



A Healthy Outlook!

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THE BENEFITS of Using Your Strengths at Work

IF YOU WANT TO THRIVE, you will not get there by trying to fix your weaknesses. You also need to leverage your strengths. As the field of positive psychology has focused more on looking at what works instead of what does not work, increased attention is being paid to the benefits of identifying and developing strengths.

What Are Strengths?

We intuitively understand that a strength is something we are good at, something that takes less effort than those things in which we do not do well. Strengths, however, are more than what we do well. Strengths also energize us. Did you ever notice yourself involved in something where you lost track of time because you were so engaged? That indicates that you were

using one or more of your strengths. Did you know that people who use their strengths daily are six times more likely to be engaged on the job and are less likely to experience stress or anxiety? It is no wonder that much research has looked at the impact of strengths in organizations. The results of this research strongly indicate that people who use their strengths regularly are more engaged and happier at work.

How to Identify Your Strengths

As much as we think we know our strengths, we tend to overestimate ourselves in some areas and underestimate in others. One reason is that strengths are not fixed—when, how, and how much we use them is situational. One way of getting a

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Debbie Tipton IS RETIRING

“AFTER AN AMAZING 27-YEAR CAREER with the Employee Assistance Program, I have decided to retire on June 30, 2016. I am moved to take this early opportunity to thank all of the wonderful people in MCPS who have made my time as an employee assistance specialist so rewarding. To my colleagues, both in the EAP and throughout the school system, who have taught me so much and offered me consult, support, and encouragement over the years, thank you, thank you, thank you. To my clients, who have shared so much of themselves and trusted me with their confidences, thank you from the bottom of my heart. The work that we have done together has impacted me profoundly and made a significant difference in my life, for which I am truly grateful. If you have a chance to give me a call, or send me an e-mail, or schedule a few minutes to see me before I leave, I would love to hear from you. Wishing all of you all of the best. ”

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Using Your Strengths

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handle on your capabilities is to use the Reflected Best Self Exercise, an intervention developed by faculty at the University of Michigan Ross Business School. The idea is this:

- ♦ **Choose 10 or more people** who know you well from different walks of life. Ask them to write a story about a time you were at your best, being as specific as possible about what you did and why it made an impression on them.
- ♦ **Look for common themes** that appear in these stories and list them.
- ♦ **Create a profile** of who you are when you are at your best.
- ♦ **Ask yourself** the following questions: How can I apply my strengths to the goals I want to achieve? How can I use my strengths to live my values? How can I adjust my job to incorporate more of my strengths?

We would love to hear about your experiences when you give this technique a try.

Adapted from Susan Peppercorn, Principal, Positive Workplace Partners. Follow Susan Peppercorn on Twitter: www.twitter.com/susanpeppercorn and positiveworkplacepartners.com.

Upcoming Events:

Caregiver Support Group

TO SUPPORT OUR CAREGIVERS, MCPS EAP offers a caregiver support group designed to provide helpful resources and establish connections among the caregivers within our MCPS community. The meetings are held on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, 4:15–5:15 p.m., at Carver Educational Services Center (CESC). The group hosts speakers who present a variety of important topics related to caregiving for a loved one. All are welcome to attend. For more information, or to register, please contact the EAP at 240-314-1040.

FOR SUPPORTING SERVICES: Stressing the Positive
May 11, 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, Maple Room, 45 West Gude Drive, Rockville, Maryland.

LEARN TECHNIQUES for creatively managing stress to enhance work and personal competencies and thereby increase job productivity and satisfaction. A half-day class for all support professionals. To sign up, go to PDO and look for course #50737.

FOR SUPPORTING SERVICES: Managing Your Time, Maximizing Your Potential

May 26, 10 a.m.–12 noon, Upcounty Regional Services Center, 12900 Middlebrook Road, Germantown, Maryland.

THIS INTERACTIVE WORKSHOP will provide an overview of many of the core issues related to time management. We will examine your time management goals, obstacles to effective time management, time management strategies, and prioritizing. To sign up, go to PDO and look for course #53676.

What is the MCPS DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROGRAM?



THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROGRAM provides free, voluntary, and confidential mediation services to MCPS employees who would like help resolving workplace conflict. Whether it is a matter of feeling disrespected, communication issues, dealing with someone who is always late, or working with someone who encroaches on your personal space, mediation can help. With the assistance of a neutral mediator, provided through the Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County, people are able to find their own solutions to problems. Mediation sessions typically are two hours long and include an opportunity for each participant to describe the conflict as he or she experiences it. The mediators then assist the participants in developing a plan for resolution. A private, informal, confidential agreement may help you resume a more workable relationship with someone with whom you have had difficulties.

To learn more, visit www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/staff/respect/mediation.aspx or call the Dispute Resolution Program at the EAP at 240-314-1041.

Help for Children WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE

SEPARATION WILL AFFECT CHILDREN in a variety of ways, depending on the age and sex of the child and the kind of relationship the child has with each parent. Parent-child relationships change unpredictably during and after separation. The sepa-



rating parents may be surprised at their own reaction to the separation. They may feel intense attachment and dependence on their children. They may feel overwhelmingly depressed or angry. Parental reaction to separation has a profound effect on the child's reaction.

Styles of family interaction vary greatly during separation. Children do not thrive in the midst of continued parental arguments. They respond better to a less conflictual atmosphere during separation. Indecisiveness also is difficult for parents and children. Some parents separate and that is it. Others separate on a trial basis and then either separate permanently or rejoin. Some parents separate repeatedly. Just as we know that heated battles are not good for children (or parents!) we know that

a gradual approach eases change for children and parents. Sudden separations accompanied by a change in child care arrangements and in school, home, and city are very unsettling. Parents and children need time to absorb the impact of these changes step by step.

Guidelines for Parents

Think through your financial needs and plans before the separation. This can be an especially stressful area since ownership of property and money are emotionally loaded issues. Most families find themselves with less income after separation.

- ♦ **Provide good child care.** Children under 12 should not be at home alone after school. Some children over 12 need adult guidance after school, as well. Explore child care possibilities before you separate.
- ♦ **Keep the tension level down.** Do not argue in front of the children.
- ♦ **Do not bad mouth** the other parent.
- ♦ **Avoid having the children take sides** in any conflict between the parents.
- ♦ **Do not communicate with the other parent through the children.** Keep the children from being caught in the middle.
- ♦ **Consider not reuniting** for special holidays or birthdays since that may feed the children's fantasy that there will be reconciliation.
- ♦ **Maintain good** sleeping and eating patterns for the children.
- ♦ **Do not be surprised** if the children become angry.
- ♦ **Plan some happy times** for your children, but do not overindulge them.
- ♦ **Do not let the children take on adultlike duties** or burdens to substitute for the absent parent.

3 HELPFUL RESOURCES for Separating and Divorcing Parents

1. Up To Parents—website with tools for creating co-parenting goals

This inspiring interactive website is free. It provides an opportunity for parents to consider 50 commitments they could make to their children during periods of conflict and stress.

2. The Truth about Children and Divorce—by Robert Emery, Ph.D.

In addition to his wonderful book, Robert Emery has a website offering parents Ten Tips for the Holidays; The Children's Bill of Rights in Divorce; and sample parenting plans, based on the level of cooperation between the parents.

3. Split—documentary for divorcing parents

The documentary, Split, explores the effects of divorce as seen through the eyes of 12 children. The children's wisdom, candor, and humor will give courage to other children and encourage parents to make better choices as they move through divorce. While not free, we thought it worth mentioning here. The film can be purchased for home or professional use, both in DVD and streaming formats.

Information provided by the Mediation Office of John Spiegel, J.D., & Donna Duquette, J.D., LLC. They can be reached at 301-340-1811. For more information about their services go to www.mediationoffice.net/.

“Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our own responsibility for the future.”

JOHN F. KENNEDY (1917 -1963)

(Adapted from material prepared by the Child Center and Adult Services.)

The HEALTHY Family

WHAT MAKES A FAMILY SEEM “HEALTHY”?
This list describes some of the traits of a healthy family:

- ◆ Communicates and listens
- ◆ Affirms and supports one another
- ◆ Teaches respect for others
- ◆ Develops a sense of trust
- ◆ Has a sense of play and humor
- ◆ Exhibits a sense of shared responsibility
- ◆ Teaches a sense of right and wrong
- ◆ Has a strong sense of family in which rituals and traditions abound
- ◆ Has a balance of interactions among members
- ◆ Has a shared sense of values
- ◆ Respects the privacy of one another
- ◆ Values service to others
- ◆ Shares leisure time
- ◆ Admits to and seeks help with problems

Think about:

- ◆ What are some of the positive values your family exhibits that are not on the list?
- ◆ What can you do to make your own family healthier?

If you have concerns about your family and want to talk about it, feel free to contact the EAP at 240-314-1040.

Ask the EAP:

Q. *I have a family member who seems to have a serious problem but won't seek help. This is bothering me a lot, and I cannot figure out what to do about it. Is there anything the EAP can do to help me?*

A. There are a few things that we can do that you might find useful. First, we could help you think through your options and the implication of each option. Options can range from exploring whether intervening could be done to figuring out what to do for yourself and your family member if intervening is not possible. We could provide you with a list of possible resources, should this person become open to help at a later date. Some people find it useful to be able to talk about such difficult, private situations with an impartial person. Overall, getting assistance with a family problem is one of the most common reasons that employees contact us.

Do you have a question for the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

Send your questions to Jeff Becker at Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org or via the Pony mail.

*“I dream of a world
where truth is what
shapes people’s
politics, rather than
politics shaping what
people think is true.”*

NEIL DEGRASSE TYSON
(1958 -)



A Healthy Outlook!

*To help employees with
troubling issues before they
become overwhelming.*



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[www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/
departments/eap](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap)

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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