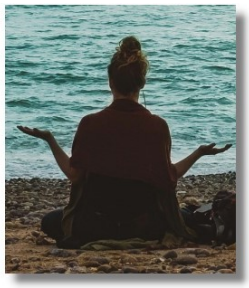
PATHWAYS
September 2024
The **Employee** Newsletter of the BOCES Employee Assistance Program

Dangers of Excessive Screen Use

Studies consistently link compulsive internet use to brain changes that foster addictive behaviors and impair intellectual and physical growth. Teens now average 4.8 hours online daily. Signs of addiction include disinterest in other activities, withdrawal symptoms when offline, and using screens to escape negative feelings. If you're a concerned parent, you should know over 50 studies confirm family counseling is the most effective approach. This therapy helps establish healthier screen habits, promotes offline activities, improves family communication, and supports children's mental and emotional well-being. Don't endure the frustration of watching your teen struggle with depression, anxiety, aggression, defiance, or even bullying. These issues are treatable but require family involvement rather than sole focus on the teen. Your employee assistance program can help.

Learn more at https://greenschoolsgreenfuture.org/excessive-internet-use-disrupts-key-parts-of-the-teenage-brain

Anxiety: It's Number One Now



The 2024 results of the American Psychiatric Association's annual mental health poll show U.S. adults are feeling increasingly anxious. In 2024, 43% of adults said they feel more anxious than they did the previous year, up from 37% in 2023 and 32% in 2022. This problem surpasses depression, stress, and relationship issues. Key concerns include the economy, the upcoming presidential election, and gun violence. There are many anxiety triggers, including personal economic instability, health concerns, and fear of war. Immediate personal steps you can take to manage (reduce) anxiety include setting boundaries on news consumption, writing action steps you will take to have better control over direction in your life, and using the EAP.

https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/news-releases/annual-poll-adults-express-increasing-anxiousness

Stress Tips:
Conquer Monday Morning Blues

Feeling the Monday morning blues is common. Very simply, weekends give you control over your time and choices. It's almost like retirement for 48 hours. But the script flips on Monday, and demands you cannot control take over. Overcome this overwhelming feeling by spending 10 to 15 minutes on Sunday night writing down your goals and organizing your personal to-do list for the week. This way, you can start the week feeling more in charge rather than suddenly "dictated to" by work.

September is Suicide Prevention Month: Connections are a Key in Intervention

Everyone can help prevent suicide by knowing the warning signs, understanding how to initiate an intervention conversation, using empathy and compassion, and knowing how and when to act. You can learn more from your EAP or the new national 988lifeline.org website. Many would-be interveners ask, "What are some of the reasons a high-risk person ultimately decided against suicide?" The answers give clues to prevention and offering support. One of the most important was the suicidal person's concern about the negative effects the suicide would have on loved ones. Particularly if the person had strong social connections and feelings of responsibility or concern for loved ones. People often report thinking about the impact their death would have on family members deterred them from taking their own life. Additionally, the fear of burdening loved ones with grief and the desire to spare them pain can be powerful motivators for someone to reconsider. In some cases, even a single caring conversation or expression of support can create a vital connection that keeps someone from making a tragic decision.

https://988lifeline.org/promote-national-suicide-prevention-month/

Using Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage your emotions while also recognizing, understanding, and influencing the emotions of others. Maximize EI's use to enhance relationships, experience fewer conflicts, and enjoy your job more. 1) When a coworker shares a concern, listen without interrupting, and show you're engaged by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and paraphrasing what they've said. Similarly with your boss, listen carefully to feedback or instructions, and ask effective questions to ensure you understand and show it. 2) When tensions rise in the office, decide you will remain calm. Encourage others to take a break, thereby helping defuse tense situations. Likewise, if your boss is under pressure, decide to offer solutions rather than adding to their stress, thereby allowing your calm demeanor to influence their mood. 3) The most important EI skill is being aware of your own emotional triggers and managing your response to them. If a coworker's comment annoys you, pause for a moment and take a breath. You'll respond thoughtfully rather than reacting impulsively. And if you feel frustrated or upset by something your boss has said or done, take time to cool down before addressing the issue. Then enter the conversation as though you are teaming with them to explore a concern.

https://mhanational.org/what-emotional-intelligence-and-how-does-it-apply-workplace

Create a Sustainable Exercise Routine

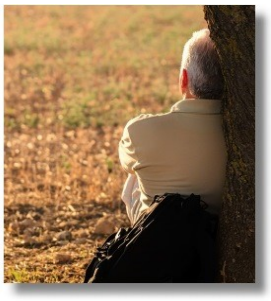
Exercisers experience fewer illnesses like diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease and have improved mood, cognitive ability, and reduced systemic inflammation. New research also shows a 30%–35% reduction in their mortality for any reason compared to non-exercisers. Despite the benefits, more is needed to inspire many people to engage in regular exercise. Roadblocks include inconvenience, hassle, pain, boredom, failure to see fast results, having unrealistic expectations, or even seeing people at the gym looking healthier than oneself. Stay motivated by first answering key questions about your exercise program and goals: What tangible benefits would regular exercise bring to your life? What physical activity will you truly enjoy? How can you integrate exercise into your daily routine in a way that feels manageable and not overwhelming? What small, achievable goals can you set for yourself to measure progress and stay motivated? Who in your life can be your "accountability partner" if your motivation wanes? How will you reward yourself for staying consistent with your exercise routine?

Source on "all cause mortality": pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov (Search 18525377)

Choosing a Positive Attitude at Work

Many employees think a positive attitude at work is mostly shaped by the environment, job satisfaction, and how they are treated. While a positive work environment can foster a good attitude, your attitude is also a controllable soft skill that can be developed and applied in any situation. Experiment with your attitude. Choose to approach challenges with optimism while maintaining a professional demeanor. When the work unit feels stressed or dysfunctional, clearly define your own boundaries to prevent burnout, and your attitude will remain more positive. Even in less-than-ideal conditions, you can choose to maintain a positive attitude. Why? While you may not control the conditions around you, you can control how you respond to them. The payoff is maintaining your well-being, but it will have a ripple effect that improves the overall environment.

What Is the "National Loneliness Epidemic" About?



Remote work, digital communication, the isolation of the elderly—the time people spend socializing in person has dropped over 70% in the past 20 years. Among its ripple effects is the impact on health. Loneliness—and not just the subjective feeling of being sad from lack of social contact with friends, family, and meaningful relationships—has been linked to mental health disorders, cardiovascular disease, and decreased life expectancy. Be proactive and intentional in maintaining social connections. Relationships are resources you build for a lifetime—your future "social IRA." Counter loneliness by focusing on meaningful relationships rather than numerous casual connections. Assess your social media use—ensure it enhances, not replaces, real-life interactions. If you're concerned about isolation, whether your own or someone else's, reach out to your EAP for support.

Learn more at https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html.

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