



PATHWAYS

April 2024

The **Employee** Newsletter of the BOCES Employee Assistance Program

Stress Awareness Month: Counseling for Stress Management?

Despite the many stress management tips that exist, not everyone can decide which ones will work best or how to apply them consistently for the desired impact. This is where professional counseling can be of assistance. Consider seeking support when faced with persistent, overwhelming stress you believe interferes with your daily functioning. Physical symptoms of stress such as headaches, gastrointestinal issues, or consistent sleep problems are also indicators it is time to seek support. Typically, when stress is unmanageable, it will negatively affect your relationships with your family, friends, and colleagues. Based on these signs it may be beneficial to reach out to your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or seek additional support and resources. This can provide you with the necessary support and tools, including lifelong skills, to better manage stress both now and in the future.



What a Small Garden Can Do for Wellness

Spring is the perfect time to explore gardening—for both fresh produce and enhanced well-being. You can start with a single pot or a square foot of space, and with a bit of sunlight seize this wellness opportunity to help manage stress. Gardening promotes relaxation, relieves tension, enhances mood, improves emotional well-being, encourages mindfulness, it gives you a sense of grounding, connection to the world around you, awe of nature, and achievement. A larger garden will give you loads of exercise too. Start today—a handful of seeds is only a couple of bucks!



Resource: "Square-Foot Gardening: A Beginner's Guide" Mel Bartholomew

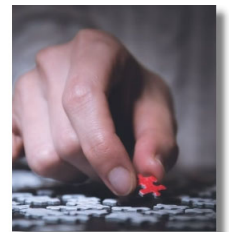
Keep Your Team Aligned, Engaged, & Productive

Don't overlook the importance of your team meeting regularly to deal with issues of communication, productivity, and job satisfaction. Many employees are on teams, but months or years often go by with some teams never taking time to address issues impacting productivity and cohesion. Do you recognize these "overdue for a meeting" signs and symptoms: 1) unaddressed issues leading to misunderstandings or conflicts; 2) cliques forming among like-minded employees to bond, vent frustrations, and protect each other using a "we vs. them" view of the work unit; 3) a perceived lack of trust among team members; and 4) team members demonstrating less initiative than in the past.



Overcome Resistance and Achieve More with Micro Habits

Micro habits are tiny, easily achievable actions linked to goals seamlessly integrated into daily routines. They circumvent resistance to change, offering a pathway past the intimidation of large goals that can keep us from what we desire most. Micro habits wield significant influence due to their cumulative impact. It starts with small manageable tasks. Resistance is almost nil. These behaviors then foster discipline and momentum. This paves the way for larger successes. For instance, one daily pushup may seem trivial, but starting with just one then gradually adding more can evolve into a robust exercise routine over time. Delve deeper into this potentially life-changing strategy by reading "The Power of Tiny Wins: Building Success Through Micro Habits" (2024).



Reduce Personal Risk When Using Antidepressants

One in eight people takes an antidepressant. Do you or a loved one use an antidepressant? Dozens of antidepressants exist (e.g., Paxil, Zoloft, Prozac), but they are not without risk. Although antidepressants may help patients overcome depression, manage anxiety, and improve sleep, follow your doctor's instructions closely. Especially while waiting for a specific medication to take effect and relieve your symptoms. Doctors typically seek to identify the right medication via short trials. During this time communication is critical. Since 2004, the Food and Drug Administration has required patients to be informed of the increased risk of suicidal thoughts in children and adolescents who use antidepressants. Research is mixed about suicidality, but the warning now also applies to young adults who take antidepressants. One study showed more risk during the first week or two. Another study found supportive psychotherapy was very helpful in reducing such risk. Tips: 1) report any increased agitation or anxiety to your doctor after starting an antidepressant; 2) expect your doctor to initially follow your reactions to the new medication closely—if this communication seems less than you anticipated, reach out to them; 3) have a thorough discussion with your doctor about the potential risks and benefits of antidepressant treatment but be aware the benefits can far outweigh the risks; 4) educate yourself about antidepressants and how they work; 5) discuss with your doctor how adopting a healthy lifestyle—through regular exercise, balanced nutrition, adequate sleep, and enjoyable activities—can complement your medication in treating your condition.

Learn more at clevelandclinic.org/health (search "antidepressants-depression-medication").



Avoid Couple Troubles Over Money



Money troubles among couples are common. But resolving them is possible. You can try avoiding them if your relationship is new. Tips for couples: 1) Communicate openly and honestly about financial goals, spending habits, and values to reduce misunderstandings and disagreements. 2) Set specific, achievable financial goals together so you work towards a common financial future. 3) Avoid resentment and imbalance in your relationship caused by unequal contributions to your shared financial responsibilities. 4) Few things will cause more stress than debt. It is important to create a budget. Stick to it to avoid overspending. (Many couples attempt this task, but they are undermined by not starting first with #1 above.) 5) Avoid secrets or hiding financial information. Money has a powerful effect. Don't underestimate it. Secrets can erode the essential trust needed to make your relationship thrive. 6) Turn to expert sources to help guide your financial future.

Learn more: <https://www.investopedia.com> [Search "money marriage issues"]

Understanding Alcohol's Impact on Health Beyond the Hangover



Acetaldehyde is a toxic substance produced by your liver when alcohol is metabolized (it is a main contributor to a hangover). But acetaldehyde is also considered a carcinogen. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notes that consuming three or more alcoholic drinks daily raises the risk of stomach and pancreatic cancers. Heavy alcohol use is also a risk factor for cancers of the head and neck (mouth, throat, and voice box), liver, colon, rectum, and breast! Strong suspicions are associated with prostate cancer as well. Is addressing a potential alcohol use disorder a priority for you? Begin with a free, confidential assessment through your EAP or consult with a professional treatment provider. Learn more at www.cdc.gov (search "alcohol and cancer").

Self-Motivation vs. Self-Discipline for Enhanced Success

Self-motivation is the inner drive to achieve a goal, but self-discipline is what makes things happen. Self-motivation is easier to come by than self-discipline. You may know this already if you didn't stick to the action steps of a New Year's resolution. Self-discipline includes consistently resisting distractions, frequently delaying gratification, and adhering to routines or plans, even in the face of challenges. To improve self-discipline: 1) decide on—and visualize—a goal; 2) divide the goal into small tasks; 3) repeat #2, with the tasks made even smaller; 4) fit the tasks into time slots of an existing daily routine—a key point because a routine *pulls you* along with less reliance on willpower to act; and 5) reward your successes, big and small.

New resource: "Self-Discipline: How to Keep Mental Control to Provide Self-Improvement and Achieve Goals Every Day" (December 2023)



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