

CONNECTIONS

APRIL, 2021

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 4

Feeling Anxious about Returning to Work

By Arlyn Gonzalez, MSW, LCSW, Employee Assistance Specialist

It has been over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic has abruptly changed the world. As new information has emerged, we've had to adjust our habits and our lives, being creative in how we work and live. It was unimaginable that most of our workforce would be teleworking, that schools would close and transition to virtual learning, that we would have to adjust to wearing masks, to isolating, to constantly sanitizing and washing our hands, to staying 6 feet apart, to canceling important events and needing to celebrate virtually or apart, to being concerned about loved ones, to potentially losing loved ones and needing to grieve apart, and overall to be faced with constant fear and uncertainty.

Now that a vaccine is available, the infections and death rates have decreased, and people feel safer leaving home, workplaces are slowly and cautiously re-opening to the public and reintegrating their workforce. As with any transition, it will be filled with uncertainty about what this "new normal" will look like and cause mixed emotions including anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, and feelings of being overwhelmed. For many of us, the anticipation and the fear of the unknown will be worse than the reality may be. Although we have gone through the pandemic together, each one of us has had unique experiences during this time and has different coping strategies and life experiences.

There is no one correct way of responding to this new transition, we will have different feelings about returning to work and society reopening. Below are some normal reactions:

- Increased social anxiety about being around other people.
 - » We have been told to stay 6 feet apart, how do we interact with each other again?
 - » What will communication with co-workers and members of the public look like?
- Fears about returning to the workplace and the unknowns.
 - » Will I be safe?
 - » What will be the new dynamic and work culture? Will things be the same?
 - » Part of our office is vaccinated and others are not, what does this mean?
 - » I am a new employee or we have new individuals on our team.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2.



Greetings City Employees,

We hope that the arrival of Spring is lifting your spirits! If you aren't finding time to get outside as the weather improves, we are sharing an article and an upcoming event that we hope will persuade you of the benefits of spending more time in nature.

The month of April seeks to increase awareness on two important issues:

- Alcoholism
- Sexual Assault

Therefore this edition of *Connections* features articles on keeping your use of alcohol in check during stressful times and supporting male victims of sexual trauma.

Are you feeling anxious as you see society move back to pre-pandemic routines and hear conversations about returning to work? Arlyn has written a very helpful article on this subject that puts into perspective our common concerns and some tips to keep you from feeling overwhelmed. Stay tuned for more on this topic in upcoming newsletters.

We hope you find something here that will help you keep moving through these stressful (but improving) times. Please read on!

~ The EAP Team



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

Tresa Martinez, EAP Manager: (608) 266-6561

Arlyn Gonzalez, EAP Specialist: (608) 266-6561

Provides bilingual EAP services in English and Spanish

Lori Wessel, EAP Specialist: (608) 266-6561

Sherri Amos, Confidential Program Support: (608) 266-6561

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1.

- Increased anxiety about reopening, despite being a field worker who has not been working from home.
 - » If you are a frontline worker, this will also be a change and can cause an increase in anxiety and other mental health reactions, as you may find yourself encountering more public members than before.
 - » How should I react?
 - » Is this safe?
- Excitement about being able to engage with the world again.
 - » Some people are excited to socialize in person again!
- Sad or reluctance to come back into the office.
 - » Some employees have thrived working from home, finding an increase in work-life balance and productivity.
 - » Others are introverts and prefer to work from home.
- Separation anxiety from home or children.
 - » Some employees have been teleworking with their children and now they may have to go to child care, this is a difficult transition for some.
 - » Some employees may experience anxiety about leaving their homes and being in the world again.
- It can also exacerbate mental health symptoms for people who are already experiencing mental health conditions.

Psychologically, this transition will activate our stress response, it will have some of us responding from our reptilian brain, trying to access if we are safe, if there is an ongoing threat. Thus, it will make us less patient, make it difficult to focus, make it difficult to manage our emotions, make us more critical, etc.

Below are some tips in managing this transition:

- Increase your self-awareness
 - » How are you feeling about this transition?
 - » What do you need to feel safe?
 - » What have you been doing to cope? Is it working? Is it enough?
- Recognize that you have choices and focus on what you can control
- Set boundaries
 - » What are you comfortable with and what are you not comfortable with?
- Connect
 - » Talk to loved ones around you
 - » Share your experiences
- Maintain a daily routine
- Take care of yourself
 - » Make time to process this new transition and make sense of this new experience
 - » Make time to decompress
 - » Use or increase your coping strategies



- Prepare and plan
 - » Give yourself time to adjust! Things will be weird at first
 - » Make a plan
 - » Do a trial run, visit your workplace before needing to go into work
- Talk to your supervisor
 - » Tell your supervisor what you need. Can a compromise be made?
 - » Speak up if your workplace is stressful or problematic behaviors are occurring
- Be kind and compassionate with yourself and others
- Get help

Remember you are not alone in your experiences, if you need additional support, please contact EAP at 266-6561. We can help you through this difficult transition and if needed we can connect you to a mental health counselor.

Tips for Raising Resilient Kids



Tip #3 – Increase their exposure to their social support

Research has shown that positive social support is associated with positive emotions helping kids build self-esteem, motivation, resiliency and optimism. We are social creatures who thrive on interacting with others especially when things are not going well. Children may not be aware of how many people are rooting for them. Let them know about their fan club and build their connections with people who love them - i.e., “I told your Auntie how smart you were for XYZ. She’s so proud of you!”

The Invisible Male Victims of Sexual Trauma

By Robert T. Muller, Ph.D., **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

Anthony Edwards, an American actor and director, widely known for his role as Dr. Mark Greene on the series ER, is also a child sexual abuse survivor. He was molested by Hollywood producer Gary Goddard. In his 2017 essay on Medium, Anthony revealed:

“I met Goddard when I was 12, and he quickly became a dominant force in my life. He taught me about the value of acting, respect for friendship, and the importance of studying. Pedophiles prey on the weak. My father, who suffered from undiagnosed PTSD from WWII, was not emotionally available. Everyone has the need to bond, and I was no exception. My vulnerability was exploited. I was molested by Goddard, my best friend was raped by him—and this went on for years. The group of us, the gang, stayed quiet.”

Other famous male survivors of sexual abuse, assault or harassment, include Terry Crews, James Van Der Beek, Anthony Rapp, Alex Winter, Ryan Locke, Robyn Sinclair, and Terron Wood.

People who commit sexual violations against males can be male or female, family members, neighbors, co-workers, colleagues or peers, babysitters, current or past partners, sports teammates, military personnel, and people who hold positions of authority or power.

About 1 in 6 males have experienced child sexual abuse or adult sexual assault. As of 1998, 2.78 million men in the U.S. had been victims of attempted or completed rape. The mental health effects of sexual victimization are severe. Victims are at greater risk of suffering from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs and to contemplate suicide. One study found that these males experience an increased sense of vulnerability, increased anger/irritability, and damaged self-image, concluding that the immediate and long-term responses were similar to those described in female victims of rape, contradicting the myth that sexual abuse and assault is less harmful to males than females. And a study conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control found that the sexual abuse of boys was more likely to involve penetration of some kind, which is associated with greater psychological distress.

Both men and women experience the characteristics of post-traumatic stress disorder. Still, there is a general reluctance to recognize and validate the pain it causes men. And there is limited research on sexual abuse and assault on males. When seeking supportive resources, such as homeless shelters, rape crisis centers, or therapy centers, sexually abused men find there are few, if any, services specifically designed for male victims.

A scan of support services in Canada for male survivors of sexual abuse found only three organizations in the country were dedicated to providing services to this population. Unwanted sexual experiences for males are “common, under-reported, under-recognized, and under-treated.”

Social pressures surrounding male identity play a role. Boys and men report shame for having been victimized in a sexual manner, as well as fear of having their sexuality questioned and for expressing vulnerable emotions. As Rick Goodwin, clinical MSW, from 1in6 and Men and Healing describes:

“We all grew up, regardless of gender, with these dictates of the male code. It's not just boys who grew up with these values. It's their siblings, fathers and mothers. Part of the understanding of masculinity is that boys are invulnerable. So, the conception of male victimization is hard for us to wrap our heads around. We know that there are components of masculinity that prevent guys from talking out. So, if part of masculinity is invulnerability, we also have to consider that vulnerability might make men shame-prone because it runs counter to what is expected of their gender.”

Men who have been sexually abused or assaulted feel as though their masculinity has been compromised. Jordan (name changed), a survivor of child sexual abuse, confirms:

“I feel inadequate, like I am not a real man. And when people ask, ‘How could you have let that happen to yourself?’ it makes things worse because that is precisely what I have spent two decades trying to come to terms with.”

Men have difficulty acknowledging their experiences as traumatic. A study about childhood sexual abuse found that only 16 percent of men with documented histories of sexual abuse considered themselves to have been sexually abused compared to 64 percent of women with similar documented sexual abuse histories. Rick explains:

“Males take a longer time to identify that they've had a harming, abusive, traumatic experience. The average age at which men come into our clinic here in Ottawa is 45. Women don't take that long. We also think that the average age for sexual abuse for boys is between the ages of 9 or 10. So, we're talking about three and a half decades of males keeping quiet about this.”

Rick further emphasizes the need to recognize and support male victims:

“The number one regret for males I work with who are survivors of childhood trauma is, ‘Why didn't I do this work 20 years ago, 30 years ago?’ They realize their experience changed them so profoundly. And that's a painful acknowledgment because, of course, you can't turn back time.”

Fed Up with Tech Fatigue? Look to Nature

By Jeffrey Davis, M.A., **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

Research shows nature can improve mood, reduce stress, and restore creative energy.

Look Beyond the Screen

The Greek philosopher Epictetus is credited with saying, “You become what you give your attention to.” Founder of American psychology William James with the statement, “My experience is what I agree to tend to.”

At first glance, these maxims seem straightforward enough. If you practice self-care and cultivate your creative ideas, then you will be that much closer to living the life you aspire to. But if you water the weeds that inevitably infiltrate the garden of your mind – your anxieties and fears – those will grow as well.

Like so many of us, you’ve probably been watering those weeds a lot more than usual this past year. Between vehement political divides, social upheaval, natural disasters, and a global pandemic, it’s been difficult not to feed our fears. However, our digital solution to this chronic stress and uncertainty only serves to further undermine our wellbeing.

With the economic shutdowns and shelter in place mandates, we’ve become even more compulsively reliant on our devices for self-soothing and social connection. According to a recent survey by One Poll, Americans are spending up to 19 hours per day immersed in our technology. At that rate, the average American would spend 44 years of their life glued to a screen!

If you’ve succumbed to this widespread digital malaise these past months, you are not entirely to blame. We live in a “distraction economy,” a world wired by tech corporations that misuse the psychology of attraction to get you, unconsciously, to hang out on their platforms for longer and longer. Though scrolling through Facebook or bingeing Netflix seems innocent enough, so much screen time can actually increase our “technostress,” negatively impacting both our mental health and our physical well-being.

It can be difficult to consciously direct our attention to more uplifting or fruitful pastimes when there are so many crises and digital temptations vying for our attention. We can, however, learn to redirect our gaze. Rather than succumbing to virtual temptations, research suggests that we look to nature.

Two Types of Attention

The sounds of rustling leaves, the warmth of the sun on your skin, the scent of a pine forest, or a sea breeze: just thinking about these things can be comforting to us. But why? What exactly is happening in the brain?

Psychological research identifies two types of attention: directed attention and involuntary attention. As the name implies, the former describes when we consciously focus our attention on the task at hand. But when we try to focus on something for too long – whether we’re advancing a work project or scrolling through status updates – we can fall prey to “direct attention fatigue,” making us more impulsive, irritable, and distractible as our devices further deplete our energy, empathy, and creativity.

Involuntary attention, on the other hand, arises when we are immersed in a setting that sparks awe and piques our fascination. Natural environments invoke this kind of automatic attention better than most any man-made setting, giving our busy brains a much-needed break from our tech-fueled lives.

Look to the Present and to the Future - in Nature

Numerous studies have shown that being in nature – even observing natural scenery or nature photos – can improve mood, boost memory, restore our ability to focus, and replenish our creative energy.

But beyond these mental and emotional benefits, nature can actually improve our physical health, and not just through exercise. Being in or observing nature activates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps to reduce stress. Lowering stress levels creates a domino effect that can impact the entire body by boosting the immune system and reducing inflammation. One study even found that participants who spent time in nature saw a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and in the production of stress hormones as compared to participants in urban environments.

These findings have far-reaching implications for city planners, workplaces, organizations, and institutions because they reveal the psychological and physiological impacts of the spaces we inhabit. For example, research on restorative environments has found that patients heal faster, have fewer complications, and require less pain medication if they have a view of some greenery through their hospital room window. Similarly, children who live in greener environments are better able to sustain focused attention, delay gratification, and inhibit impulses.

If we can factor the benefits of natural scenery and design for experiences of wonder and delight, perhaps we can build for a healthier, more vibrant future.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4.

Don't Run, Bathe

If you live in a city – as 66 percent of the world's population is expected to by 2050 – fret not. You don't have to create your own Walden or escape to experience the benefits of nature.

A glimpse of trees out the window, a walk around the neighborhood on your lunch break, or simply decorating your workspace with some natural imagery can restore your energy and inspiration. In fact, research has shown that workers with a view of greenery report greater job satisfaction and better health, while one study found that decorating an office with potted plants could increase productivity by as much as 15 percent.

However you access nature in your day-to-day life, it's important to remember that it's not all about exercise or some quest to conquer the wild – as it's portrayed far too often in American culture. To fully experience the therapeutic benefits that nature has to offer, think of it more like a bath.

The ancient Japanese practice of "forest bathing," or shinrin yoku, is meant to be as idle and relaxing as the name suggests. It involves slowly walking through the woods – though any natural setting will do – and experiencing the natural environment with all of your senses.

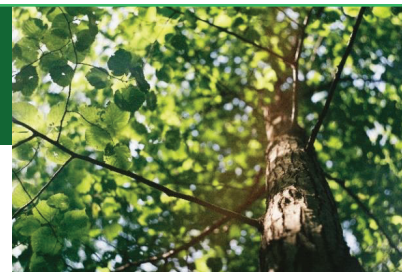
Next time you find yourself overwhelmed by anxiety, irritability, or exhaustion try to find a quiet place with a bit of greenery, or imagine yourself in your favorite natural setting. Pause and try to observe the sights, sounds, scents, and feelings that the space evokes. Pay attention to the profusion of life that abounds in even the most domesticated park or patch of grass. Hopefully, your worries can melt away for a minute or two as you put your anxieties in perspective and connect more deeply with the world around you.

In the words of Robert Breault, American operatic tenor: "I sit in my garden, gazing upon a beauty that cannot gaze upon itself. And I find sufficient purpose for my day."

References included on the [Psychology Today blog](#).

Jeffrey Davis is leading a **Tracking Wonder Retreat** in July 2021 at the Wild Rice Retreat in Bayfield, WI.

Nature Connection: Forest Bathing and Exploring Wisconsin's Scenic State Parks



**Free Virtual Presentation • Earth Day
Thursday, April 22, 1-2:30 pm**

Register:

https://mononaterace.zoom.us/webinar/register/9616135109591/WN_nfpcpTkCTiWhtHtCd0yvrQ

Celebrate Earth Day by attending this special health and wellness virtual lecture. Learn about nature's health benefits, including the increasingly popular wellness practice of forest bathing, and beautiful places in Wisconsin to connect with nature.

Have you ever wondered why you feel so wonderful after digging in the garden, fishing a stream, soaking in the sun, watching the clouds drift by, hiking or just going for a long walk? Kate Bast, Certified Nature and Forest Therapy Guide (ANFT), discusses forest bathing and the recent research on the importance of nature connection as a pillar for a healthy life. The event will be informational and experiential, with a short, guided sensory opening.

Also, discover some beautiful locations you can visit to bond with nature. Missy VanLanduyt, Recreation Partnership Section Chief for the Wisconsin State Park System, will show you what our wonderful state parks have to offer - from favorite places and hidden gems, to outdoor recreation opportunities. We'll take a trip around the state and explore remote beaches, wooded campgrounds, serene nature trails, and picturesque vistas.



Kate Bast, Speaker

Kate Bast, Certified Nature and Forest Therapy Guide and founder of Shinrin-yoku Madison, has lived in Madison for 25 years with her husband, two children and clingy Labradoodle. Until she found her path to Nature as a healing practice, she worked in the editorial publishing industry for 25 years, including as editor for Whole Health Project, and of BRAVA and Wisconsin Trails magazines, among others. With her family she loves to explore the state, embrace an outdoor lifestyle year round, travel, and especially, hang out with tree friends and connect people with Shinrin-yoku. She collaborates often with Moira Farrell of Hike and Heal Wellness to offer retreats.



Missy VanLanduyt, Speaker

Missy VanLanduyt is the Recreation Partnership Section Chief for the Wisconsin State Park System. Missy has lived in the Madison area for 20 years and grew up in northern Wisconsin on a dairy farm. She lives here with her husband and two young daughters. Missy has been with the DNR for nearly 10 years, all within the parks program. She enjoys spending time outdoors with her family hiking, biking, swimming, kayaking, and camping.

Sponsored by:

• **Madison Senior Center**



• **Monona Terrace**



• **All of Us**



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Putting Words Into Practice

Many organizations are striving to achieve greater diversity, equity and inclusion within their workforce.

Known as DEI or EDI, these initiatives seek to level the playing field so all employees can bring their authentic selves to work and have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. Here's a closer look at these words:

- **Diversity** brings people together from various backgrounds: racial, cultural, religious, political, gender, ages and abilities.
- **Equity** ensures that people from these diverse groups are included at all levels of the organizational chart and pay scale.
- **Inclusion** means all people feel valued and engaged.



For these initiatives to be effective, all three concepts must be put into practice. To accomplish this, organizations may need to create special processes, policies or accommodations.

When done right, these initiatives are a win-win for all involved. Employees are more likely to bring their best selves to work when their efforts are encouraged, recognized and appreciated. With more employees working to their full potential, organizations are more likely to gain a competitive edge and achieve long-term success.

NEED HELP?

Your EAP can provide additional guidance and resources.

2021 WEBINAR
SERIES

APRIL 21, 11am CT

How People With Disabilities Enhance Our Workplaces

REGISTER

As workplaces strive to become more inclusive, people with disabilities remain overlooked. We'll focus on the many benefits people with disabilities bring to the workforce. We'll also explore common stereotypes associated with hiring disabled individuals and what you can do to avoid these biases.

Presented by Raquelle Solon
Director, Organizational Development
FEI Behavioral Health

5 Ways to Keep Alcohol Use in Check during Stressful Times

By Danielle M. Dick, Ph.D., **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

How not to let a fun pastime or intended stress-reducer get out of control.

In response to a recent blog I wrote, “**Worried about Alcohol Use during the Pandemic?**” a friend jokingly messaged me: “I only worry when my alcohol supply is running low! But seriously, got any tips for keeping alcohol in check?”

Here are five ways to help you avoid falling into harmful patterns of alcohol use during these challenging times.

1. Take stock of your drinking.

I'm frequently asked, “How much is too much?” As a general rule of thumb, high-risk drinking (i.e., levels of alcohol use that could start harming your body) is considered:

- for women, 4 or more drinks on any given day, or 8 or more drinks per week
- for men, 5 or more drinks on any given day, or 15 or more drinks per week

Remember that when you're counting drinks, a standard drink is 12 ounces of regular beer at about 5 percent alcohol content, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or a shot of liquor. When tallying up how much you are drinking, keep in mind that craft beers, strong mixed drinks, or hefty wine glasses often contain more than one standard drink of alcohol.

2. Know what to look for.

Guidelines for harmful drinking are only that: guidelines. How much alcohol is harmful will vary for each individual, depending on personal factors, general health and other medical conditions, and whether an individual is taking other medications. For that reason, you want to keep an eye on whether your drinking is causing you problems.

Indicators of problems include:

- drinking more than you intended
- having trouble cutting down on your drinking
- getting into situations while drinking that could get you hurt (e.g., having unsafe sex, driving)
- having to drink a lot more to get the same effect (developing tolerance)
- continuing to drink even though it is making you depressed or anxious, or leading to other health problems or blackouts
- spending a lot of time drinking, or recovering from the effects of alcohol
- continuing to drink even though it is causing problems with your family or friends
- interfering with your responsibilities, at home, school, or work
- giving up other activities because of your drinking
- craving alcohol when you aren't drinking
- having trouble sleeping, restlessness, nausea, sweating, or other physical symptoms when you stop drinking

Alcohol use disorder is diagnosed by how many of the above criteria you endorse. Experiencing two or three problems from the above list is considered an indicator of mild problems, four to five symptoms indicate moderate problems, and experiencing six or more symptoms from the above list meets the criteria for severe alcohol use disorder.

3. Take a break.

Even in the best of times, alcohol can be habit-forming. You have a drink when you get home from work; you have a glass of wine with dinner. Over time, our brain gets into a routine and we fall into a pattern.

The problem with the pandemic is that it threw many of our usual routines out the window and created opportunities to use alcohol more frequently. The Barefoot Contessa star Ina Garten jokingly declared on Instagram, “It's always cocktail hour in a crisis!”





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7.

An easy way to get out of the cycle is to take a break from alcohol. You can decide how long of a break you want to take—perhaps a week, or two, or a month. The key is to set a time period where you commit to not drinking alcohol. The simple act of taking a break from alcohol helps break the cycle of alcohol use becoming habit-forming.

4. Have an accountability partner.

Maybe you are one of those people who has no problem sticking to your resolutions (I envy you), but many of us are lower on self-control. Having an accountability partner is a proven way to help you stick to your commitments, whether that is taking a break from alcohol for a defined period of time, or simply setting some rules around your drinking.

For example, some people commit to not having more than a certain number of drinks per day/week, or only drinking at certain times. An accountability partner could be a spouse, friend, or anyone else that you can inform of your intentions and who will check in with you to make sure you're sticking to them.

5. Change your routine.

Another simple way to break a habit (such as using alcohol regularly) is to create a new routine. If you usually have a glass of wine after dinner, then start going for an evening walk instead. Extra bonus: exercise is a great way to stay healthy and has beneficial effects on well-being! Or if you find yourself craving a special mid-afternoon drink, find a non-alcoholic version that you can substitute instead: I'm partial to flavored Pellegrino in a fancy glass. Find what works for you; the key is to substitute a new activity to take the place of drinking.

Finally, if you are concerned about your drinking, the **National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism website** has great resources to find an alcohol treatment provider; the **Psychology Today therapist directory** is also a good resource. The majority of people who meet the criteria for an alcohol use disorder never seek help. Don't wait until your drinking is hurting your life before you reach out.

If you need help to determine the next steps to take in order to treat an alcohol addiction, call your EAP at 266-6561 to talk with a counselor.

*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

Arlyn Gonzalez, agonzalez@cityofmadison.com
Provides bilingual EAP services in English and Spanish

Lori Wessel, lwessel@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.