a memorial and/or a memorial service.

Sometimes very few staff will be able to attend a service, due to logistics or if it is being held out of the area. Even if many staff attend the service, doing something specific for the workplace may also be important. A small ceremony where people can share memories is easy to organize and can be very therapeutic. Additionally, creating a memorial at the office can be a wonderful way to remember the person who has died. A small memorial plaque, planting a tree, naming a conference room or meeting room, or a simple memorial bulletin board are all wonderful options! You may also wish to do a memorial slideshow or photobook at an all staff meeting, annual holiday party, or other organizational event.

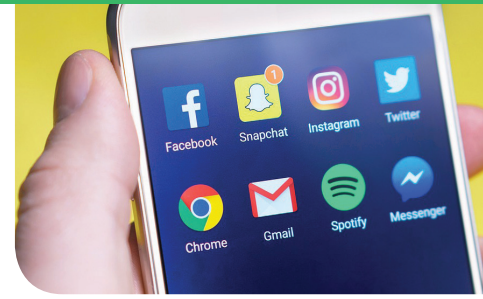


3 Ways to Fight FOMO

by Elinor Moskowitz, meQuilibrium

Social media is a blessing and a curse. It's great for staying in touch with old friends, finding people with similar interests, and sharing your ideas—but it's also a breeding ground for self-comparison, like a bully that chips away at your self-esteem. Its weapon of choice? FOMO: The "fear of missing out."

FOMO is defined as a feeling of inferiority and anxiety about missing out on meaningful experiences triggered by self-comparison and prompted by social media. It's running rampant, with over half of all social media users and nearly two-thirds of Millennials reporting such fears. Here are a few tips for how you can face your disabling feelings of FOMO and live the kind of life you really don't want to miss out on:



Fear #1: **You'll feel FOMO forever**

Studies show that FOMO preys on and exacerbates (rather than merely creates) dissatisfaction. This creates a mental trap that's hard to escape—as Flickr co-founder Caterina Fake says, "Social software is both the creator and the cure of FOMO. It's cyclical." This means that most of us feel FOMO sometimes, but we usually opt to "join 'em" rather than "beat 'em" by posting equally as appealing snapshots of our own lives to try and keep up with those who instigated this feeling in the first place. Inevitably we feel like we come up short...thus perpetuating the cycle.

Fix: Step out of the cycle

The first step to fighting FOMO is to lessen your time spent on social media. The average person will spend over 5 years on social media in their lifetime—and this number is on the rise. Keep track of exactly how much time you spend checking your devices (apps like Moment can help with this) and then set some boundaries. A good goal is to check your phone 2 or 3 times during the day. Then, bring awareness to why you're posting, not just what you're posting. Posting out of anxiety or a desire to compete just feeds your FOMO, but making the process more mindful will help you regain control.

Fear #2: **You're in the wrong place at the wrong time**

When you constantly fear you're missing out, you actually do end up missing out...on your own life. Don't allow social media to steal your inner peace by wishing you were always somewhere else or losing sight of what you do have. As meQuilibrium co-founder and CEO Jan Bruce says, "What you focus on will flourish." If you constantly focus on what you don't have, you'll always feel like you don't measure up.

Fix: Practice appreciation

Try cultivating a mindset of gratitude by countering the negative thoughts about what you're lacking with a reminder of what you do have. Reclaim social media as a tool to maximize relationships that you're grateful for—use it to make plans with friends, share photos with your family, and maintain your long distance relationships. That was the original purpose of social media: to be a tool of connection.

Fear #3: **You don't measure up**

When you get caught up in the shiny glamour that others project on their social media feeds, it's easy to forget that the same people who post those perfect selfies, brunches with mimosas, and scenic vacation views also have bad days—they just don't choose to document those moments. Social media is highly cultivated: You are seeing what others want you to see, not their reality. You're comparing your bloopers to someone else's highlight reel.

Fix: Put yourself first

Rather than letting other people's representations of themselves dictate how you should be, take time to examine your own personal values. Do some digging into what is at the root of your FOMO: Do you feel like something is lacking in your life? Could you foster and strengthen more connections with others? Tune into your needs. If you need some R&R tonight, rather than a loud, crowded, and Instagrammable party, do it—and #own it.

The account that matters most is the accountability you have to yourself, and you have as much control over your thoughts as you do your social media pages. In fact, when you use social media as a tool to savor the moment, rather than a means to live it, you can start making the most of your life, rather than missing out on it.



August Wellness Webinar: Fitting a Healthy Life in a Hectic Lifestyle

Wednesday, August 16, 2017
12:00 – 1:00 p.m.

Life can be busy. Filled with meetings, deadlines and family commitments. It's no wonder that exercise gets put to the wayside and our meals are made at the drive-thru window. This webinar will discuss simple tricks and tips you can use to make healthy living fit into your hectic lifestyle.

To register, visit wellwisconsin.staywell.com and go to *Webinars*.

Wellness webinars highlighting various health and well-being topics will take place the 3rd Wednesday of each month. All webinars are recorded and available to Well Wisconsin Program participants on the StayWell wellness portal after the event date.

To access the StayWell wellness portal, you must be an employee, retiree, or spouse/domestic partner enrolled in the State of Wisconsin or Wisconsin Public Employers Group Health Insurance Programs.

3 Habits That Could Be Wrecking Your Sleep

by Linda Wasmer Andrews, *Minding the Body*

One of the best ways to improve your overall health is by changing behaviors that disturb your sleep. Some are well-known: For example, you probably know that keeping an erratic bedtime schedule or drinking a late latte may interfere with your nightly slumber. But other behaviors that can disrupt your sleep often go unnoticed.

Here are three less-discussed sleep disruptors you should know about:

1. Eating too little fiber or too much fat and sugar.

There's strong evidence that lack of sleep increases the likelihood of consuming too many calories, gaining weight, and becoming obese. Until recently, less was known about how eating habits may affect getting enough sleep. But a study published in 2016 by Columbia University researchers sheds new light on the relationship between food choices and sleep quality.

The study included 36 adults (ages 30 to 45) who were normal weight and typically slept a healthy amount. During five nights in a sleep lab, the participants got an average of seven-and-a-half hours of sleep. Objective sleep data were gathered by polysomnography, a noninvasive test that measures brain-wave patterns, blood oxygen levels, heart and breathing rates, and other physiological changes while a person sleeps. The researchers then compared data collected after a few days on a nutritious controlled diet versus one day of self-selected foods.

Eating less fiber and more saturated fat was associated with getting lighter, less restorative sleep. Greater sugar consumption was also linked to waking up more often during the night. In addition, it took participants an average of 12 minutes longer to fall asleep after eating foods of their choice, compared to eating controlled, well-balanced meals.

2. Unwinding with a glass of wine.

An evening tippie might make you feel drowsy and help you doze off faster. But it may also result in poorer quality sleep. In a study by University of Melbourne researchers, two dozen young adults (ages 18 to 21) spent a few nights in a sleep lab. On one night, they drank vodka and orange juice before hitting the sack. On another, they drank a placebo cocktail—straight orange juice with a vodka-dipped straw. Later, as they slept, the electrical activity inside their brains was monitored and recorded with electroencephalography (EEG testing).

Alcohol increased slow-wave sleep delta power, a pattern of brain activity associated with deep sleep. Yet at the same time, alcohol increased frontal alpha power, a pattern of brain activity usually associated with resting quietly while awake. Together, these competing types of brain activity likely interfered with participants' ability to get a refreshing night's sleep.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, an evening drink may also sabotage sleep in other ways: Alcohol can throw the body's whole sleep-regulation mechanism out of balance. By relaxing the muscles of the throat, it can also worsen breathing problems during sleep. Plus, by acting as a diuretic, it may prompt more trips to the bathroom.



3. Checking social media too frequently.

In a recent national survey, nearly 1,800 young U.S. adults (ages 19 to 32) answered several questions about social media use and sleep quality. Those who checked social media most often (58 or more times per week) were three times as likely to report sleep problems as those who used social media least often (eight or fewer times per week).

Because of the study's design, the researchers weren't able to determine the direction of causation. But they suggested three potential ways that overuse of social media might undermine sleep:

- People may spend time on social media that could otherwise be used for snoozing.
- If people get caught up in heated Twitter wars or Facebook exchanges, they may feel fired up when they should be winding down for the night.
- If people use electronic devices close to bedtime, the bright light emitted may promote wakefulness rather than drowsiness.

The relationship between sleep and social media is likely a two-way street, however. Another recent study showed that the more sleep loss college students racked up, the more time they later spent on Facebook. That may have been because browsing Facebook was an easy thing to do when they were tired and distracted due to sleep deprivation.

References

- Chan JKM et al. The Acute Effects of Alcohol on Sleep Electroencephalogram Power Spectra in Late Adolescence. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res.* 2015 Feb;39(2):291-9.
- Levenson JC et al. The Association Between Social Media Use and Sleep Disturbance Among Young Adults. *Prev Med.* 2016 Apr;85:36-41.
- Mark G et al. Sleep Debt in Student Life: Online Attention Focus, Facebook, and Mood. Paper presented at: 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, May 7-12, 2016; San Jose, CA.
- St-Onge M-P et al. Fiber and Saturated Fat Are Associated with Sleep Arousals and Slow Wave Sleep. *J Clin Sleep Med.* 2016 Jan;12(1):19-24.

*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**

**External Available 24/7:
FEI Workforce Resilience (800) 236-7905**

Tresa Martinez, tmartinez@cityofmadison.com

Hailey Krueger, hkrueger@cityofmadison.com

Sherri Amos, samos@cityofmadison.com

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.