

May 2019

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Does a Family Member have a Mental Illness?

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. It is a time to raise awareness of mental illness and fight the stigma that goes with it. Every year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness, and some go without support or treatment. As symptoms of mental illness appear, family members often experience denial as they seek to cope with confusing or frightening behaviors, especially bipolar disorders and schizophrenia. Early diagnosis and treatment is crucial, so seek guidance from a professional counselor, medical doctor, or the [EAP](#) when you see symptoms. These may include confused thinking, prolonged depression (sadness or irritability), feelings of extreme highs and lows, excessive fears, worries and anxieties, severe social withdrawal, dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits, unusually strong feelings of anger, strange thoughts (delusions), seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations), growing inability to cope with daily problems, or suicidal statements. Learn more at the [American Psychological Association](#) and the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#). If you or a loved one are struggling with suicidal thoughts, check out the new EAP [Suicide Prevention webpage](#) for resources and guidance.



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Be an Inclusive Role Model for a Positive Workplace



"A positive workplace" brings to mind a relaxed atmosphere, honest communication, a sense of humor, mutual respect and appreciation, and valuing of differences (diversity) among employees. But positive workplaces with these values don't just happen. They don't stay that way either without nurturing them like a garden. That's every employee's job, not just the role of a manager. Here are a few ways you can play this role so your workplace is as productive as it is positive. 1) Recognize your biases, so they play less of an influential role in your people-to-people interactions. 2) Model "inclusion" behaviors—spot opportunities to help others feel they "belong," but also recognize the business advantage this has for your organization. 3) Respectfully challenge stereotypical comments when you see them. 4) Be proactive with discussions about what it means to have an inclusive work environment. Practicing these behaviors will make you a positive workplace change agent.

Better Reasons to Stop the Gossip



If you value a positive workplace where open communication reduces conflict, then you should value the practice of refraining from gossip. Office gossip corrodes a positive workplace, and here's why: Gossip produces a chain reaction of secrecy and negativity that erodes trust. As one person shares gossip, the next person to hear it is naturally left inhibited from being open and sharing of themselves in the future because they figure they might be the next victim. Gossip creates a short-lived bond between two people, but it comes at a high cost. Choose optimistic information sharing instead. Others will enjoy speaking with you, and you'll bond in a more positive way.

Working Under Pressure

The first reaction most people have to the idea of working under pressure is dread. We've all been there, caught between a rock and a hard place with the need to deliver. There are people who can work under pressure quite well. Some even thrive on it. The ability to work under pressure is a learned skill that has one overarching goal: Relief from feeling overwhelmed so you can focus and engage the work efficiently. Avoid obsessing over the large task at hand. Instead, break it into parts and give each part a mini-deadline. Eliminate all potential distractions. Not doing so will ratchet up the pressure more. Use clocks, timers, or other devices to keep yourself moving and on track, but decide the most critical chunk of work you must do first. Start with what's urgent and important. Schedule short breaks at specific times, even if they are only five minutes. These will help pull you through the stages of work faster. View a high-pressure work situation as a challenge to beat a deadline. This strategy produces energy and a competitive spirit with your deadline. Learn about yourself under pressure and how you respond to it.

When Employees Struggle with Opioid Addiction

New research shows 75% of employers have workers affected by struggles with opioids; 30% of workers have family members with opioid misuse and addiction problems; 30% of employers have employees who have missed work due to opioids; 22% of employees experience impaired performance due to opioids; 18% of employers say they have had employees arrested; and 8% report having employees who have overdosed. Given these impacts, it is unlikely coworkers aren't the first to know. Can coworkers help? Know how you could save a life. In a caring manner, let your coworker know that you are concerned for their health and well-being. Then recommend use of the [Employee Assistance Program](#) or another source of help like [your local County Crisis Line](#). Expect your offer of help to be declined at first. But stay tuned—a crisis or drug-related incident in the future or some related mishap will provide you with another chance.

Dozing Off with Digital Media



Is your child falling asleep with technology aglow? Children's eyes are not fully developed, and research shows their eyes are more sensitive to light than the eyes of adults are. This can affect the brain and disrupt circadian rhythms (the biological clock). Lack of sleep can contribute to excessive tiredness at the end of the school day, grade slippage, conduct problems, loss of interest in other pursuits, depression, and an increase in suicide risk. Make rules early on concerning the use of digital media. Doing so later won't be as easy. Try keeping a basket in a family area where everyone (including you!) puts their cell phone or tablets before bedtime, and model healthy behaviors like limiting screen time and good sleep hygiene.