



A Healthy Outlook!

240-314-1040 • FAX 240-314-1049 • www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/EAP • Vol. 9 No. 7

What is the **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)?**

THE EAP is a free service offered to Montgomery County Public Schools employees, their immediate family members, and retirees. The goal is to help employees address any troubling issues they face, either in the workplace or at home. The program is staffed by licensed and certified mental health professionals.

We also provide consultations to supervisors and colleagues, if they are concerned about an employee's well-being. Our services are confidential, with exceptions only as required by law. Information concerning an employee's or family member's use of the EAP will not be given to anyone outside of the EAP without the written consent of the individual, unless the employee assistance specialist is concerned that the client presents a risk of harming himself or herself, another person, or property; if there is suspicion of child or elder abuse; or if an employee who utilizes a commercial driver's license in

Here are some of the issues we help with:

- ◆ Job-related problems
- ◆ Depression and anxiety
- ◆ Financial problems
- ◆ Alcohol and other drug abuse
- ◆ Stress and life crises
- ◆ Grief and loss
- ◆ Domestic violence
- ◆ Couple and family problems
- ◆ Balancing work and family

Here are some of our services:

- ◆ Assessment
- ◆ Referrals to outside agencies and counselors—based on the most appropriate service at the least possible cost
- ◆ Short-term counseling
- ◆ Crisis intervention
- ◆ Follow-up services
- ◆ Workshops for employees
- ◆ Access to the MCPS Dispute Resolution Program (mediation)

the course of his or her work poses a danger to the safety of students in the community.

EAP services are available by appointment, Monday through Friday from

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., including the summer. You may contact us by phone at 240-314-1040 or by e-mailing EAP@mcpsmd.org.

Upcoming Events:

CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

The MCPS Cancer Support Group will not be meeting over the summer.

The next meeting will be on September 10 from 4–5 p.m.

All are welcome to the next meeting. All meetings are on the second Monday of the month from 4–5 p.m. at the Carver Educational Services Center, 850 Hungerford Drive, Room 240. For more information, please contact Debra Tipton on Outlook or by phone at 240-314-1040.

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You Can Build Your **PEOPLE SKILLS**

How would you like to get along even better with others in your personal life and in the workplace? Getting along well with people sounds pretty basic but can be difficult to do so let us break it down into some manageable and specific skills. By developing and improving the following skills, you will get along well with others:

- **Build others' self-esteem.**
- **Show empathy for others.**
- **Encourage people to cooperate with each other.**
- **Communicate assertively.**
- **Ask productive questions and demonstrate listening skills.**
- **Respond productively to emotional statements.**

PEOPLE SKILLS (which are also known as emotional intelligence) can be broken down into these five specific skills. Here is a brief look at each one.

1. **Build others' self-esteem**—When you are in a situation where you are made to feel good about yourself, you feel good. You can do the same for others by doing the following kinds of things:
 - a. Make eye contact with them.
 - b. Call them by their names.
 - c. Ask them for their opinions.
 - d. Compliment their work.
 - e. Tell them how much you appreciate them.
 - f. Write a note of thanks to someone who does something worthwhile.
 - g. Make them feel welcome when they come to your home or workplace.
 - h. Pay attention to what is going on in their lives. Acknowledge milestones and express concern about difficult life situations such as illness, death, and accidents.
 - i. Encourage your loved ones to explore their talents and interests.
 - j. Share their excitement when they accomplish something.
 - k. Honor their needs and wants.

- l. Take responsibility for your choices and actions, and expect them to do the same.
 - m. Take responsibility for the quality of your communications.
2. **Show empathy for others**—Empathy means recognizing emotions in others. It is the capacity to put yourself in another person's shoes and understand how he or she views reality, and how he or she feels about things. Being aware of our emotions and how they affect our actions is a fundamental skill to have in today's people-intense workplaces. People who are cut off from their emotions are unable to connect with others. It is like they are emotionally tone-deaf. No one wants to work with such people because they have no idea how they affect others. You probably have met a few people who fit this description.
 3. **Encourage people to cooperate with each other**—Whether you are managing a family or a work group, here are some specific things you can do to create an environment where others work together well:
 - a. Do not play favorites. Treat everyone the same. This will help people to trust you.
 - b. Do not talk about them behind their backs.
 - c. Ask them for their ideas. They will feel valued and participation increases commitment.
 - d. Follow up on suggestions, requests, and comments, even if you are unable to carry out all of them.
 - e. Check to make sure they understand your statement or announcement. Do not assume that everyone is with you.
 - f. Make sure that you give them clear instructions for tasks to be completed. Clarify by asking them to describe what they plan to do.
 - g. Reinforce cooperative behavior. Do not take it for granted.
 4. **Communicate assertively**—Assertive communication is a constructive way of expressing feelings and



opinions. People are not born assertive; their behavior is a combination of learned skills. Assertive behavior enables you to do the following:

- a. Act in your own best interest.
- b. Stand up for yourself without becoming anxious.
- c. Express your honest feelings.
- d. Assert your personal rights without denying the rights of others.

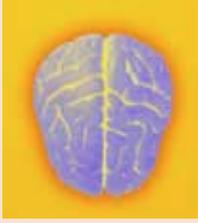
Assertive behavior is different from passive or aggressive behavior in that it is self-expressive, honest, direct, self-enhancing, constructive—not destructive. Assertive behavior includes both what you say and how you say it.

5. **Ask productive questions and demonstrate listening skills**—Listening skills help you show that you are hearing and understanding another person and are interested in what he or she has to say.

The ability to get along well with people in your personal relationships and in the workplace involves a set of learned skills. No one is born knowing how to build others' self-esteem, show empathy, encourage cooperation, communicate assertively, ask productive questions, or respond productively to emotional statements. These skills can be learned and developed with some practice. By taking the time to develop these skills, you will be able to build better relationships at home and at work.

Article from *The Therapists Newsletter*, written by Sarah Wadh, manager of Client Services at the Family Counseling Center in Deer Park, WI. Printed with permission.

MEDIATION as a Tool to Prevent Conflict



Mediation is most commonly used to resolve conflicts. In many cases, after a conflict has escalated, erupted, or “gotten out of hand,” a mediator is brought in to help deescalate the conflict between the people and help resolve the situation that led to the conflict. However, mediation serves as an equally if not more important tool for preventing conflicts.

Conflict prevention involves both self-awareness and planning. To be self-aware is to recognize your own feelings and to know what external triggers (a disrespectful e-mail, someone showing up late for a meeting) usually bring on those feelings that you do not like (frustration, discomfort, hurt, offense). To be self-aware is also to know what is important to you, or what you value (safety, respect, honesty, courtesy). Knowing what those triggers are allows you to anticipate when you will experience unpleasant feelings before you feel them. Anticipating a feeling does not mean that you will not feel it, but it allows you to respond differently when that feeling arises. Conflict prevention also involves planning. Effective planning requires anticipating difficult circumstances and recognizing what topics (schedule,

workspace, communication) will likely spark conflict.

Mediation is a useful tool for preventing conflict because it relies on feelings and values to serve as a guide for making plans around specific topics. Two coworkers who feel disrespected (feeling) in how they communicate with one another can make a plan around communication (topic) that provides the respect (value) they both want from each other. An employee who feels monitored (feeling) and controlled (feeling) and a supervisor who feels ignored (feeling) and disobeyed (feeling) can make a plan around his or her schedule (topic) that provides both a sense of independence (value) and flexibility (value) for the employee and accountability (value) for the supervisor.

Any two people who choose to use mediation to make plans will understand and anticipate that conflict will eventually emerge between them. Mediation does not prevent conflict from happening; it empowers participants to make their own decisions, get their own needs met, and make intentional choices about how they respond to conflict, before and after it emerges.

Article written by Rick Buccheri, Mediation Program manager, The Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County (CRCMC). For more information about the MCPS mediation program, please call the EAP mediation line at 240-314-1041.

About Relapse to Alcohol or Drug Use

When a person develops a problem with alcohol or other drugs, one of the consequences is that his or her thinking about these substances becomes distorted in a way that perpetuates the problem. Even after the person acknowledges that a problem exists and understands that stopping alcohol and drugs is necessary, a return to alcohol and drug use is nevertheless common. This is referred to as a “relapse” and consists of a predictable sequence of events in which distortions in the person’s thinking dominate their decision making and behavior. We call these distortions “addiction thinking.” In Alcoholics Anonymous, it is known as “stinking thinking.” It consists of partial truths and rationalizations that cause inaccurate assessments of important aspects of life and lead to self-deception. Consequently, a person behaves in ways that generate results that were not expected or wanted.

First, “set-up rationalizations” leads the person into unnecessarily exposing himself or herself to risky situations (“I’ll just stop by the liquor store to buy a pack of cigarettes”). Once there, environmental and internal cues can trigger cravings and “automatic thoughts” about the benefits of using (“A drink would sure taste good right now”). These, in turn, activate more deeply rooted beliefs that alcohol and drugs are necessary in order to live life in a satisfactory manner (“The only way I can really relax and enjoy this party is with a drink”). As the process builds momentum and cravings intensify, relatively superficial rationalizations give permission to use (“I’ll only have one drink”). The last step is actual use, which on any given occasion may be limited or quickly get out of control.

Information provided by The Kolmac Clinic. The Kolmac Clinic is an outpatient program made up of the three traditional phases of drug and alcohol addiction treatment: detoxification, rehabilitation, and continuing care. For more information about their services, go to their website at <http://www.kolmac.com> or call them at 301-589-0255. Printed with permission.

“Creativity can solve almost any problem. The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality, overcomes everything.”

GEORGE LOIS (1931-)

“Change your thoughts and you change your world.”

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE (1898-1993)

SOLO Travel

With summer approaching, many people are gearing up to go on vacation with their families. But some people do not have travel companions and often end up puttering around the house or



visiting friends and relatives, when they would really rather travel. Those same people could join the group that has decided that life is too short and set out on an adventure on their own, and find great rewards. Because many people find the idea of traveling alone to be downright scary, they scrounge around for someone, anyone, with whom to travel. That can come with pitfalls, as many learn. Even close friends have different ideas of what a good vacation entails. One wants to stay in a five-star hotel and enjoy entertainment out every night, while the other prefers to bike 40 miles a day and sleep in a tent. Or one is an early riser who hopes to pack in a dozen sights in a day, while the companion enjoys sleeping late and moseying along.

On the other hand, when you choose to travel solo, you can go off and do what you want, when you want. You can vacation frugally or you can go wild, and either way you do not have to explain it to anyone.

But how do you get past the discomfort of planning and traveling alone? Consider finding activities you like to do, in places you want to visit. That way, you are very likely to meet people with similar interests with whom to spend time, and you may not end up vacationing alone after all:

- 1. Take a tour or find adventure groups to join**—Dozens of companies offer trips that serve a wide variety of interests—from hiking to biking to rafting to horseback riding. Many guests join these groups solo. If relaxing is more your style, choose a resort or spa where you can stay put, but perhaps meet other guests at dinner or during activities.
- 2. Learn a new skill**—Immersion language programs can be found in countries around the world. There are tango classes in Argentina, cooking classes in Italy and Thailand, fantasy baseball camps, painting and photography vacations, and so much more. Go to the Web and type some keywords that include an activity and a place you have always dreamed about and see what comes up.
- 3. Sign up for an all-inclusive vacation**—Club Med and cruise vacations offer a variety of things to do and help solo guests get to know one another

by seating them at tables together or offering classes and activities that bring people together for an hour or two at a time.

The most important thing to remember if you are new at solo travel is that apprehension is normal. Even the most experienced travelers may feel some uneasiness setting off into the unknown. The successful ones are those who work past that feeling and get out the door anyway. And usually they come back with great stories to tell.

Article written by Ellen Perlman. Ellen has been traveling solo off and on for the past two decades. She is a travel writer published in *The Washington Post* and is the founder and author of a blog on solo travel called boldlygosolo.com. She is on Twitter as @boldlygosolo.com

Ask the EAP:

Q. If I come in to the EAP for short-term counseling, with what frequency would my sessions be? I'm concerned that coming in once a week would be difficult on my schedule.

A. Coming to the EAP for short-term counseling does not mean you have to come in once a week. After the counselor does an assessment, if it is determined that short-term counseling is appropriate, you will work with your counselor on a plan that makes sense. Important factors include the problem you come in with and your schedule. Some people come in weekly, while others may come in every other week or once a month. The final plan depends on a mutually agreed upon plan between you and the EAP counselor.



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

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Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook!* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.

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