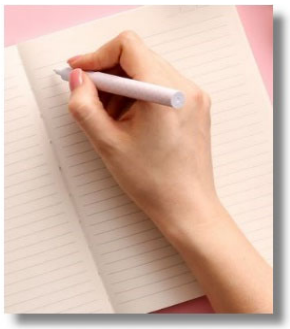
PATHWAYS
February 2022

Keep Teen Dating Safe

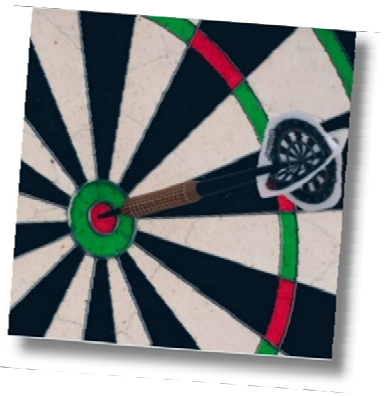
Dating violence among teens is not just physical violence, but also verbal, sexual, and/or emotional abuse. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control has evidence-based help to assist parents and guardians with materials that are worth exploring that can help reduce risks. Key themes in these materials include being proactive at helping teens understand what a healthy relationship looks like. Everyone is entitled to a healthy relationship; discussing positive behaviors and learning how to "trust one's gut or inner voice" is important. Although experts disagree on aspects of teen dating—ideal age to start, forms of dating, and frequency—being a victim of dating violence in the formative years of adolescence can lead to depression, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, and anxiety, as well as increased risk of victimization in future relationships.

Off-Load Worry for Improved Performance



Write down your worries and concerns on paper, and you may have more mental capacity to engage in other tasks requiring your attention—and do so with increased efficiency. That's the discovery of researchers at the University of Michigan, where it was observed those who wrote down their worries and concerns (engaging in a "mind dump") actually freed up brain capacity that was weighed down by the stress and anxiety associated with personal and workplace troubles. Will it work for you? Try it.

Reduce Stress with Accurate Empathy

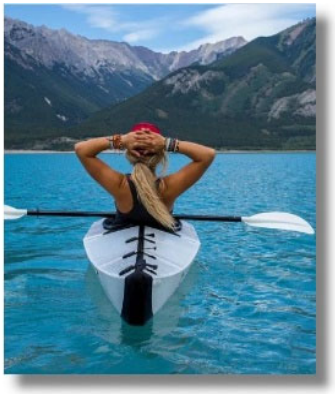


When challenged by complaints, try listening for what is not being said. You may hear anger, but is the deeper issue disappointment? If so, saying, "I know you may be disappointed" will demonstrate more accurate empathy. It zeros in on the real emotional target. This can calm someone faster. It takes practice, but don't be surprised if as a bonus, you get an apology for the overly emotional behavior. Rather than becoming stressed over who is complaining, practice accurate empathy to improve relationships and increase your job satisfaction by possibly having less stressful days.

Managing Grief in the Era of COVID-19

Millions of people worldwide have experienced recent deaths of loved ones—some have even lost multiple family members. Whether or not the deaths are COVID-19 related, every person's experience with grief is a personal journey. Many circumstances can complicate it, even when the person losing someone is surrounded by helpful family members and friends. Only the bereaved person can decide when he or she is ready to move toward a healthy resolution of their grief. If this is your experience, know that counseling to help your grief journey is available from professional counselors. Many are uniquely gifted in this process. Find them with the help of your EAP or by reaching out to one of the many associations focused on this topic. Once source is grief.com.

Learn to Love Exercise



Even if engaging in exercise can elevate one's mood and promises a longer life, this may not spur enough enthusiasm on your part to make it a priority. To create real motivation, rather than to "just do it," be programmatic about it. You'll stand a better chance of making exercise a more permanent part of your routine. Here are some ideas: 1) Decide where you will insert 30 minutes of exercise into your day four or five times per week. 2) What form of exercise is most gratifying? Can you combine exercise with another pleasurable activity like listening to music, reading a book, or other learning? Don't rush this step. Googling "fun exercises to stay in shape" will lead to many options. 3) Test the exercise for 5–10 minutes. Stop short of the normal discomfort from any muscle resistance exercise entails; for now, you are only gauging your personal satisfaction with your choice of exercise. 4) You've set aside 30 minutes per day, but when you first begin, shorten this time period and work your way up to the allotted time. 5) After a week, examine how you are feeling. Do you feel proud of your achievements so far? What about your energy level? Any gains there? Has this motivated you to sit less frequently? Any improvements to your diet choices? Has exercise helped you switch your focus or detach from stress or worries, at least temporarily? Think of all the small and large benefits gained. Don't overlook the less obvious ones. They all add up to the motivation necessary to reinforce your decision to keep an exercise program going.

Workplace Stress Management: Interpersonal Demands

Workplace stress management typically focuses on the after effects of challenging tasks. The *interpersonal demands* of others around us are often overlooked. They're also stressful. Due to everything that results from having to hear thinly veiled insults and gossip to dealing with those who manipulate, bully, chronically complain, or even lie, withhold information, and miscommunicate. Interpersonal stress may require more than a jog around the block to shake it off. Detachment, maintaining boundaries, self-discipline, assertiveness, ignoring negativity, and avoiding manipulation are teachable soft skills. They can help you remain unaffected by this form of stress, perhaps entirely. Talk to a counselor to learn better control of your emotions, how to stay focused on solutions, and when to disengage from "people dynamics" at work that can make you feel drained at the end of the day.

Not Ready for Addiction Treatment?

Fourteen million workers, or 9% of employed Americans, have a substance-abuse problem. The ratio is about the same in Canada. Fentanyl and other opioid derivatives are the #1 killer of drug users within these groups. Obviously, the most important step to avoid accidental overdose and death is to get treatment. Recovery is about learning how to stay "stopped" from using addictive substances to avoid a relapse. It's also about avoiding any substance that substitutes for your drug of choice. "I'm not ready for treatment yet" is a top reason for resistance to treatment. If you have attempted to quit using substances but have only been frustrated by a lack of success, it's likely you are missing many pieces of the treatment equation that make it work. Start with an assessment from a professional with specialized knowledge in addictive disease. They will guide you to the type of help that's most likely to work for you.

Training Reduces Risk of Injury

Many jobs are hazardous but don't require certified training in accident prevention by government agencies such as the Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA). Examples include how to lift something heavy or working outside in the heat. Fortunately, OSHA has many videos on these and other topics; they are available in English and Spanish. Find more on YouTube. See the library at www.osha.gov/video. To reduce risk of injury, set aside time with your team and learn from these resources how to be safer on the job. If you work a position where your risk of injury is statistically higher, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

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