



A Healthy Outlook!

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HOLIDAY Stress and Grief

During the holidays, stress and depression are often the result of three main trigger points: relationships, finances, and physical demands. And, for some, the loss of a loved one or a job, divorce, or illness can bring grief.

Tension is often heightened during the holidays. Family misunderstandings and conflicts intensify. Overspending causes a financial spiral that can lead to symptoms of depression. High demands, such as attending social gatherings, preparing holiday meals, and shopping for gifts, increase fatigue, may increase stress.

FAMILIES OFTEN GET STUCK in rituals that no longer work. Families change as a result of aging parents and events such as divorce and marriage. Rituals need to change along with these events.

- ♦ *The holidays represent memories accumulated during a person's lifetime.* But, when there is a loss or change in life, traditions must change. Think about what makes traditions special. A part of healing is coming up with creative ways to make a new tradition to fit the new situation.
- ♦ *It is important to be realistic.* You do not need to create a perfect holiday. Ask family members and friends for help with the planning, decorating, shopping, and cooking. Plan ahead, stick to a budget, and learn to say no.
- ♦ *Save time for yourself.* Fifteen minutes alone, without distractions, can help you reenergize.
- ♦ *Accept the fact that you can control only yourself and not others.* Limit the time you plan to spend with someone with whom you are having difficulty and let the person know ahead of time that you have a limit.

The EAP is MOVING on 12/18/12!

Our new location:

Carver Educational
Services Center
850 Hungerford Drive,
Room 43, West Entrance
(old professional library)
Rockville, Maryland 20850
Phone: 240-314-1040

- ♦ *Families have expectations that can lead to unrealistic demands.* Set boundaries and make arrangements in advance.

When someone is experiencing the great stress of bereavement, the additional stresses of the holidays can create unbearable pressure.

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Upcoming Events:

CANCER SUPPORT GROUP

January 14, February 11, and March 11

All are welcome to upcoming meetings of the MCPS Cancer Support Group. Meetings are from 4 to 5 p.m. at the Carver Educational Services Center, 850 Hungerford Drive, Room 240 (West Entrance). For more information, please contact Debra Tipton on Outlook or at 240-314-1040.

Holiday Stress and Grief

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Holidays do not erase reasons for feeling sad and lonely. There is room for these emotions to be present. So, accept them and cry if you need to.

- ♦ **Practice forgiveness.** Acknowledge your feelings, seek support, and set aside differences. Holidays are not the time to settle family disputes; they are a time for conciliatory and kind behavior. Try volunteering. Helping others can lift your spirits and broaden your social circle.
- ♦ **Tune in to small, joyful moments as the holidays unfold and you are grieving.** In those moments, you are outside your grief. Give yourself permission to laugh. When you laugh, your brain produces endorphins that help boost your immune system.
- ♦ **Keep healthy habits.** Daily physical activity is a proven way to cope with stress. And it is important to eat balanced meals because nutrition affects brain chemistry. Not getting enough sleep causes the body to produce an excessive supply of stress hormones. Stress hormones can cause weight gain, even if your caloric intake is not higher than normal.

Sources: Hospice Foundation of America, Mayo Clinic, University of Virginia, Ezine articles, WebMD, University of Maryland, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist hospitals. The Fact Sheet of the Month is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician.



My Family Food A P P

In the last issue of Healthy Outlook, there was a listing of health-related apps and a request for other suggestions. In response to this, Mrs. Lindsay M. Steiner, an MCPS occupational therapist with the Infants and Toddlers Program, Office of Special Education and Student Services, submitted the following:

I am passionate about helping children to expand their food repertoire, eat healthy, and develop a love of fruits and vegetables. That is what inspired me to create My Family Food. It was mentioned in *Bethesda* magazine last fall! My Family Food is an iPhone/iTouch application that helps you to track both your own AND your children's food intake and portion sizes, based on USDA recommendations. You also can track Omega 3 fatty acid intake.

Features include—

- ♦ Tracking by food group, not calories
- ♦ A motivational program (options for burp, bite, and cheering sounds, earn “medals”)
- ♦ Tips from an occupational therapist to encourage picky eaters of any age
- ♦ Built-in alerts that indicate serving size changes with each user's birthday

Many parents believe that their children are not eating enough, when they are actually expecting their children to eat too much! In contrast, adults (particularly in the United States) are accustomed to seeing oversized portion sizes. They eat too much without even realizing it.

The iTunes application costs only \$1.99, and all updates are free.

This is the only iPhone food tracker that—

- ♦ allows multiple users;
- ♦ addresses children; and
- ♦ incorporates the USDA's updated “My Plate” recommendations and recommends appropriate portion sizes based on age.

My Family Food is available in the iTunes store in the Healthcare and Fitness category. Discounts are available for school system purchases! Find more information about the app and how to use it to keep your family healthy at www.myfamilyfood.com.



Holiday Stress Got You FRAZZLED?

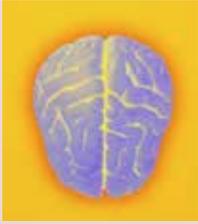


The holiday season can be a stressful time for many people. It is easy to become overwhelmed with the hustle and bustle of activities going on around us, and we often forget to take time for ourselves. This holiday season, take time to do something special just for you. You are worth it!

For more ideas on coping with stress during the holidays, contact the MCPS EAP at 240-314-1040.

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”

~ MARK TWAIN
(1835-1910)



Are you feeling SAD?

Winter is coming. As the sun sets earlier, many

people begin to experience “the blues,” partially due to a lack of sunlight. This is commonly known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. You may feel like not doing anything except going home and crawling into bed.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, the shorter day-light hours and the reduced amount of sunlight to the retina causes SAD. This is because sunshine increases the production of serotonin and increases the levels of melatonin in the body. Together, these seasonal fluctuations cause seasonal affective disorder in some people.

A point to remember is that symptoms of major depression are typically consistent throughout the year and may last from morning to night. The symptoms of SAD begin to show as the season changes and they get stronger throughout the day.

Symptoms

You may notice that each year at this time you experience a variety of symptoms that mirror signs of depression, which may include—

- ♦ an increased appetite (especially for sugar and carbs);
- ♦ changes in your sleep patterns (especially an increased need for sleep during the day);

- ♦ withdrawing from friends and other social situations;
- ♦ for women—an increase in premenstrual symptoms; and/or
- ♦ a lack of interest in other activities (including sex).

THE GOOD NEWS

is that these symptoms are temporary and studies have shown that, with recognition and some effort, you can conquer the winter blues.

- ♦ **Continue to exercise and eat healthy foods!** Keeping up your energy is important. Also, if you tend to drift toward eating a bit more, exercising will help you keep off that extra weight, which can lead to other health problems and increase your feelings of depression.
- ♦ **Take a quick walk in the morning, even for just 10 minutes.** This exposure to the sun and the exercise will help you get through the day.
- ♦ **Make sure to get plenty of sleep.** However, try not to “hibernate” and sleep too much. Studies have shown that eight hours is what our bodies need to function healthily.
- ♦ **Take a vacation if possible.** A quick weekend trip to a sunny destination

can help you feel refreshed and energized. Go ahead and soak up those rays—being mindful to use sunscreen!

- ♦ **Invest in light box therapy.** This can be extremely beneficial, since it is the main treatment for people with SAD. Studies have shown that people who are exposed to bright morning light experience almost total relief from depressive symptoms. Some forms of light therapy include wearing a special visor while you eat breakfast or read a book.
- ♦ **Visit websites where you can obtain more information on light therapy.** There are many of them, including NIH (www.nih.gov) and the Mayo Clinic (www.mayoclinic.com/health/seasonal-affective-disorder/DS00195). Some insurance companies may cover some of the expense of light therapy, so talk to your doctor. Also, follow the instructions carefully, as side effects can occur.

If you are experiencing major signs of depression or feeling suicidal do not dismiss this as SAD. Please make an appointment to see your doctor or go to your local crisis counseling center immediately. You also may call or make an appointment with a counselor at the EAP office at 240-314-1040. An EAP staff member will talk with you about your symptoms and assess other steps that are available to you!

Written by Sasha Scaun, graduate intern, MCPS EAP.

Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage."

~ MAYA ANGELOU (1928-)

SUICIDE: What to do when someone is suicidal



MOST SUICIDAL individuals give some warning of their intentions. The most effective way to prevent a friend, colleague, or loved one from taking his or her life is to recognize the factors that put people at risk for suicide. Take warning signs seriously and know how to respond.

More than 90 percent of people who kill themselves were suffering from one or more of the following psychiatric disorders:

- ♦ Major depression (especially when combined with alcohol and/or drug abuse)
- ♦ Bipolar disorder
- ♦ Alcohol or drug abuse or dependence
- ♦ Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- ♦ Eating disorders
- ♦ Personality disorders

In most cases, depression and the other psychiatric disorders that may lead to suicide are both recognizable and treatable. Remember, depression can be lethal.

The following signs most directly warn of suicide:

- ♦ Threatening to hurt or kill oneself.
- ♦ Looking for ways to kill oneself (weapons, pills, or other means).
- ♦ Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide.
- ♦ Making plans or preparations for a potentially serious attempt at committing suicide.

Other warning signs include expressions or other indications of certain intense feelings, in addition to depression, especially the following:

- ♦ Insomnia
- ♦ Intense anxiety and panic attacks
- ♦ Feeling desperate or trapped (like there is no way out)

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MANAGING ANGER: Tips and Techniques

ANGER IS A NORMAL and even useful emotion when you know how to express it in a healthy way. The six anger management tips below will help you to take the edge off when you get angry, so that you can respond to the situation effectively.

- 1. Take a time out.** If you can, remove yourself from the situation that is making you angry until you feel calmer. This can mean going for a walk or stepping into the next room for a couple of minutes. Removing yourself from a stressful situation can give you time to restore some perspective. If you cannot leave, try to count to 10 before you respond.
- 2. Get physical.** Exercise is a great way to release the energy generated by anger. Participate in your favorite sport, whether it is walking, jogging, going for a bike ride, or taking a yoga class.
- 3. Talk to someone about the situation.** Psychologist Rich

Walker of Winston-Salem State University explains that talking about a situation that has angered you reduces the emotional intensity of the memory. Walker says that storytelling works best when there is a lot of audience diversity—that is, it helps to tell the story many times to a variety of people.

- 4. Make sure you are assessing the situation accurately.** Sometimes we get angry because we have misinterpreted a situation or someone else's actions. The next time you get angry, ask yourself the following questions:
 - ♦ What evidence do I have?
 - ♦ What assumptions am I making?
 - ♦ Is there another equally believable interpretation of what is going on here?
 - ♦ What is the best action I can take in this situation?
- 5. Practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques.** The ability to elicit a sense of relaxation is important to

reducing the physical tension and psychological stress caused by anger. Examples include deep breathing, guided imagery, and progressive muscle relaxation.

- 6. Separate the people from the problem.** Instead of telling your coworker “You never answer the phone, you just do not care about this office,” you can say the following: “When everyone does not help out with answering the phones, it upsets me because I feel overwhelmed with all of the calls.” This way you are communicating to the other person that you are upset with something the person did, not with who the person is. Once you separate the person from the problem, you can attack the problem together, instead of attacking each other.

Written by Robyn Rosenbauer,
EAP Specialist, MCPS EAP

- ◆ Feeling hopeless
- ◆ Feeling that there is no reason or purpose to live
- ◆ Rage or anger

Certain behaviors also can serve as warning signs, particularly when they are not characteristic of the person's normal behavior. These include the following:

- ◆ Engaging in risky activities
- ◆ Engaging in violent or self-destructive behavior
- ◆ Increasing alcohol or drug use
- ◆ Withdrawing from friends or family

Take It Seriously

- ◆ Between 50 and 75 percent of all people who commit suicide have given some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member.
- ◆ Imminent signs must be taken seriously.

Be Willing To Listen

- ◆ Start by telling the person that you are concerned and give him or her examples of what concerns you.
- ◆ If he or she is depressed, do not be afraid to ask whether the person is considering suicide or has a particular plan or method in mind.

In an Acute Suicide Crisis

- ◆ If an individual is threatening, talking about, or making plans for suicide, these are signs of an acute crisis.
- ◆ Do not leave the person alone.
- ◆ Remove from the vicinity any firearms, drugs, or sharp objects that could be used for suicide.
- ◆ Take the person to a hospital emergency room or walk-in clinic at a psychiatric hospital. The Montgomery County Crisis Center is open 24 hours a day. The address is 1301 Piccard Drive in Rockville, and counselors can be reached at 240-777-4000.
- ◆ If the above options are unavailable, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

- ◆ Ask if the person has a therapist and is taking medication.

Let the person know you care, that he or she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, and that depression can be treated.

Seek Professional Help

Be actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately.

Individuals contemplating suicide often do not believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more.

Help the person find a knowledgeable mental health professional or a reputable treatment facility, and take the person to the treatment.

If you have any questions or need guidance, consult with an EAP counselor at 240-314-1040.

Q. If I meet with an EAP staff member for counseling, will that information be kept confidential?

Ask the EAP:

A. The MCPS EAP is obligated to keep all visits with the EAP confidential, in accordance with confidentiality laws (both state and federal) and MCPS EAP policy. We can divulge information about an individual's involvement with the EAP only with written consent from that individual. The only exceptions to this include very serious circumstances such as threats of homicide or suicide and suspicion of child or elder abuse. The EAP also has a legal obligation to protect the community if a school bus operator, truck driver, or anyone who services these vehicles reveals that he/she has a drug or alcohol problem.

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send your questions via Outlook to Jeff Becker at Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org.



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

SPECIALISTS: Debbie Tipton
Robyn Rosenbauer
Jeff Becker

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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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