

The many benefits of forgiveness

By Larry Dunn, Ph.D., SIA Conflict Resolution Specialist

This is the fourth article of our five-part conflict-resolution series. It discusses forgiveness and its impact on our well-being.

Forgiveness is a complex and profound part of the human experience. As the subject of my first book, *Discovering Forgiveness: Pathways through Injury, Apology, and Healing* (Cascadia, 2014), I had long been interested in forgiveness as part of a transformational process for dealing with conflict, injury and other types of harm and wrongdoing. For many, it's a highly regarded value, principle, practice, process and goal of healthy relationships.

Unmanaged or unresolved conflict and its effects can negatively impact relationships and our overall sense of personal well-being. Extensive research in psychology, medicine and neuroscience has explored the positive impacts of forgiveness on mental, emotional and physical health. And forgiveness is associated with enhanced interpersonal relationships and other positive life outcomes. The potential benefits of forgiveness are many:

- **Reduced Stress and Anxiety.** Forgiveness has been linked to lower stress levels and reduced anxiety. Holding onto grudges and harboring resentment can elevate stress hormones in the body, contributing to chronic stress and its associated health risks. Forgiveness, on the other hand, allows individuals to release these negative emotions, leading to a more relaxed and calm state.
- **Improved Mental Health.** Forgiveness is closely tied to mental well-being. Research suggests that individuals who practice forgiveness tend to experience lower levels of depression and anxiety. By letting go of past grievances, forgiving others creates space for positive emotions, fostering a healthier mindset and emotional balance.
- **Enhanced Relationships.** Forgiveness plays a crucial role in



interpersonal relationships. Estrangement in family relations is on the rise, and unresolved conflict can lead to wider social isolation. Embracing forgiveness contributes to healthier and more satisfying relationships, creating a positive social environment that, in turn, supports overall well-being. As part

of a process for resolving conflicts, forgiveness can play a role in fostering reconciliation, breaking the cycle of resentment and contributing to emotional healing within the context of family and friendships.

- **Positive Effects on Cardiovascular Health.** The emotional and psychological benefits of forgiveness can positively impact cardiovascular health. Studies have suggested that forgiveness is associated with a reduced risk of heart disease and improved heart health. Chronic anger and resentment can lead to increased blood pressure. By practicing forgiveness, individuals may experience a reduction in hostility and anger, leading to lower blood pressure levels. This cardiovascular benefit contributes to overall physical health.
- **Improved Immune Function.** The stress-reducing effects of forgiveness also extend to the immune system. Chronic stress can weaken the immune response, making individuals more susceptible to illnesses. Forgiveness has been linked to a strengthened immune system, potentially enhancing the body's ability to fight off infections and diseases.
- **Enhanced Coping Mechanisms.** Forgiveness is associated with better coping mechanisms in the face of life's challenges. Individuals who can forgive are often more resilient, able to bounce back from adversity with a

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Benefits of forgiveness

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- positive outlook. This resilience contributes to overall mental and emotional well-being.
- **Better Sleep Quality.** Unresolved conflicts and negative emotions can contribute to sleep disturbances. By forgiving and letting go of grudges, individuals may experience improved sleep quality. Better sleep, in turn, contributes to many of the above-mentioned benefits and supports overall physical and mental health.
- **Increased Life Satisfaction.** As a personal practice for injuries both big and small, forgiveness aligns with the virtues of compassion and mercy. Forgiveness is linked to higher levels of life satisfaction and subjective well-being. By releasing negative emotions and fostering positive attitudes, individuals who practice forgiveness often report a greater sense of contentment and fulfillment in their lives.

In addition to recognizing its transformative potential for individuals, we do well to remember that forgiveness can have different meanings and purposes, especially in the public realm. The pressure to forgive can be overwhelming, especially for victims of serious crimes or abuse. But forgiveness isn't magic. We can forgive and still be angry, there can be good reasons not to forgive (at least not right away) and forgiving a wrong without tackling its roots solves nothing and may allow further harm.

Forgiveness involves a process of internal healing sometimes offered by individuals to keep their own souls intact, and anger and resentment from destroying them. In such cases, forgiveness is about survival and preserving one's ability to keep up the fight of the larger battle against the wrongs of the world and not about absolution.

Forgiveness is a powerful contributor to overall well-being. The ability to forgive oneself and others is associated with stress reduction, improved mental health, enhanced relationships, and positive effects on various physical and physiological systems. Embracing forgiveness as a regular practice can contribute to a healthier and more fulfilling life.

While the transformative power of forgiveness is evident, it's also important to approach forgiveness with thoughtfulness and sensitivity, recognizing the complexities and diverse responses to injury and harm. Those seeking or offering forgiveness must wait for "head" (values) and "heart" (emotions) to come together at the right time. We benefit from a nuanced understanding of forgiveness, acknowledging its potential for healing and transformation while respecting the individual and societal complexities that surround this profound human experience.



National School Breakfast Week is March 4-8 Sacramento City Unified School District's Central Kitchen Food Truck Program is revitalizing school breakfast

By Deborah R. Camacho, Ph.D., SIA Prevention Services

When the school week gets busy, it's easy for students to rush out the door in the morning without having a nutritious meal. That's why school breakfast is such a great option. In fact, students who participate in school breakfast tend to have better attendance rates and fewer behavioral problems.

Funded by No Kid Hungry, the Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) launched the Central Kitchen Food Truck Program on March 6, 2023 to help fuel students for success. Since then, the program has transformed the school breakfast experience and increased meal participation by 250 percent at nine middle school sites.

Central Kitchen strategically targeted middle school students because of low breakfast participation rates districtwide and is now serving an average of 300 free breakfasts a day within a 30-minute window. The program has been so successful that as of January 31 the program was expanded to include five district high schools.

Of course, this would not be possible without a dedicated, hardworking team of people. Supervisor Yolanda Marculescu oversees the food truck, as well as eight other district sites. Helping her keep the "wheels rolling" is a remarkable crew.

Lead Esty Vinson and assistant Gabby Ruiz are the "heart and soul of the operation," says Yolanda. They start at 5:30 a.m. every day, prepping, preparing and cooking hot, fresh and nutritious farm-to-fork breakfasts. From hand-dipped French toast, to fresh berry compote for yogurt and granola parfaits,

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Food Truck Program

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to ordering and managing product rotation to ensure minimal waste, their attention to detail extends to every aspect of the operation. In addition, all three women collaborate on new menu and recipe ideas that are tested in the kitchen prior to being served.

Driver Tyler Newton handles everything from point-of-sale systems, serving lines (students are required to enter their student IDs to track the number of free meals provided), loading, unloading and helping with expediting the food. “He’s essential to our operation,” says Yolanda.

Area supervisor David Lose brings his experience and organizational skills in running high-volume operations, along with managing the dedicated high school student workers who help serve the breakfasts. David has been instrumental in the program’s success, says Yolanda, and “we couldn’t do it without him.” And these front-line breakfast heroes don’t stop after serving the students; they also prepare for the next day’s service, sanitize all the dishes and the truck, and all within an eight-hour day.

Together this dedicated team embodies the spirit of the Central Kitchen Food Truck Program, ensuring that no child goes hungry and that every meal served is a testament to care, commitment and community.



**National School Breakfast Week
is March 4-8**

Six dimensions of the Wellness Challenge Series

By Lyn Poll, M.S., SIA Prevention Services

With three of the six wellness dimension challenges under our belts, I hope you’re beginning to see how “small” changes can have “big” impacts on your W.E.L.L.-being*. This issue will highlight the areas of occupational and purposeful health with the *LaserFocused* and *MeditationMaster* challenges.



The LaserFocused Challenge

NationalToday.com conducted a survey of 1,000 people about their use of electronic devices. They discovered that 75 percent of Americans spend anywhere from three to 10 or more hours a day on a device. Some 48 percent spend five hours or more per day looking at a screen, while 13 percent spend 10 hours or more.

The pandemic has permanently blurred the lines between work and home life, so much so that we may find it difficult to separate the two. A common habit afflicting many is checking emails at all hours of the day and night. Doing so prevents the ability to get a much-needed break from screen time to relax and recharge.

The **LaserFocused challenge** encourages breaking the cycle of constantly checking emails off the clock. Start small by reading emails only once an hour for the next 30 days. If you find this easy, then take it one step further by checking email every two to three hours. Still too easy, then only check email at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day. You may be surprised at how challenging this might be, but you also may realize how liberating it can be to step away from technology, breathe deeply and reconnect with the rest of the world.

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- SIA website receives equal access credential

Wellness Challenge Series

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Take being LaserFocused to the next level. Commit to the Global Day of Unplugging on March 1. Always held on the first Friday of March, this day encourages people to disengage from technology for 24 hours and engage in real-world activities that promote mindfulness, connection and well-being. Click this link [Global Day of Unplugging](#) for tips and ideas on how to disconnect.

The MeditationMaster Challenge

Anxiety and depression concerns nationwide are making mental health a priority in 2024. In fact, a Forbes health survey cited that in 2023 improved mental health was the number one goal or resolution among Americans, suggesting a cultural shift when it comes to well-being ([Top New Year's Resolutions For 2023 – Forbes Health](#)).

One commonly used method for improving mental health is meditation. Meditation is a great way to quickly regain a sense of presence and calm, reduce stress, boost immunity, decrease pain, sharpen memory, and lead to a deeper appreciation for life.

The **MeditationMaster challenge** invites you to meditate a total of 150 minutes over 30 days – that's just five minutes a day. For some, this may be a first encounter with meditation, but don't be discouraged if you don't see or feel immediate benefits; it takes practice, like all good things. If you're not sure how to begin, use the easy tips below as a starting point to help guide you.

- Find a comfortable, distraction-free location. Create your space.
- Sit up tall with your spine straight, either in a chair, on the floor or with back against the wall.
- Close your eyes and take 3 deep breaths; check out this SIA video on [Basic Belly Breathing](#).
- Focus on the breath. If your mind wanders, return the focus to the sensation of your breathing.
- Practice, practice, practice. It may take time to fully see or feel the benefits of your practice. Be kind to yourself.

Of course, there are many types of meditation techniques, but the best one is the one that helps you with your journey to finding a calmer, less stressful and more present lifestyle. The ability to tune out the world and devote the mind to the present can be incredibly therapeutic and beneficial. Are you ready to get in touch with your inner peace and live a more purposeful life?

Take meditation to the next level. Download an app such as Calm, Headspace or Breathe Sync to help you maintain and explore new ways to meditate or click <https://www.youtube.com/user/SIA4Kids/videos> for other SIA videos on relaxation. Take a live class with a friend, co-worker or family member. Invite others to join you for "meditative minutes" and form your own group in person or over Zoom.

If you want to share any "ah-ha" moments, comments or stories on how your challenge has gone thus far, email us at PreventionServices@sia-jpa.org.

*Whole Person, Environment, Lifestyle and Learning

SIA website receives WCAG certification

By Amanda Franco, SIA Prevention Services

In an era where inclusivity and accessibility are at the forefront of digital experiences, we are thrilled to announce that the SIA website (www.sia-jpa.org) has been certified in the WCAG 2.1 Level A and AA standards. This [certification](#) was performed by WebAIM and awarded on November 28, 2023. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines ([WCAG](#)) were created to help companies ensure that people with disabilities can have equal access to website functionality, content and features. As a company committed to providing equal opportunities for all individuals, this milestone marks a significant step toward creating a more inclusive online environment.



Implementing accessibility features enables us to provide a seamless browsing experience for all users. Here are some notable enhancements that have been made to our website:

- **Alternative Text for Images:** All images on our website now include descriptive alternative text, allowing screen readers to accurately convey the visual content to visually impaired users.
- **Keyboard Navigation:** We have optimized our website for keyboard-only navigation, enabling users who rely on alternative input devices to browse our site efficiently.

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World Health Day '24 •
is set for April 7



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Accessibility certification

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- **Color Contrast:** To improve readability, we have carefully selected color combinations that meet the WCAG 2.1 contrast requirements, ensuring that text and visual elements are easily distinguishable.
- **Clear and Consistent Layout:** Our website now follows a consistent structure throughout, making it easier for users to navigate and find the desired information effortlessly.

We understand that accessibility is an ongoing process, and we're committed to continuously improving the usability of our website. If you encounter any accessibility barriers while using our platform, or have suggestions for further enhancements, we encourage you to reach out to us. Your feedback is invaluable in our journey toward creating an inclusive online community.



World Health Day is April 7

By Anthony Ricci, M.S., SIA Prevention Services

Every year on April 7 the world observes World Health Day. Spearheaded by the World Health Organization (WHO), this event highlights major health issues and emphasizes the value of maintaining global health.

Since its inception in 1949, World Health Day has had a variety of themes, from diabetes and polio to bigger topics like road safety or the effects of climate change on our health. But the main goal has remained consistent in raising awareness about taking better care of our health and that nothing is off limits in the pursuit of achieving better well-being.

Just like the WHO, with its various themes, everyone has a different view on what health involves. Webster's dictionary defines health as "the condition of being sound in body, mind, or spirit." A great definition, but what does that even mean? In body, the epitome of health might be best represented by an Olympic athlete. Being one of the best athletes in the world means you must be in peak physical condition, but the body is only one aspect of the above definition. And do all Olympians have sound mind and spirit? Olympic athletes sacrifice a tremendous amount for their sport, which can often result in other aspects of life being pushed aside. We hear countless stories about athletes who've encountered mental health problems either during or after their careers, so do athletes truly personify the essence of health? Maybe, maybe not.

So, if athletes aren't the epitome of health, then who is? The answer is anyone. We can all strive to reach optimal health, but it requires effort and balance. Eating well, exercising, getting good sleep, reducing stress, and cultivating your spirit are all avenues in improving our wellbeing and finding balance.

Taking small steps to improve your body, mind and spirit can make a huge difference to your quality of life and can get you closer to being the best version of yourself. Instead, on this World Health Day, tap into your inner "Olympian" and take one step toward improving your health and realize that "healthy" might not be as far off as you think. <https://www.daysoftheyear.com/days/world-health-day/>



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Free virtual trainings •
Quote to Note •



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Upcoming FREE virtual trainings

SIA provides the staff of our member districts with virtual training on a variety of topics that apply to both personal and professional life. To learn more about any of the training courses listed below, contact tfranco@sia-jpa.org. You can also join our [email list](#) to learn of future events at [SIA – Schools Insurance Authority \(sia-jpa.org\)](https://sia-jpa.org).

3/4/2024	Beyond Worry: Supporting Yourself and others with Anxiety	5:30-6:30 p.m.
3/5/2024	Caring for Elders	5:30-6:30 p.m.
3/6/2024	How to Create a Healthy Workplace	5:30-7:30 p.m.
3/8/2024	How to Support Mental Health Concerns in the Workplace	12-1 p.m.
3/11/2024	How to Make the Most of Feedback	5:30-6:30 p.m.
3/13/2024	How to Make the Most of Feedback	12-1 p.m.
3/14/2024	How to Manage Finances	5:30-6:30 p.m.
3/18/2024	Teaching Your Kids Accountability	5:30-6:30 p.m.
3/20/2024	How to Support Mental Health Concerns in the Workplace	5:30-6:30 p.m.
3/21/2024	How to Better Manage Stress	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/1/2024	Building A Culture of Kindness: Strategies for Promoting Mental Health and Strong Relationships	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/4/2024	How to Create a Respectful Workplace	5:30-7:30 p.m.
4/8/2024	How to Navigate Workplace Change	12-1 p.m.
4/11/2024	How to Navigate Workplace Change	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/15/2024	How to Understand Nonverbal Communication	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/17/2024	How to Work with Difficult Customers (not employees)	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/19/2024	How to Work with Difficult Customers (not employees)	12-1 p.m.
4/23/2024	Menopause and Mental Health	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/25/2024	Making Time for Fitness	5:30-6:30 p.m.
4/30/2024	How to Support Mental Health Concerns with Friends and Family	5:30-6:30 p.m.

QUOTE TO NOTE



"When you share your humanness, you create an opportunity for someone to practice theirs."

- Nataly Kogan

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