



EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance.



UPCOMING WEBINAR

WHAT'S INSIDE

How to Maintain a More Positive Mindset

About the Webinar:

This important presentation will discuss how to intentionally embrace a more positive mindset, including strategies for improving self-talk, managing emotions, and responding more effectively to challenging circumstances.

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Date: July 27, 2023
Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

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Keeping an Open Mind

To be open-minded is to be receptive to new ideas and information, even when they challenge your beliefs and understanding of the world. Open-minded people consider differing views and opinions with curiosity and a desire to understand. They seek out new perspectives in their efforts to learn, grow, and make more informed choices.

Open-minded people can have strong beliefs and deep expertise, but they are willing to question their beliefs and knowledge when presented with new evidence and new thinking. Having an open mind is an important element in critical and rational thinking. It's also a foundation for creativity, learning, empathy, and personal growth.

Why It's Hard to Be Open-Minded

While being open-minded has tremendous benefits, it's not easy. For most people, it takes conscious effort. That's because the human mind tends to streamline perceptions and reactions with energy-saving shortcuts. For example, people tend to sort information into categories based on their previous experience and interpret new information based on their beliefs. When new information or ideas are encountered that don't fit those categories or that challenge those beliefs, it's easier to reject the new information or distort your understanding of it than it is to rethink your categories or beliefs. Other mental shortcuts include stereotyping people, judging people based on first impressions or single characteristics, and making snap decisions.

Being open-minded can involve reevaluating memories, past experiences, and beliefs in the light of new information. It might require you to admit that you've been wrong. That can take real mental effort. It can also be uncomfortable—at least until you experience the benefits of an open-minded outlook.

How to Be More Open-Minded

- **Be humble about what you know and don't know.**

Researchers call this practicing intellectual humility:

- Recognize that your understanding of the world isn't perfect and that perspectives other than your own are valid.
- Accept that there are gray areas in life, where choices aren't black and white.



- Be aware of your biases—the ways your thoughts and perceptions may be distorted by your brain's shortcuts or your past experiences. Key among these is confirmation bias, which causes people to favor information that fits with their existing beliefs and to dismiss information that doesn't.

- Be willing to admit you have been wrong and revise your views.

- Practice saying, "I don't know," or introducing your thoughts with "I could be wrong, but..."

- **Be curious.** Cultivate your desire to inquire, explore, learn, and understand. People tend to have a strong natural curiosity in childhood, then allow it to weaken as they grow older. That's partly from fear of being embarrassed by showing ignorance. To be more open-minded, push past that hesitation and rediscover the joy of natural curiosity:

- Be open to all information, not just information that confirms what you already believe.

- Read a variety of books, articles, and online content. Fiction can put you in the shoes of other people and help you become more empathetic to different life experiences and viewpoints.

Nonfiction and journalism can introduce you to new areas of knowledge and new information about the world. Online information is easy to access, but you need to be alert to the ways search engines and social media limit your exposure to different views by curating what you see to match what you already believe.

- Seek out other perspectives. Make a point of talking with people and reading the writings of people who have views or backgrounds that are different from yours, or who have discovered information that challenges your understanding and beliefs.
 - Ask questions to understand new information and different perspectives. Push past your desire to appear knowledgeable, and overcome your fear of coming across as uninformed or naive. Learn something new from everyone you meet, whether it's about their lives or backgrounds, or lessons they have learned through experience or study. Ask open-ended questions to encourage them to tell you more. Ask yourself questions, too: "How do I know this is true?" "Are the sources I rely on trustworthy?" "Have I considered different ways of explaining this?"
 - Listen to learn and understand. It's common to listen with only partial attention as you think about what you want to say in reply. Let your curiosity take charge from your ego as you really listen to what others have to say. Turn off or set aside any distractions and focus on the other person. Test your understanding of what they are saying by putting what they say in your own words and asking whether you have heard correctly.
- **Spend time with people who have different ideas and perspectives.** Widen your circle of friends to include people who are different from you. Find the areas where you agree, but don't be afraid to explore those where you don't. Being a good listener with someone who agrees with you or has a similar background is easy. Challenge yourself to really listen to friends and acquaintances when they share ideas, opinions, and experiences that don't fit easily with your own view of the world.
 - **Slow down.** Initial reactions and snap judgments are often driven by emotion, habit, and unconscious bias. Sometimes they're right, but not always. People's brains make it hard to recognize when this is happening. It's common to make a snap judgment based on rapid unconscious thinking, emotion, or bias, then have the conscious mind create, more slowly, a rational reason to explain the judgment—which may have nothing to do with the actual emotional or biased reaction. Some researchers characterize responses based on emotion, habit, or bias as "fast" thinking, and rational responses as "slow" thinking. When you have a quick reaction to something, especially a negative reaction, slow down and consider why that might be. Challenge your rational self to consider more positive and accepting responses.
 - **Calm down.** When you're anxious, upset, or under pressure, it's hard to be open-minded. Snap judgments and quick negative reactions tend to take over. When you find this happening, step back from the situation and calm down. Reconsider the issue, or reengage in the conversation later when you are more relaxed.
 - **Reframe negative thoughts.** Positive reframing is the technique of looking at things in new ways to find the positive in them—the opportunities in change, the good in other people, and the strengths in yourself. When you have a negative reaction to a new idea, an event, or another person, consider the merits of the idea, the good qualities of the other person, other explanations for what is happening, or how this might lead to something positive.
 - **Embrace new experiences.** Step out of your comfort zone. Try something new. Do something spontaneous. Listen to a different style of music. Try food you've never had before. Accept an invitation to lunch or coffee with a new neighbor or work colleague. Take a class in something you know nothing about. Read books written by people from other cultures. Learn another language. Travel to another country. Breaking out of your routine and trying new experiences can help you realize that there is more than one way to live life and view the world.
 - **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness is a form of meditation in which you focus on what you are experiencing as you meditate, accept those feelings and sensations, and bring yourself to be in the present moment, without thoughts of the past or future. With its focus on acceptance and being in the present moment, the practice of mindfulness can help you let go of worries about the future, regrets about the past, and negative thinking about new experiences. Mindfulness can help bring out your natural curiosity and open your mind to new perspectives and ideas.

Setting Boundaries Towards Positive Mental Health

At some point in life, everyone has probably become a little (or a lot) stressed. It's quite common—in both your professional and personal life—to hear others allude to “Feeling so stressed right now!” or “Being so overwhelmed” with whatever the presenting challenge is—be it in their home or work life. It's so common, in fact, that often people don't realize that, by the time they feel stressed and overwhelmed, on some level the damage has already been done. The stress response in itself is not the problem. However, the fact you're feeling stressed in the first place can tell you something extremely important: You're already beyond your window of tolerance, and your personal or professional boundaries have been crossed.

What is stress?

Stress can be caused by a build-up of pressure in response to personal or professional stressors. Those stressors don't necessarily have to be negative or traumatic; positive or negative moves and changes in your personal or professional life can contribute to a sense of pressure and being overwhelmed. For instance, buying a new home or a first-time home is largely seen as a positive experience. The process, however, can take a toll, demanding emotional and psychological resources, and a sense of feeling stressed can ensue. The same goes for positive changes at work. A promotion, usually a positive indication of professional growth, often comes with an increased salary and therefore increased responsibility. A moment to celebrate, but one that comes with the likelihood of an increase in pressure and demand.

Stress itself is not all bad—the psychological and physical symptoms of stress bring you an opportunity to reflect and listen to your mind and body. In this sense, think of stress as the engine warning light on a car—the engine light itself is not the problem, but the underlying problem is. When your engine light comes on, it's time to pull over and investigate or even call for help. In an ideal life, people would rarely or never see their personal engine light come on to indicate a problem (although it's very likely that they will experience this at some stage in their busy modern lives). The old adage applies—prevention is better than the cure. One of the ways you can maintain and manage yourself before beginning to feel stressed is by setting boundaries for yourself, personally and professionally.

What are boundaries?

Boundaries are the limits people set for themselves in any context of their lives. When people think about the literal meaning of the word boundary, they might think of hard-and-fast rules or in legal terms, such as property boundaries. True, boundaries do allude to where things end and new things begin in this sense. But in psychological terms, when it comes to managing yourselves and how you feel about things, a boundary is not something you can actively see, feel, or get any physical sense of. So, knowing the thresholds can be difficult. It's also true that it's easier to feel when boundaries have been crossed because of the symptoms of stress that tell you when things are becoming overwhelming. Boundaries, though, are a key step along the way towards self-care and self-compassion. When you understand how to set and maintain healthy boundaries, you can bypass symptoms of stress and keep your engine warning light at bay.



Healthy boundaries are flexible boundaries. When you don't set limits for yourself, you leave yourself open to be taken advantage of—personally and professionally. Equally, if you are too rigid with your boundaries, you risk disconnection from those around you and therefore isolation from the support of closeness of family, friends, and coworkers. Setting healthy boundaries and aiming for balance enables you to put yourself first when you need to, which in turn enables relationships to stay safe and your emotional energy to be protected. In this way, different situations and relationships require different boundaries to be set and maintained; you might still want to be involved in a friend's situation, but it doesn't mean you have to take the emotional burden. Likewise, it's ok to say no when demands placed on you at work or anywhere else are too high.

How to Set Boundaries

When it comes to setting boundaries at work and at home, there are some tips you can take on board to ensure that you are really taking care of yourself.

1. Identify blocks to boundary-setting.

A good first step is to identify what might stop you from setting boundaries with others. You may have had a sense recently or over a long period of time that you're being taken advantage of and that demands upon you are too high or unmanageable. Nonetheless, it keeps happening. Before you do anything, it's important to know what might stop you from setting healthy boundaries. Asking yourself why you might not be setting the correct limits in different situations is crucial to understanding the blocks underneath—whether this is born from a sense of fear, a sense of low self-esteem, and so on. Fears and perceived threats will hold you back—it might be that you're imagining conflict with a friend or being fired from your job if you say no. Here you can play a game of “true or false” with yourself: What's the evidence that your worst fears will come true? Writing this down provides a reference tool to help you learn what fears come up for you so you can overcome them.

2. Prioritize.

Many people's professional identity is important without a doubt. They have to survive and thrive if they want to get along, and although they may not think about it, most people actually spend a great deal of their adult lives in the workplace. This is why it's important to know what your priorities are at work. Taking everything on without knowing why you're taking everything on will lead to burnout. When you don't know your why factor, you become detached, and meaning is lost. In this regard, it is always a good idea to check in with yourself about your why factor: “Do I know

why I am doing this? Does this have meaning for me, or am I taking on too much?” On a more micro level, if people let themselves become overwhelmed with every task without prioritizing them, they can lose a grip on what it is that they most need to do. Taking a few moments to write down priorities for the week or even the day can make a huge difference.

The same goes for people's personal lives. You can easily become a sponge for everybody else's problems when all you want to do is help. Ultimately, without self-care, self-compassion, and self-respect, all your emotional energy can become depleted. You can never fully be present and help others without first helping yourself: Before you become involved in being there for other people in your network, it's important to check out why you want or need to do this. Sometimes, you have no choice—but if you know there is going to be a great cost to your emotional energy, you need to find ways to recover and regenerate as well.

3. Transparency is key.

When it comes to setting professional and personal boundaries, communication is key. This starts with identifying your own avenues of assistance (e.g. who you can go to and who you can talk to). In a work setting, this looks like being honest and upfront with managers or coworkers. If you have a sense that you will be unable to manage a task, a project, or anything else, speaking up before it's too late can go a long way. At home or in your relationships outside of work, being honest about yourself and what you can or can't do for others will help to protect a sense of wellbeing.

Sometimes people get caught in the trap of thinking that they will “do this one thing” and then all will be well—remember, other people don't know what you're thinking and will not be able to tell your boundaries just by guessing. Once you have crossed your boundaries once, it is likely that the demands will continue to present. Saying no doesn't have to mean conflict, and assertiveness doesn't have to mean aggression.

4. Define golden rules.

As you practice more and more, you can start to define your golden rules. Definition is key to making things concrete. This is a work in progress and not a final destination—it's important to define, check, and re-define your boundaries to suit your needs as you grow both professionally and personally. In order to define your golden rules, you can use your past experiences to try to understand what you will and will not accept from others, and what is tolerable or intolerable for yourself.

Final Thoughts

Ultimately, establishing boundaries keeps you safe and protected at a level that keeps your interactions with others and the world around you healthy and balanced. With time and practice, you can arrive at a healthy, robust place of being able to maintain this balance—and if you are able to maintain balance, you are able to prevent becoming stressed and overwhelmed. Giving yourself permission to not only be well, but stay well, gives you a good chance at healthy progression at a suitable pace. Sometimes, permission is simply allowing yourself to take on that it's okay to say no.

Source: Sussex, J. (2023, January 4). Setting boundaries towards positive mental health. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO). Retrieved June 6, 2023, from the WPO Blog at <https://www.workplaceoptions.com>



BEAT THE HEAT: STAYING SAFE IN THE SUMMERTIME

After a long winter cooped up, the arrival of sunny days can make you eager to be outside. Getting outdoors can be good for you in many ways. It provides opportunities for exercise. It can also boost your mental health.

As the heat rises, some health risks also increase. Intense heat can put strain on both your body and brain. Too much heat can cause a heat-related illness called hyperthermia. Mild hyperthermia can cause discomfort, like muscle cramps or swelling in the ankles and feet.

Heat exhaustion is more serious. It occurs when your body can no longer keep itself cool. You may start to feel dizzy or nauseated. Other symptoms include feeling thirsty, weak, or uncoordinated.

The most extreme form of hyperthermia is heat stroke. Heat stroke is life-threatening, so seek medical help right away. Symptoms include fainting or having trouble walking. You may start feeling confused or agitated. You can also feel very hot but not sweat or have dry, flushed skin.

Some people are more at risk for heat-related illness than others. That includes infants and young children, and those with certain health conditions, such as heart, lung, or kidney disease. Older adults are the most heat sensitive. That's because the body's ability to cool itself changes as people get older.



There are two main ways your body regulates its temperature, explains Dr. Craig Crandall, who studies heat effects on the body at the University of Texas (UT) Southwestern Medical Center. “One is increasing how much blood flows to the skin. The other is how much we sweat.”

Neither of these works as well in older adults, Crandall says. That makes it more difficult for them to cool off. His research has shown that sitting in front of a fan increased older adults’ body temperature in extreme heat. That’s because they weren’t sufficiently sweating when the hot air was blowing over their skin. This suggests that older adults may need to use other ways to keep cool, such as going to an air-conditioned place.

Too much heat is not safe for anyone. If you’re outside in the heat, drink lots of water. Don’t try to exercise or do a lot of activities outdoors when it’s hot.

If you start to feel sick in the heat, rest in a cool place and drink plenty of fluids. If you think someone has heat stroke, get them to a cool place and call 911.

“Shade is your friend,” Crandall says. “If you’re going out to exercise or mow the lawn, take breaks in the shade.”

If possible, go into an air-conditioned room for a while. “That time you’re inside, your core temperature is going to be cooled,” Crandall explains. “If you stay outside, it may just go up and up and up.”

If you want to exercise outside in the summer, start slow. “It takes about 10 days to two weeks to get acclimated to hotter temperatures,” Crandall says.

Heat isn’t the only hazard during the summer. It’s also important to protect your skin and your eyes from the sun. See below for tips to keep safe in the heat.

Wise Choices: Protecting Yourself from the Heat and Sun

- Do outdoor activities during the coolest part of the day, in the early morning or evening.
- Exercise in an air-conditioned space if possible, or do water workouts.
- Try to stay in the shade when outdoors during peak sunlight.
- Drink plenty of liquids, especially water. Avoid drinks that contain alcohol or caffeine.
- Wear protective clothing, such as hats, long-sleeve shirts, and long pants to block out the sun’s harmful rays. Choose light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Use sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB radiation. Choose a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, preferably 30. Reapply frequently.
- Use sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB.
- If you don’t have air conditioning, keep your home as cool as possible. (If you need help paying your electric bills to run an air conditioner, visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs/fact-sheet/liheap-brochure-english>.)



Reference

Gagnon, D., Romero, S.A., Cramer, M.N., Jay, O., Crandall, C.G. (2016, September 6). Cardiac and thermal strain of elderly adults exposed to extreme heat and humidity with and without electric fan use. *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, 316(9), 989–991. doi: 10.1001/jama.2016.10550

Your Employee Advisory Service

Employee Advisory Service (EAS) is a program designed to help employees and their immediate family members with personal, family or work-related issues that may adversely impact the employee's work performance.

EAS provides confidential assessment, counseling, and referral services and helps to restore the health and productivity of employees and the workplace as a whole. Problems are addressed in the quickest, least restrictive, and most convenient manner, while maximizing confidentiality and quality.

EAS can assist with:

- Work life Balance
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Grief Counseling
- Anger Management
- Critical Incident Stress
- Stress Management
- Substance Abuse
- Family Issues
- Job Performance Issues

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Your confidentiality is protected by state and federal law and regulations. All of the services offered are guided by professional and ethical standards. EAS staff may not release details of your need for services without your prior written consent. Information concerning the date and time of your appointments and referrals can be released to your Human Resource Office.



Employee Advisory Service

Support - Empowerment - Growth

How Can
We Help
You?



Number:
1-866-327-9133

Email:
EAS_Help@csc.nj.gov

Website:
[www.csc.nj.gov/csc/employees/
programs/advisory/eas.html](http://www.csc.nj.gov/csc/employees/programs/advisory/eas.html)

24 hours a day 7 days a week
(Emergency Mental Health Services)

You Asked, We Listened – Feedback from EAS Webinar Survey

From our annual survey, employees shared topics of interests for future EAS webinars. Based on your feedback, several themes were identified. We will incorporate this information into upcoming webinars. Thank you for your feedback

THEME	EMPLOYEES FEEDBACK	SUPERVISOR/MANAGERS FEEDBACK
Work Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Boosting Office Moral ▪ Confidentiality ▪ Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Boosting Office Moral ▪ Confidentiality ▪ Accountability
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Team Building ▪ Conflict Resolution ▪ Providing constructive criticism when working with customers, managers or co-workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constructive criticism ▪ Team Building and Collaboration ▪ How to deal with difficult employees / upper managers
Office Morale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Working with different generations/cultures ▪ Maintaining Motivation through office changes ▪ Empathy and acceptance in the workplace 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employee Appreciation or value to the office without compensation ▪ Empathy and equity in the workspace ▪ Managing office cliques
Building Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Understanding chain of command ▪ Restoring Relationships ▪ Dealing with toxic worker environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creating harmony in the workspace ▪ Culture awareness and diversity ▪ Empowering an unmotivated team
Work Life Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overcoming stressful situations ▪ Remote work/life balance ▪ Finding mental clarity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoiding burnout for yourself and your team ▪ Self-care/Mental and emotional stress relief ▪ Micromanaging and Delegation
Other / Job Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advancing your career ▪ Professional development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advancing your career ▪ Professional development