



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

MANAGING THE STRESS OF TIME AND COMPETING PRIORITIES

About the Webinar:

Designed to help individuals recognize how personal organization and use of time contribute to stress levels. In addition, the presentation will offer a practical approach to prioritizing efforts and maintaining focus on the most important activities in our lives to reduce stress and increase our effectiveness.

Date: August 24, 2023
Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

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SETTING BOUNDARIES TO AVOID BURNOUT

If you're feeling overloaded and burned out, one problem could be the boundaries you're setting around your work, time, and relationships. Boundaries are the limits you establish on what responsibilities you take on, how you spend your time, and how you expect other people to treat you. Boundaries are key to maintaining healthy relationships and an appropriate balance between your own needs and work requirements, and the needs and expectations of others.

If you find yourself saying "yes" too readily to additional demands on your time, attention, and energy, to the point where you feel overloaded, exhausted, resentful, and emotionally drained, you may need to pay closer attention to your boundaries.

Saying "no" or "not now" is appropriate and necessary at times, even at work, with coworkers, customers, and your boss. You can do it without being rude or unhelpful or signaling that you're not committed to the work. When you set healthy boundaries for yourself and respect the boundaries of others, you'll build stronger relationships, help focus efforts on the most important priorities, and set yourself on a path to greater happiness and success.

How to Set and Maintain Boundaries

- **Give yourself permission**—to attend to your own needs, to focus on what's most important to you and your organization, or to take a break to relax and recharge. You have a right to set boundaries for your own wellbeing. You have an obligation to your employers to set boundaries to ensure that the most important work gets done.
- **Identify your limits.** Think about the requests you've said "yes" to or activities you've volunteered for that later left you feeling overloaded or resentful. Think about when you've put other people's wishes ahead of your own needs in ways that ultimately left you feeling bad. Think about times you've responded to "urgent" requests that pulled you away from more important obligations:



◦ It's great to apply your energies and skills to important endeavors. If helping someone, adding another activity to your busy schedule, or giving an extra effort at work feels good to you, great—but you have needs, too. Pay attention to your emotions. If a relationship or activity drains your energy and makes you unhappy, it's likely you've allowed yourself to be pushed beyond an important boundary. If work feels overwhelming and you are at risk of burnout, you may need to step back and reconsider how you are focusing your efforts.

◦ Consider what your emotions are telling you. What are your limits? Which people and activities energize you, bring you joy, or help you move toward your most important goals? Which bring you down or hold you back? Which of your work activities have high value to your customers and your organization, and which are taking your time and attention but producing little return? Paying attention to your emotions can help you identify the boundaries that are important to you.

- **Protect your time.** Think about how you spend your time. Are there meetings on your calendar that don't have a clear purpose or lead to productive outcomes? How often, when you're trying to concentrate on something, are you interrupted by incoming messages or other distractions? How much time do you spend outside of work checking news or social media or watching TV, or on other activities that don't bring satisfaction and restore your energy? You might be surprised to see what a difference it can make to focus your time and attention on your most important priorities at work and in your life outside of work:
- **Set aside time to focus on what's most important.** That includes both the work that's most important and your priorities outside of work. It includes time to relax, connect with friends and family, recharge, and take care of yourself. Block time for these activities in your calendar, and treat them as unbreakable commitments.
 - To the extent that you can, find places and ways to work that minimize interruptions.
 - Set times when you'll respond to messages and times when you won't. You don't need to respond immediately to everything.
 - Expect that meetings you attend have a purpose and an agenda and that they lead to productive outcomes. When you're invited to a meeting, look at the agenda to make sure your attendance is needed. If it's not clear to you, ask why you've been invited.
 - Take short breaks during the workday, as allowed, to stretch, relax, clear your mind, and refresh your energy.
 - Protect time outside of work to be with family and friends, get physical activity, eat healthy foods, and get the sleep you need.
- **Reset unrealistic expectations—both your own and other people's.** If you're exhausting yourself because of your own high expectations of yourself, consider whether you might be crossing the boundary between pushing for excellence and striving for perfection. Excellence is an admirable goal, but perfectionism can be bad for your mental health. If other people have grown to expect you to respond immediately to their requests or to be the one who always volunteers for extra tasks, start resetting their expectations, politely but firmly. Make it clear that you are focusing on the most important work and that you have your own priorities and needs.



- **Start small.** It can be hard to break old habits in your own behavior and to change other people's expectations of you. Try setting boundaries with a friend or family member and see how it can improve your relationship. Try setting boundaries in small ways at work as a way to practice your communication.
- **Be consistent.** Don't say "no" to something, then give in to pressure and agree to it. If you feel guilty about not being more responsive and available, consider why you have those feelings. Challenge yourself to think about whether they are appropriate or helpful. You can't stop other people from asking you to do things, but you can control how you respond. With practice, maintaining your boundaries will become easier and you'll see the benefits in improved productivity and better relationships, work-life balance, and wellbeing.

How to Communicate Your Boundaries

- **Assert yourself.** If it's hard for you to say "no" to requests, it may be because you fear conflict, want too much to be liked or praised, or have fallen into a habit of putting other people's needs before your own. Learn to assert yourself. It won't lead to conflict if you're clear and respectful in your communication. Considering both your own needs, your organization's most important needs, and the needs of others, be firm and polite in explaining what you're willing and unwilling to do.
- **Be clear, calm, and direct.** If you're asserting your boundaries for the first time, you can't expect other people to know without telling them. Be clear, calm, and direct when you explain to someone that you're not able to do what they're asking. It may help you get your message across if you let the person know what your other priorities are, especially if they are work priorities. But that's not always necessary or even appropriate if your other priorities are personal. There's no need to defend or over-explain your reasons for maintaining a boundary.
- **Rehearse ahead of time.** If you're intimidated by the prospect of being more assertive, practice saying "no" in clear, calm, and respectful ways. You might do this in front of a mirror or with a trusted friend or family member.
- **Offer other options.** If you're willing to help someone, but not right now, suggest another time that might work for both of you. If you can't contribute to a project or effort right now and have thoughts on ways it might get done without you, offer your suggestions in a helpful way. If the request seems important but conflicts with other work priorities, ask your manager whether you should set aside existing work to make time for the new assignment.

Maintain Your Boundaries

- **Be firm and stay strong in maintaining your boundaries.** Remind yourself of the reasons you've decided on them, the feelings of overload and resentment you've had in the past or the awareness that you're not getting to the most important work. If you back down or are inconsistent, you invite people to ignore your needs.



Be realistic and adaptable. While you need to be firm about important boundaries, be open to adjusting them if they prove to be too rigid. Your organization's needs and priorities can change quickly with economic conditions, innovation, and shifting customer preferences. You have to be flexible in supporting your organization as it adapts to those changes. Remember, too, that a key goal of boundaries is mutual respect—to have others respect your needs while you respect theirs. Don't set boundaries that are so protective of your needs that they get in the way of collaboration, friendship, and engagement with activities that are important to you and your organization.

Seek help.

If you're struggling to set and maintain healthy boundaries, reach out for help. Contact your Employee Advisory Service (EAS) to speak with an expert who can help you understand what boundaries might be helpful to you or coach you on how to explain your boundaries to others.

Source: Morgan, H. (2022, August 4). *Setting boundaries to avoid burnout* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options (WPO).

FLEXIBLE THINKING

What is Flexible Thinking?

Flexible thinking is a frame of mind or way of thinking that enables you to solve novel problems, come up with new ideas, and see beyond the limitations of established approaches and conventional views. It includes the ability to:

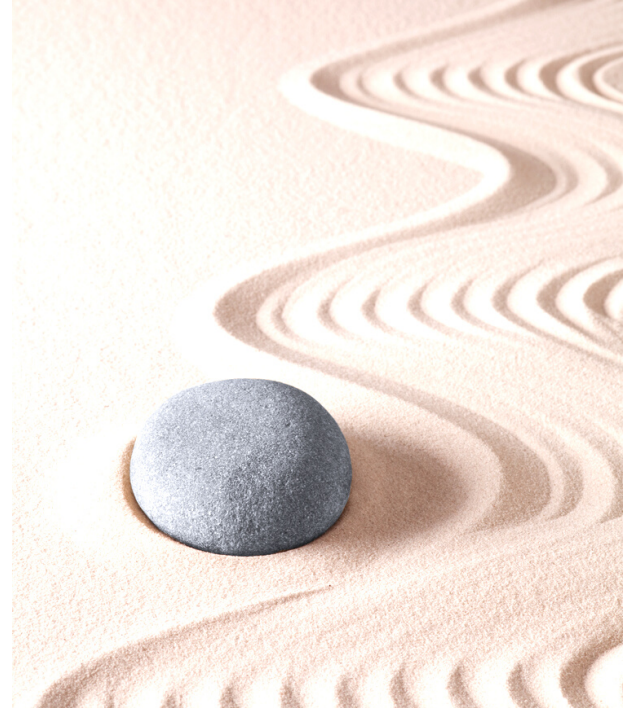
- Imagine new solutions to problems, beyond those that have been tried in the past
- Consider different, even conflicting, interpretations of the same information
- Collaborate effectively with other people, listening to and seriously considering their views
- Explore nuances and gray areas, rather than seeing only absolutes, like right and wrong or good and bad
- Question your assumptions and beliefs when presented with new information

Rigid thinking, by contrast, can limit you to seeing just one solution to a problem or considering your own opinion as the only valid one. It can blind you to new ideas, new ways of doing things, and alternative explanations for things you observe. It can close your mind to noticing or accepting information that conflicts with your views and that could lead you to a richer and more accurate understanding of the world around you.

Leonard Mlodinow, who has written about flexible thinking in his book, *Elastic: Flexible Thinking in a Time of Change*, also contrasts flexible thinking with rational and logical thought, the kind of conscious thinking that helps you make decisions based on learned knowledge and previous experience. Mlodinow describes logical thought as the "top-down" thinking of the conscious mind and flexible or elastic thinking as the "bottom-up" working of the mind at rest, where unfiltered thoughts bubble, churn, and make new connections. It's the difference between rationally tackling a problem by weighing the risks and benefits of known options, and daydreaming about it and coming up with an entirely new solution.

Why is Flexible Thinking Important?

Rigid thinking and habitual responses have their place in a stable world when nothing is changing. They save you time and mental energy when novel solutions and a deeper understanding aren't needed.



In a changing world, however, when you encounter new problems and when you need to work with other people, flexible thinking can be critical to success. Flexible thinking leads to innovation and invention. It's required for effective collaboration. It can also open the door to a richer and more fulfilling life.

How to Be a More Flexible Thinker

- **Learn ways to relax.** Fear and anxiety work to narrow thinking. When you're afraid or tense, you tend to focus on details rather than the big picture. You're more likely to become frustrated when initial attempts to solve a problem don't work. You're also less open to considering ideas and opinions from other people. When you're calm, it's easier to step back and take a fresh look at a problem. You're more likely to hear and accept other views. Recognize the signs of stress, and learn ways to calm yourself when you're tense.
- **Take a break from a challenging mental task** to relax, exercise, or engage in an activity that doesn't require the same kind of rational or logical thinking. That might be playing music, making art, or practicing a craft. This gives your mind a chance to relax its conscious—and narrow—focus.

- **As your mind loosens its focused concentration** and shifts its attention, unrelated thoughts can bubble up and new thought connections can form. Daydreaming and a wondering mind, far from being negatives, can be valuable boosts to flexible thinking. The same kinds of creative connections are more likely to occur when you're in a relaxed and hazy state as you gradually wake from sleep or wind down at the end of the day.
- **Change to a different environment.** If you're feeling stuck on a mental problem, try moving to a different place, one with less distraction, softer light, higher ceilings, or some other feature conducive to relaxed thought. A walk outdoors in nature can sometimes free your mind to think of new ideas.
- **Become comfortable with ambiguity, uncertainty, and contradiction.** There's not a right and wrong answer to every question, and even when there is, you don't always have the information you need to recognize it. Accept that you don't have all the answers. Learn to say, "I don't know." Resist the temptation to judge ideas, opinions, or people as right or wrong, or as good or bad. Learn to operate comfortably in the gray areas, when you don't have all the information and when both sides of an argument have merit.
- **Question your beliefs.** Your beliefs affect how you approach problems and how you respond to new ideas and people who are different from you. To become a more flexible thinker, have the humility to question your beliefs, even those you hold most strongly. When you encounter information that contradicts one of your beliefs, have the courage to examine that information carefully, and ask yourself whether your belief could be wrong.
- **Focus on the "why" before the "how."** As you consider a new problem, consider the goal that lies behind it. Why are you trying to solve this problem? What do you, your partner, your organization, or the customer hope to achieve? Understanding the bigger picture might lead you to redefine the problem or consider a different range of potential solutions.
- **Expand your frame of reference.** Look beyond the way things have been done in your department, your industry, or your family. Seek ideas wherever you can find them. The solution to your organization's manufacturing or marketing challenge might be found in the practices of an unrelated enterprise.
- **Expand your social circle and professional network** to include people who have had different life experiences, different areas of interest and expertise, and views that are different from your own. Share ideas, opinions, and experiences with this broader circle. Listen to what they tell you, and use their insights to look at the world and think in new ways.
- **Be willing to experiment and be comfortable with failure.** New ideas and solutions come from trying novel ways of doing things. Scientists and inventors know that experiments often result in failure, and that those failures lead, in a productive way, to refinements in new experiments. Learn to take the same approach to experiment and failure in your life and work.
- **Generate new ideas without judging them.** Brainstorming is the practice of generating lots of ideas without squelching their flow with negative comments or judgments. There's no such thing as a bad idea in a productive brainstorming session. Once you have a long list of ideas, you can review them and consider which have the most promise. An idea that seems crazy at first might, upon reflection, have great value, perhaps with some small modification. Brainstorming typically happens in a group, but you can follow the same process by keeping a journal of thoughts and ideas. Set aside time without distraction or interruption to build your list. As you write down your thoughts, do your best to keep the rational, logical part of your mind from judging and censoring what you come up with.

For More Information

- Cook, G. (2018, March 21). The power of flexible thinking. *Scientific American*. London: Springer Nature Group.
- Mlodinow, L. (2018). *Elastic: Flexible thinking in a time of change*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Source Morgan, H. (2023, February 9). *Flexible thinking* (B. Schuette & E. Morton, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: *Workplace Options (WPO)*.



AUGUST 30TH: NATIONAL GRIEF AWARENESS DAY

AN INDIVIDUAL'S REACTIONS TO BEREAVEMENT

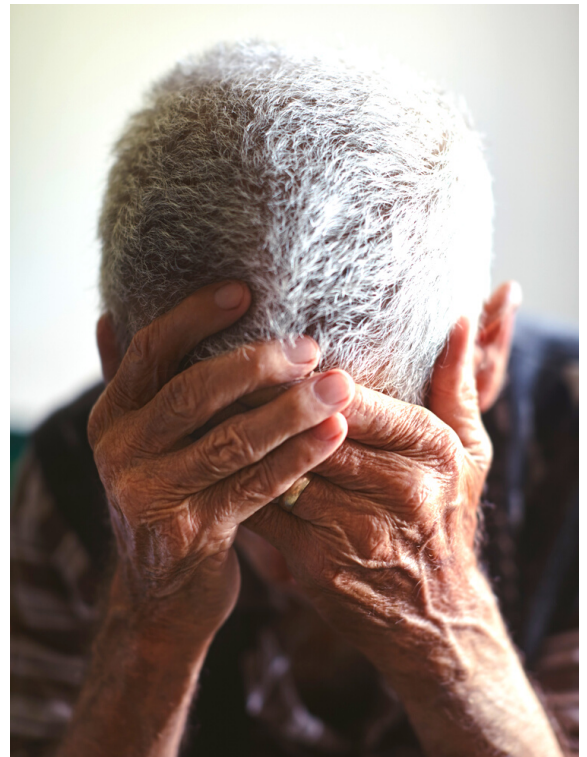
Losing someone you love or care for is a painful experience. The feelings can be so intense that some people wonder if what they're feeling is normal. Sometimes people worry that their family members aren't coping well with their loss. The following information may help answer some of your questions and increase your understanding of the grieving process.

Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning

Bereavement is the period after a loved one dies when grief is experienced and mourning occurs. There is no rule or formula for how long one spends in bereavement. For most, healing occurs slowly but surely. Some begin to feel better within weeks or months, others not for years. The length of bereavement can depend on several factors, including the person's personality, relationship to the deceased, coping skills, level of support from others, and cultural and religious background.

Grief is a universal reaction to loss. People can experience grief after any loss, including loss of a marriage, job, or health. The loss of a loved one often causes the most intense type of grief reaction.

Mourning is the way people show grief in public. The way people mourn is affected by beliefs, religious practices, and cultural customs. People mourn in many different ways. Some examples are Buddhists praying weekly during a funeral period of 49 days; Catholics participating in the funeral practices of a wake, funeral mass, and final graveside farewell; and Jewish mourners undergoing a seven-day period, called shiva, that includes following certain practices such as covering mirrors.



The Process of Grief

There are several theories about how the normal grief process works. The one developed by psychiatrist, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross gained much awareness by the public. Based on her work with patients facing terminal illness, Dr. Kübler-Ross introduced a model to describe the stages that dying people experience. Her identified stages were:

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

Although Dr. Kübler-Ross never intended her model to be used as a rigid formula for how a person should grieve a loss, that's what happened. People began to generalize and apply her five stages to the grieving process an individual experiences after losing a loved one. At this time, there is insufficient evidence to prove that this theory is correct.



The Hospice Foundation of America, along with many other professional organizations, instead suggests imagining the grieving process, "as a roller coaster, full of ups and down, highs and lows. Like many roller coasters, the ride tends to be rougher in the beginning, the lows may be deeper and longer. The difficult periods should become less intense and shorter as time goes by, but it takes time to work through a loss. Even years after a loss, especially at special events such as a family wedding or the birth of a child, we may still experience a strong sense of grief."

The grief process is as personal as one's fingerprints. People in bereavement shouldn't judge or compare themselves to others. Instead, they need to experience their own natural process, whatever that looks like.

Common Responses

There are no right or wrong reactions to a death, but grief seems to affect us on several levels: emotional, physical, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual. Grieving people often experience some of the following reactions:

• Emotional

- Emotional numbness, shock, disbelief, or denial
- Anxiety over being separated from the loved one
- Guilt and regret
- Anger
- Profound sadness
- Relief (e.g. if the person died after a long illness)

• Physical

- Sleep disruption
- Dreams, illusions, hallucinations of the deceased
- Loss of appetite or weight loss
- Exhaustion
- Lowered immunity
- Tearfulness
- Sighing
- Other physical symptoms such as nausea, palpitations, tightness in the throat, or digestive problems

• Cognitive

- Disorganization in daily routine
- Preoccupation
- Distraction

• Behavioral

- Searching for places or possessions shared with the deceased



◦ Withdrawal

- Loss of interest in hobbies, groups, previous activities, self-care

• Spiritual

- Anger at one's God or higher power
- Questioning one's religion or beliefs

Coping with Grief

Research has verified that people with strong social support tend to cope better after a significant loss, like the death of a loved one. Although they might not be used to or comfortable with talking about their inner thoughts and feelings, these individuals don't grieve alone. They get support from family, friends, neighbors, fellow members of your religious organization, coworkers, or a support group.

Another important and necessary component of coping with grief is self-care. Not paying attention to their physical and emotional needs can worsen how grieving individuals feel physically and emotionally. Looking after their health by walking or getting some other form of exercise is critical. So is being able to express their feelings by writing or talking them out to someone with good, nonjudgmental listening skills.

Complicated Grief

For some people, the intense pain of grief doesn't diminish over time and continues to interfere with daily living activities. About 1 in 10 people in bereavement experience what is called complicated grief. Signs include intense longing for and intrusive thoughts of the deceased, denial of the death, difficulty moving on with life, and inability to carry out normal daily functions.

People experiencing complicated grief should seek professional medical or mental health consultation. If not addressed, this intensity of grieving can lead to significant emotional problems and life-threatening health problems, including suicide.

How will I know when I'm done grieving?

Every person who experiences a death or other loss must complete a four-step grieving process:

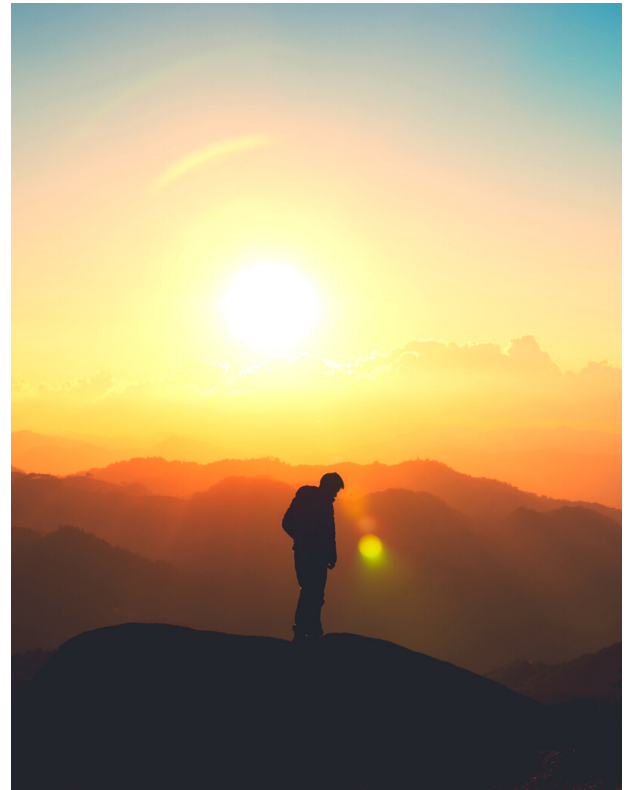
1. Accept the loss.
2. Work through and feel the physical and emotional pain of grief.
3. Adjust to living in a world without the person or item lost.
4. Move on with life.

The grieving process is over only when a person completes the four steps.

How does grief differ from depression?

Depression is more than a feeling of grief after losing someone or something you love. Clinical depression is a whole-body disorder. It can take over the way you think and feel. Symptoms of depression include:

- A sad, anxious, or "empty" mood that won't go away
- Loss of interest in what you used to enjoy
- Low energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Loss of appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Trouble concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Feeling hopeless or gloomy
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Thoughts of death or suicide or a suicide attempt
- Recurring aches and pains that don't respond to treatment



If you recently experienced a death or other loss, these feelings may be part of a normal grief reaction. However, if these feelings persist with no lifting mood, ask for help.

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Smith, M., Robinson, L., & Segal, J. (Updated 2021, August). Coping with grief and loss. Retrieved September 2, 2021, from <https://www.helpguide.org>

Hospice Foundation of America. (n.d.). What is grief? Retrieved September 2, 2021, from <https://hospicefoundation.org>

U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Cancer Institute (NCI). (Updated 2020, December 3). Grief, bereavement, and coping with loss (Physician Data Query summary). Retrieved September 2, 2021, from <https://www.cancer.gov>

Source: Sulaski, C. (Revised 2021). An individual's reactions to bereavement. Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

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



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

24 HOURS A DAY 7 DAYS A WEEK
(EMERGENCY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES)



Contact us: 1-866-327-9133 | Email: EAS_Help@csc.nj.gov