

# Mindful Living:

## Your EAP Guide to Wellness

SPRING 2022  
ISSUE 2

### Spring has finally arrived with all of its glory!

The sound of birds chirping, flowers starting to bloom, and brighter/longer days is good for the soul. For many, spring feels like a fresh start, with renewed energy and motivation.



Did you know, however, that springtime has many physical and emotional health benefits as well? Various studies show that springtime boosts mood, improves memory, and increases new ideas, and the extra hours of sunlight may be one major reason. According to Sanford Auerbach, MD, director of the Sleep Disorders Center at Boston University, during the long darkness of winter months, the body naturally produces more melatonin. For people prone to seasonal affective disorder, all that melatonin triggers a winter depression. In spring, when melatonin production eases up, so does depression (<https://www.webmd.com/women/features/you-give-me-spring-fever>). So, make sure you get outside and enjoy the sunny days to get the most benefit from what spring has to offer.

In this edition, we will be addressing ways to cope with current events, handling emotional contagion, and practicing self-compassion.

### Coping with Current Events

With the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the unrest in the Ukraine it is no surprise that many are noticing feelings of anxiety and distress. The increased stress can begin to take a toll mentally and physically making it imperative to prioritize self-care. Here are some tips on how to effectively cope with emotions related to current events:

#### Limit news/social media exposure.

Setting boundaries around media exposure helps in reducing stress levels and prevents us from being consumed by the difficult situations occurring throughout the world. Consider limiting exposure to news and/or social media platforms to once or twice throughout the day. It is especially important to avoid exposing yourself to media before bedtime, as it activates your body's natural stress response.



## Coping with Current Events (Cont'd)

**Acknowledge your feelings.** There is no right or wrong way to feel regarding current events. Some common feelings you might notice are frustration, sadness, anxiety, helplessness, and anger. Feeling distress is a normal reaction to negative events and avoiding those feelings would cause them to persist for longer. Take notice of what you are feeling, label the emotions, and acknowledge that those feelings are valid and deserving of expression. Helpful ways to express feelings can be through communication with a trusted source, journaling, expression through art, and/or speaking with a professional.

**Focus on the present.** Often when things are out of our control our brain's natural response can be to try to predict what the future holds. The issue with this is that as humans we have a negativity bias that can cause us to predict the worst case scenarios (catastrophizing) or take in more negative than positive information. Acknowledge when you may be catastrophizing and allow yourself to bring your brain back to the present by utilizing mindfulness. Try utilizing mindfulness by bringing attention to your five senses, taking note of what you can feel, see, touch, hear, and taste in the present moment. Research has shown that utilizing a meditation practice has been found to reduce stress and symptoms of anxiety/depression. Lighthouse EAP provides clients with access to myStrength, a health and wellness app, which has additional information on mindfulness and meditation techniques.

**Find a way to contribute.** Feelings of helplessness can arise when we see injustice



occurring in which we have little to no power over. It is helpful to focus on what

you can control and ways you can contribute, such as donating to causes you believe in or volunteering your time.

**Look for the good.** When negative events are taking place, that negativity can skew our perspective and cause assumptions that everything is bad. Intentionally keep an eye out for what you personally feel grateful for and the positive things still occurring throughout the world. Keep in mind this quote from Mr. Rogers, "When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"

**Engage in activities you enjoy.** Finding pleasurable activities you can engage in can help reduce your stress levels. Consider taking a walk in nature, reading a book, listening to music, or watching a comedic movie.

**Stay connected with others.** Rather than isolating when difficult emotions arise, do your best to connect with others in your life to create positive experiences. Consider meeting a friend out for coffee or planning a game night.



## Emotional Contagion in the Work Setting:

Have you ever woken up in the morning with all of the best intentions, looking forward to the workday, only to show up at your job and be greeted with someone who was having a particularly bad day? If so, how quickly did your cheery disposition change and begin to match theirs? Or, maybe you strolled into work dreading the workday but your co-workers were in good spirits and brought a warm energy to the office space. It is likely you began to acclimate a bit to the positive work setting.



Emotional contagion is a form of social contagion involving the spontaneous spread of emotions and related behaviors. Such emotional convergence can happen from one person to another, or in a larger group. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional\\_contagion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_contagion))

This phenomenon is not just seen in humans but some animals as well. Maybe this has even happened to you after scrolling through too much negativity on social media or watching too much news.

In EAP we hear from employees, from all different work settings, that the negative work climate is creating an additional burden for them that they have to carry throughout the day. About 23% of employees will seek new jobs in 2022, while 9% have already secured a new position, according to a December ResumeBuilder.com poll of 1,250 American workers. We have learned from multiple studies that some of the top factors for “The Great Resignation” include those in search of better bosses, more money, more flexibility, and more happiness. What employees tell us is that they could cope better with the demands of the job, if the work climate wasn’t so negative, further confirming people are seeking more happiness in the workplace.

How can we all be part of the solution when there are so many other on the job stressors we often feel we need to vent about? Getting your frustrations out can be helpful when it is expressed to the right people at the right time. Often employees have said to us that they want to be more positive on the job but they are afraid they won’t fit in or be accepted by their peers if they do so. Here are some tips for healthy venting versus bombardment which often leads to negative emotional contagion:

- Ask yourself do I need to share this right now with someone or can I wait a bit to decide if it is something I really need to and should share.
- If I need to vent in the workplace, who best should I share with?
- Am I getting consent before I vent? Although venting is sometimes helpful for the person venting remember it can have unintended negative consequences on the other person. We cannot always assume the person we are sharing with is in the right emotional space to hear the information. If the content involves something traumatic we won’t always know if sharing is causing secondary trauma. It is important to ask the person if you can share something with them and if it is a good time to do so. In order for this to benefit you, a person needs to be able to really listen and understand you versus just hearing you.
- Ask yourself, “What do I need from the listener?” It can be helpful to share this need with the listener as well. For example, let them know whether you are looking for advice or just asking for their undivided listening time.
- To avoid creating too much emotional contagion, try and keep your message

## Emotional Contagion in the Work Setting: (Cont'd)

concise. What specifically are you looking to share? It can be easy in these situations to get caught up in other negative elements or stories not related to the current one.

- EAP can be a great resource, outside of the workplace, to discuss workplace stressors and seek objective advice as well as to process traumatic events that may occur in the workplace.
- Make sure you are intentional about utilizing self-care in the workplace when you have a day in which you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed out. A brief walk or a 5-minute guided meditation can help calm your nervous system and decrease stress and anxiety. It is helpful if you decide on a couple of workplace self-care activities before you actually need to use them, so you are well prepared when the time comes.



"Sometimes we forget we can get our needs of *acceptance, kindness, and forgiveness* met from within."

With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give to a good friend.  
- Dr. Kristin Neff

## Homework: Practicing Self Compassion

The word compassion comes from a Latin word meaning co-suffering. Compassion is defined by Merriam-Webster as: the sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it. Taking that definition, if we were to apply it to ourselves, self-compassion would be a consciousness of our own distress together with a desire to alleviate it. It may sound simple, but most people are often their own worst critics. While constructive criticism can be helpful, negative self-talk is rarely so. Compassion is linked to the hormone oxytocin which brings a calming benefit. People who are self-compassionate tend to have a better quality of life, more satisfaction in relationships, and a greater overall sense of wellbeing.

**To gain more awareness on your self-talk answer the following questions:**

1. What do you typically criticize yourself for?
2. What do you typically say to yourself when you make mistakes?
3. How do you say these things? (harsh, angry, cold?) Does your inner voice remind you of anyone?
4. How do you feel after you criticize yourself?
5. Would you be okay with someone else saying those same things to you?

**Consider the following questions to increase self-compassion:**

1. Would you criticize a friend in the same ways as you do yourself? If not, what might you say to friend in a similar situation?
2. Is your criticism in proportion with the consequences of the situation? (For example, are you calling yourself stupid for just making a simple mistake?)
3. What words of support would you want to hear from a friend?
4. What would your self-talk be like if you were giving yourself grace to learn and grow from your experiences?

**Your EAP team is here for you any time you need us. There is no issue too big or too small to talk to a professional about. All information is kept private and confidential including from your employer. Please contact [419-475-5338](tel:419-475-5338) to schedule an appointment.**

**Remember to ask us about the myStrength app, which is a behavioral health app that can assist you in meeting your health and wellness goals.**