

# CONNECTIONS

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## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

### Positive Childhood Experiences May Improve Mental Health

By Jenalee Doom, Ph.D., **Psychology Today** (Used with the author's permission)

Several national and state-level organizations have led efforts to increase awareness about the **negative impacts of adverse childhood experiences** on mental and physical health from childhood through adulthood. These adverse childhood experiences are profoundly negative experiences children can have that include childhood abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or having a caregiver with severe mental illness or who is in prison, for example.

Adverse childhood experiences are associated with greater risk for depression, anxiety, suicide, substance use problems, and physical health problems like heart disease and cancer in adulthood. In fact, adverse childhood experiences have been named one of the biggest public health crises of our time. This statement is especially concerning considering that around two-thirds of U.S. adults report having at least one adverse childhood experience and over one-third report having two or more, underscoring the widespread nature of the problem.

#### Positive childhood experiences

Fortunately, we know that we are impacted by more than just the bad experiences we have. For example, having a supportive friend or partner, living in a safe neighborhood, and having access to nutritious food are all things the general public thinks of as positive. And there is research linking each of these positive experiences to better health!

Recent research has been working to identify the types of positive childhood experiences that may play a role in long-term health. One measure of these positive childhood experiences, for example, called benevolent childhood experiences, identifies the following 10 experiences as being good for adult mental health:

1. Having at least one safe caregiver (not all caregivers may be safe, but having at least one is associated with better outcomes)
2. Having one good friend
3. Having comforting beliefs

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2.



Greetings City Employees,

Are you having a good summer? We hope you are finally using some of those vacation days that have been piling up for over a year!

We have a mixed bag for you this month, including promos for some upcoming trainings and a webinar on Workplace Substance Abuse that may be of interest. We are still delivering our trainings virtually while we all figure out our return to the workplace. Our colleagues in Organizational Development have been really busy creating a course list that addresses many of our concerns as we transition back to the office, please **check it out**.

Every profession has its challenges, and this month we highlight some good strategies for police families who regularly need to work around the unusual and uncertain schedule of their law enforcement officer. Adaptability, attitude and communication are excellent skills for all of us to carry in our "go-bag".

And for our employees who care for children, our *It Takes a Village* section features some recent research on the impact of Positive Childhood Experiences on our mental health as well as this month's Tips for Raising Resilient Children.

Have an excellent July!

~ The EAP Team



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1.

4. Enjoying school
5. Having one caring teacher
6. Having good neighbors
7. Having an adult who is not a parent or caregiver who can provide support
8. Having opportunities to have fun
9. Having a positive self-concept
10. Having a home routine that is predictable

Recent research has demonstrated that adults with more of these positive or benevolent childhood experiences have fewer mental health problems (Bethell et al., 2019; Narayan et al., 2018), better diet and fewer sleep problems (Crandall et al., 2019), and less risky sex and substance use (Crandall et al., 2020). As a result, there is growing evidence that more of these positive childhood experiences are protective for both mental and physical health in adults.

## Positive childhood experiences and COVID-19

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, my collaborators and I wanted to understand whether these positive childhood experiences could be protective for mental health during the pandemic. We were particularly curious whether these positive experiences would predict better mental health even after we accounted for adverse childhood experiences and adult factors like whether they or family members or friends had gotten infected with COVID-19 or had financial difficulties, and how good their current social support was. In a paper that will soon be published in the journal *Adversity and Resilience Science*, we found that adults with more positive childhood experiences had fewer symptoms of depression, less stress, and were less lonely early in the pandemic compared to adults with fewer positive childhood experiences. These associations remained even after we took into account how much people were affected by the pandemic and how good their social support was.

As a result, it's not just that people who report more positive childhood experiences also report better current situations. It seems like there is something special about these childhood experiences that is particularly related to better adult mental health during a pandemic. Adverse childhood experiences were only associated with greater symptoms of depression, so it appears that positive childhood experiences are related to a wider range of outcomes than the adverse experiences that we typically hear about!

Although we cannot say that positive childhood experiences cause improved mental health, this growing evidence suggests that increasing positive childhood experiences could lead to better mental health when children become adults. Identifying people who have had

low numbers of positive childhood experiences—even if they didn't have a lot of negative experiences—could be helpful for targeting support to the people who need it most during big stressors like a global pandemic.

## Practical steps to increase positive experiences

One good thing is that these positive experiences do not require anything extraordinary to implement. For example, you don't need a million dollars to have a friend or a caregiver who cares about you. The following are some steps for increasing or strengthening positive childhood experiences to potentially improve their later mental and physical health:

1. It is important to educate parents about the types of experiences that children should have that are associated with better mental and physical health in adulthood. For example, having caregivers, friends, and mentors who the child knows are there for them no matter what is extremely important, so caregivers can help facilitate and strengthen these relationships. In addition, having a predictable routine at home and providing opportunities for fun are ways that caregivers can increase positive childhood experiences.
2. Knowing what types of experiences are most important to foster in children helps us decide what resources we should provide to caregivers. For example, providing parents with financial resources to help them be there for their child, such as a living wage or paid time off, will allow them the time to be able to be there for their child instead of having to work multiple jobs. In addition, these resources may reduce financial strain on caregivers, which would allow them more mental space to be present and responsive to children without having to worry about money.
3. Therapy for adults that strengthens positive childhood memories could be a resource for adults to access during difficult times. Strengthening these positive childhood memories could also lay a foundation for creating more positive experiences for their own children, which may improve mental health in the next generation.

Taking time to reflect on positive childhood experiences could be particularly helpful for boosting your mood and feeling better during these stressful times. And increasing these positive experiences for children in your own life may be a great way to improve mental health for the next generation!

**View references for this article.**

### Tips for Raising Resilient Kids

#### *Tip #5 – Build their Ability to Problem Solve*

It's important to guide children to solve their own problems rather than doing this for them. Talk them through the problem solving process. Some questions you can ask:

- What has worked before?
- What hasn't worked?
- What would (someone they admire) do?
- Can this problem be broken down into smaller pieces?



# FIRST RESPONDER FOCUS

## The Go-Bag: 3 Essential Elements for Successful Law Enforcement Family Life

By Lara Healey, **Lexipol** (Used with Lexipol's permission)

From the academy to retirement, most public safety careers impact the lives of those closest to the employee—friends, parents, siblings, a spouse, children. Everyone in the extended family, at some point, will experience unique challenges as part of a public safety employee's support system. And though many first responders and public safety personnel thrive independently, let's take a glimpse into the life of a law enforcement family ... married with children.

### Shift Work—It's Everyone's Schedule

Several factors impact shift selection (if you are tenured enough to have a choice), and sometimes the employee's preferences do not align with those of family members. With a cost-benefit analysis and a little shift-pick luck, the schedule can provide the employee and the family with enough rest and interaction time to remain healthy and connected.

Or, let's be realistic. Your family member is on the graveyard weekend shift for years, and you try to keep the house quiet so they can sleep during the day, celebrating holidays and special occasions whenever possible, before the next shift.

If this is your reality, there are steps you can take to ease the tension. Refrain from comparing your family's schedule to that of other families. This will help everyone accept and adapt to the new normal. Adapt is the key word, as shift needs are unpredictable. A late call, a long report, a sick colleague, and another family meal is missed.

In addition, understand your loved one has limited control over their daily schedule and training requirements. You would never get mad at your child if their coach kept them late for a team meeting, so strive to have the same understanding for your public safety family member.

Finally, be prepared to operate without their involvement or assistance, just in case. You can schedule day care, commitments and your own work schedule around your loved one's schedule, but that's no guarantee they'll arrive at the expected time. And you might not be able to reach them on the phone. Do your best to establish and communicate a backup plan for shuttling the kids and give them assurance a trusted adult will always be available.

This level of understanding and flexibility does not come easy. Each day brings a new challenge.

### The Family "Go-Bag"

To help you take on the short- and long-term challenges of coping with law enforcement family life, develop a family "go-bag." Just as law enforcement professionals have go-bags with essential gear, a family go-bag contains essential skills to create a successful home life. Success is a safe home, in every sense: A place in which the employee and their support system are equally important. A place where we strive to improve and maintain the family's overall health—physical, mental and emotional.

Go-bag items will vary from family to family, but here are three common skills every public safety family member should carry:

#### Adaptability

Public safety family life is unique. Special events and life moments will be missed. Time together may be brief or interrupted. Without the ability to adapt to scheduling changes and the added pressures of this life, it is easy for both the public safety employee and his or her support system to feel overwhelmed, disappointed and underappreciated. Stop staring at the family at the park; stop wondering if your children will be upset that one parent never makes it to school events. This is your new normal. Dig into your go-bag and find some gear to help you adapt to what you are encountering.

Strive for resiliency. Sometimes children are better at adjusting than adults. As much as they thrive on schedules and predictability, children also recover more quickly from changes. They are a good act to follow. In addition, be flexible, and not just with schedules. Your public safety family member may (and should be) hypervigilant, an essential skill that often spills over into family life. When their hypervigilance doesn't add stress or anxiety to the family, adjust to it. Offer them their preferred seat in a restaurant, where they have a good view of the people and layout. Let them scout your children's school for safety concerns and address issues with the proper adults (not the children!). That said, flexibility goes both ways. If hypervigilant behavior increases tension or fear in the family, communicate and work toward an adaptation that considers all family members.

#### Attitude

A positive attitude can be the most essential yet challenging piece of gear to use. All attitudes can be contagious. If you're feeling negative about coping with law enforcement family life, there's a good chance your children will too—and vice versa. Try to put a positive twist on things, especially with children. When

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it's difficult to find a silver lining, perhaps opt to deescalate. For example, when a child is disappointed their parent won't make it to the soccer game, acknowledge the child's feelings and remind them certain jobs don't end when the clock strikes 5:00—but that their parent is equally disappointed they missed the game because they were so excited to see it.

Also, avoid venting to children. Complaining about a scheduling change or work commitment heightens the entire family's sensitivities. Children are especially vulnerable to this; they may worry their parent is on a dangerous call or their parents aren't getting along.

Instead of adding extra verbal ammo to your go-bag, add extra patience. Put another way: Fake it 'til you make it.

## Communication

No go-bag is very useful without effective communication among family members. You can't support each other and the family if you don't make your needs clear. If you would prefer your spouse to be home rather than working overtime, ask if they can compromise. In addition, consider these other important family communication elements:

- **Safety—spoken.** In any public safety home, whether or not children are present, communication is the key to safety. Combat curiosity by verbalizing clear expectations—e.g., if you see this, do not touch it. Show your children your loved one's law enforcement gear. Answer questions.
- **Safety—practiced.** Just because your children have seen the gear and heard the rules does not mean they will obey. Adults must always ensure safe gear practices. Whenever firearms are in the home, all safety rules apply, no matter your job. If your loved one isn't safely storing gear when they come home, speak up immediately.
- **Parental guidance suggested.** With children of any age, it is essential to reassure them their loved one is physically safe. Sometimes a tour of the police station is a good way to show a child their loved one is surrounded by friends and safety equipment. A positive visual of their parent's workplace can be lasting and impactful.
- **Know your audience.** Children may be confused by negative commentary they encounter pertaining to law enforcement officers. Acknowledge their concerns and have an age-appropriate discussion. Be considerate of how you explain sensitive topics to your family members, striving to instill a sense of security as opposed to inducing fear. If you tell your child not to tell anyone that their parent is a police officer, they may be confused and worried for their loved one's safety or their own. Remember: Children of all ages are perceptive. Be respectful and adjust your levels of communication accordingly. If your teenager asks about a sensitive call out, discuss appropriate details with them. They will appreciate your openness and it may also allay their concerns.

- **Define terms.** Without being dismissive of their shift experiences, discuss with your public safety family member which duty-related topics are acceptable to discuss with you and the children.
- **Establish outlets.** For every communication wall you put up to protect yourself and the children from the harsh realities of public safety work, it is essential to ensure your loved one always has an outlet. If you notice any self-isolation, self-medication or other worrisome behavior by your public safety loved one, **DO NOT IGNORE IT.** It will not get better on its own. Just as a mother with post-partum depression might hesitate to seek help because she fears someone will take her child, public safety personnel might hold similar fears as it pertains to their job security or fear people will perceive them as weak if they seek help. Mental wellness services exist on the agency level and from outside resources; however, if psychological, medical, spiritual or peer support groups are not viable options for your loved one, encourage them to spend time with informal outlets—an old military buddy, a sibling. When all else fails, you may need to take initiative and confidentially contact a trusted friend of theirs, requesting they reach out. A simple text, call or bike ride from them can be good medicine. Finally, make sure everyone in the family has an outlet, including you. Mental wellness resources exist not just to address post-traumatic stress disorder and other public safety-specific needs. They exist to give everyone, even children, a safe place to communicate.

## Training Is Key

Lexipol co-founder Gordon Graham likes to say, "Every day is a training day." Few, if any of us, will master the art of balancing a public safety home life. But that doesn't mean we can't get better at it. Each day, the entire family should practice using their go-bag gear and work to improve their adaptability, attitude and communication skills. Train as a team. This is not a one-person show. This is an entire family, working toward a common goal of health and happiness.

Is your home life like a call-out? Do you need to walk around with emotional ballistic plates or personal protective equipment? Not quite, but you do need to come prepared, be ready to adapt, and train, train, train.

Are your immediate family members aware that City of Madison EAP services are available to them?

They can call 266-6561 or visit [www.cityofmadison.com/eap](http://www.cityofmadison.com/eap) for more information.



# How Technology Can Be Part of a Happy Life

By Amy Blankson, **Greater Good Magazine** (Used with the author's permission)

*Researchers are exploring what wellness looks like in a digital world.*

Zoom Fatigue. Distraction. Burnout. For many of us, digital overwhelm is all around. The pressures of remote work are all too familiar.

When we think about how to solve these problems, conversations inevitably turn to disengaging from technology: limiting screen time, deleting apps, taking breaks from social media. But what if we approached these issues in a different way, thinking about how to create well-being while using technology?

Over the past two years, the **Digital Wellness Institute** (which I cofounded) has partnered with a team of international researchers to study digital wellness. Digital wellness reflects the increasing need for more balance in how digital technologies are integrated into every aspect of human life. When you are digitally well, you can:

- Find focus and flow in work
- Live in harmony with both your physical and digital environments
- Connect in meaningful ways with others
- Enjoy strong relationships online and offline
- Build healthy physical and digital practices
- Embrace mindfulness and self-care through intentional technology use
- Understand how to manage your digital data and privacy
- Contribute to a positive digital community in your networks

When we think about technology this way, we can come up with more creative and realistic ways to pursue happiness in a digital world that go beyond decreasing how much time we spend online.

## Assessing your digital wellness

How do you know if you are digitally flourishing?

Assessing your digital wellness is not just a matter of adding up screen time; rather, it's a holistic assessment that takes into consideration numerous factors. These include feelings of angst around constant connectivity, digital overwhelm, and computer-induced aches and pains, as well as positive emotions and experiences we might have around technology, like savoring pleasant experiences, connecting with others, and a sense of self-efficacy.

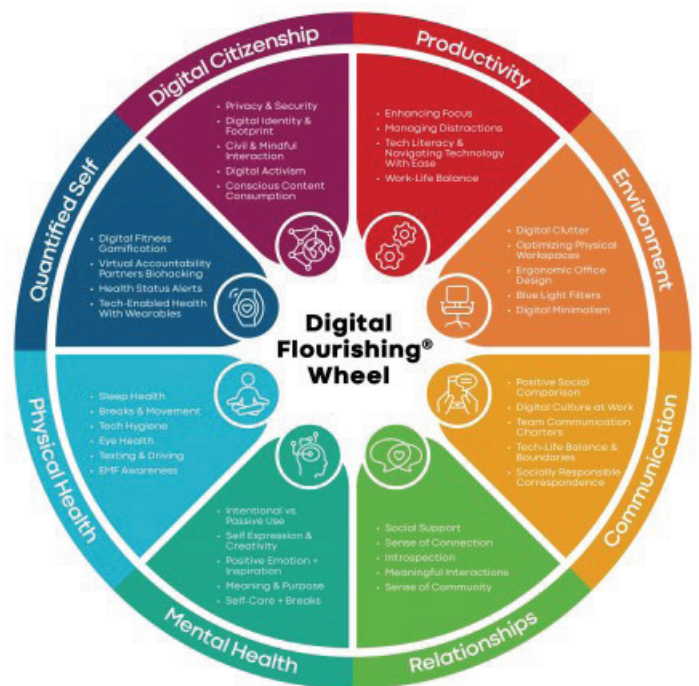
Think of digital wellness as a spectrum, ranging from excessive technology use to complete unplugging:



Finding this healthy balance for living with technology involves:

- Reflecting upon how, when, where, and how often we use our digital technologies.
- Examining what we pay attention to and the quality of that attention when we do.
- Aligning how we use our digital technologies with our values and motivations.

Our research at the Digital Wellness Institute has aimed to identify the components of digital wellness and figure out how to measure it. Building on Margaret Swarbrick's research on the eight dimensions of wellness, our team created a picture of what it would look like to flourish in the digital era across dimensions of life, including productivity, the environment, communication, relationships, mental health, physical health, the quantified self, and digital citizenship. We then partnered with 18 leading experts around the globe (including Harvard instructor Heidi Hana, New York Times bestselling author Nir Eyal, and adolescent medicine specialist Doctor Bobo) to survey research and develop actionable recommendations for each domain.



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This framework can help you identify potential areas of weakness and pathways to improving your wellness over time. For instance, perhaps you have been working long hours to complete a big project at work. Your productivity might be thriving, but your relationships or mental health might be lagging. By identifying this need, you can recalibrate in real time by leaning into more self-care or social support.

To identify your own target areas for growth, you can take our free **Digital Flourishing survey**.

## How to boost your digital wellness

Once you have identified areas in which you want to improve, it's time to make some changes to create a more positive digital culture in your life. Here are a few strategies to help you digitally flourish.

**Productivity.** Digital productivity requires us to minimize distractions, enhance our focus, and find work-life balance. If you're working on a task and you stop to look at your phone, for example, it takes just two seconds to read a text message—but it makes you twice as likely to make an error on what you're doing. Worse yet, it takes you an average of 11 minutes to get back into flow with your previous task. Minimize distractions by turning off any notifications on your phone from non-humans (for example, sports, stocks, news alerts, game prompts).

**Environment.** Having organized, comfortable spaces—both physical and digital—is important to our mental and physical health. Chaos in your home or work environment invites distraction into your life. To proactively set yourself up for success, establish some digital boundaries that work for you and clearly communicate them to family members and work contacts (for example, no work communication after a certain time in the day or week, specific locations where you will not engage in work-related tasks). Consider posting a list of your digital boundaries somewhere visible, both for others and for personal accountability.

**Communication.** Technology multiplies our possibilities for social interaction but also brings with it new challenges. Have you ever been phubbed (phone-snubbed) by someone who interrupted an important conversation with you to check an incoming text? If so, brainstorm a nice way to signal how you feel about being phubbed. Humor is a wonderful way to disarm others but still get your point across. You could casually joke, “Did you just phub me?! You know, phone-snub me?” However, be prepared that, if you are going to hold others accountable, you might be held accountable, too!

**Relationships.** Social media can be the source of much angst and social comparison, particularly when relationships are shallow or flippant. Rather than focusing on the quantity of relationships, hone in on the quality of your connections online. Unfollow unnecessary people or groups who are not adding meaning to your life.

**Mental health.** Whether a certain technology enhances or detracts from our life is often dependent on how we use it. The temptation to endlessly scroll on social media or on news sites can be high, particularly when your brainpower is low (like late at night when you are already tired). Take a few minutes first thing in the morning to write down your intentions for the day. Consider including an intention for how long you want to be online, and use your screen-time settings to hold yourself to your limits.

**Physical health.** Connected device usage has increased 46% since the start of COVID, and, as a result, back aches and neck pain have risen by 50%. Pay attention to your posture when you are sitting at your desk and make sure that your screen is at a height level with your eyes to avoid squinting and hunching.

**Quantified self.** The “quantified self” is a method of seeking to understand yourself through technology, using sensors like wearables (think smart watches) or data trackers (like apps) to optimize health. While this concept sounds new, health providers have been tracking metrics like blood pressure, heart rate, and calories for decades; the quantified self movement simply empowers individuals to track and make sense of their own data. To try out this approach, pick one behavior to track (like step count) and focus on optimizing that one metric. Set a goal for yourself and celebrate when you achieve it!

**Digital citizenship.** Having a healthy online civic life means building competency in civil discourse, culturally sensitive communication, online etiquette, and information processing. A person with a high digital citizenship orientation knows about data privacy and its implications for the individual and society, is aware of how their online communication can affect others, has tools at hand to evaluate information obtained from the internet as truthful or biased, and understands how to communicate to different audiences in a way that is sensitive to diversity and inclusion. One of the best ways to gain awareness of your digital footprint in the world is to do a Google “selfie” to see what information about yourself is publicly available. Remove any online information that you no longer wish to share (check [whitepages.com](http://whitepages.com) to see what might be listed publicly).

While we know that technology will continue to be an integral and ever-present part of our everyday lives, we do have some control over how we use it to digitally flourish, rather than flail in the midst of distraction. By cultivating our own digital wellness, we can leverage technology for its best and highest purposes and begin to shape the future with the choices that we make today.

## Workplace Substance Abuse

COVID-19 and its related stresses have led to a surge in drug and alcohol use and abuse. Over time, substance abuse can change the brain's wiring, leading to addiction.

Addiction is a brain disease that causes people to have intense cravings for a substance despite its harmful consequences.

Studies show that addiction affects areas of the brain that control judgment, decision-making, learning, memory and self-control.

All too often, addiction can interfere with workplace safety, productivity and employee morale.

It's important for managers to stay on top of problematic behavior, such as missed deadlines or safety concerns; it's also important for employees to get the help and support they need.

Many organizations are supporting managers and employees by providing helpful information and resources, including referrals to substance abuse professionals for appropriate treatment.



### NEED HELP?

Your EAP can provide additional guidance and resources.

**2021** WEBINAR SERIES

**JULY 21, 11 am CT**

**How To Talk About Addiction**

**REGISTER**

Although addiction often runs in families, helping a loved one who struggles with drug or alcohol abuse is a complicated process. We'll discuss how addiction is a disease and *not* a personal weakness. We'll also explore codependency, setting boundaries—and why the recovery process may include setbacks.

**Presented by Lantie Jorandby, MD, DFAPA**  
Chief Medical Officer, Lakeview Health, and  
**Sarah Franklin MS, LMHC**  
Program Director, Lakeview Health

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# COMPASSION FATIGUE & BURNOUT



Compassion fatigue is the emotional residue that tends to affect individuals in helping professions, caregiving roles, or those who are empathetic. This is more than just being stressed and overwhelmed, it can lead to feeling worn, exhausted, being unable to empathize with others, and dreading to go to work. Depending on the nature of your job or the roles you have in your personal life, you may be more vulnerable to compassion fatigue.

This is a virtual and interactive training that will use lectures, videos, polls, and small group discussion to explore the relationship between stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout and their impact on our personal and professional lives. As a result, you will leave with increased self-awareness being able to identify if you are being impacted by compassion fatigue or burnout, and strategies to combat them and increase your resiliency and wellness.

» Monday, July 19, 2021, 10:00-11:30AM



Registration required.  
Questions? Call the EAP Office at (608) 266-6561.







EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

# BRING YOUR BEST SELF TO WORK

This virtual training will explore the impact of wellness for employees in their personal and professional lives, discuss the benefit of reducing stress, increasing mental and physical health, improving work satisfaction and productivity, and will explore often overlooked areas of how stress can impact work units. Wellbeing looks different for each person, as it encompasses physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, intellectual, and social aspects. Further, working with the public can sometimes be challenging, increasing an employee's stress response, which can present personal and professional challenges if left unaddressed. In this workshop, we will identify ways employees can increase their resiliency at work.

This is an interactive training aimed at exploring what it means to bring your best self to work. Through a series of lectures, polls, and small group discussions, participants will get a better understanding of well-being in the workplace. We will explore vulnerability, trust, resiliency, and wellness. As a result, you will leave with increased self-awareness and a plan for how to improve your well-being so that you can bring your best self to work.

» Monday, August 2, 2021, 2:00-3:30PM



Registration required.

Questions? Call the EAP Office at (608) 266-6561.



# Outgrow the Impulse to Blame

By Steven Stosny, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* (Used with the author's permission)

*Blame may be the most self-defeating coping mechanism.*

I recently received some interesting questions about blame from a journalist. Here are the questions and answers.

## **What is the function of blame and why do we do it?**

The primary function of blame is to transfer vulnerable emotional states to someone else. Vulnerable feelings—sadness, guilt, shame, anxiety—create self-doubt and make us feel powerless. They can be alleviated with adrenaline if we can blame someone. The adrenaline that powers blame provides temporary feelings of energy and confidence.

The social function of blame is to control other people's behavior by invoking guilt or shame in them. Blamers are almost always complainers; they want others to join their assignment of guilt and shame on those they blame, in a kind of common-enemy bonding.

Blame is a natural coping mechanism that begins in toddlerhood. If you go into a room to find a toddler alone with a broken lamp and ask what happened, you'll hear, "He/she did it," even if he or she is an imaginary friend. Blaming is a function of the toddler brain—the part that's fully developed on a structural level by age 3. If you wouldn't drive in a car designed by a toddler, don't use a coping mechanism designed by a toddler.

## **If it's so natural to blame, what's wrong with it?**

For one thing, it makes the other person defensive. When people are defensive, they can't listen. More important, blame renders you powerless over how you feel. As long as your vulnerable emotions are attributed to others, they cannot motivate you to make positive changes in your behavior. Improvement is sacrificed to the impulse to punish. The road to psychological ruin begins with blame.

## **What's the difference between blame and responsibility?**

Blame is about causes. It carries a punishment impulse. Responsibility is about solutions. It carries an impulse to cooperate. Blame is focused largely on what the blamer cannot control. Responsibility is focused on possible improvement.

## **Is blame the same as criticism?**

There's a big overlap. Criticism can be constructive if it's respectful and focuses on how to do things right, rather than how they were done wrong. If it's respectful and focuses on improvement in the present and future, criticism is more teaching or guiding than blaming.

## **You've written that "blame puts you in the wrong time dimension, the wrong part of your brain, and the wrong part of your heart." What do you mean by that?**

Blame's about past causes of problems. Solutions must be in the present and future.

Blame comes from the assessment part of the prefrontal cortex, which tries to discern how bad things are and how much damage has been done. Solutions come from the more advanced "improve" part of the prefrontal cortex—making things better. As long as you're stuck in how bad things are, you can't make things better.

Blame comes from the vengeful part of the heart. Most of what we blame on our loved ones must be addressed from the compassion and kindness part of our hearts.

## **Why are we more likely to blame our partners for things that we would not blame on our friends or coworkers?**

We carry more guilt and shame concerning those we love. Where loved ones are concerned, simple disappointment feels like rejection. That creates a tendency to transfer guilt and shame by blaming. Of course, blaming loved ones only creates more guilt and shame—it's a coping mechanism designed by a toddler, after all.

## **You've written about blame junkies. What does that mean?**

Blame requires a certain amount of adrenaline—you're violating your more humane values by devaluing someone. If you don't feel energetic or confident without adrenaline, your brain will look for things to blame to get the energy shot. Adrenaline is the addiction, blame is just an easy way to get it. When blame becomes automatic, it's achieved the status of habit.





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### ***If blame is a habit, how do you break it?***

The only way to change a habit is to condition a new habit that is incompatible with the one you want to change. Practice acts of improvement, compassion, or kindness each time you have the impulse to blame, and you'll build a better habit. Improvement, compassion, and kindness usually produce endorphins, which calm anxiety and facilitate well-being. The brain tends to give up adrenaline when endorphins are available.

Begin with focusing on how you want to feel rather than how you do feel. That moves you out of the past and into future improvement. The habit of blame can't function in the future.

### ***I know a lot of people who blame themselves for everything, is that just as bad as blaming others?***

It is, for the same reasons. Blame of self or others cuts you off from solutions and your ability to create value and meaning in your life.

### ***What do you say to couples who get trapped in the blame game?***

I work with them to develop binocular vision—the ability to see your partner's perspective alongside your own and to see yourself through your partner's eyes. It's the ability to look beneath toddler coping mechanisms—blame, denial, avoidance—to the vulnerability that we all have in love relationships.

What most couples really long for in their blame game is not to be shown that they're right, but that they are loved and lovable. When they focus on being loving, instead of blaming, they feel more lovable and are more likely to get love in return.

*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**

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