



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

HOW TO PROVIDE GREAT CUSTOMER SERVICE DURING STRESSFUL TIMES

About the Webinar:

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, stress levels have remained high for most of us. It can be more difficult to utilize our best interpersonal skills when we are interacting with customers and colleagues when we are feeling stressed. This timely session will discuss several practical self-management strategies and advanced communication skills necessary to interact effectively with customers during stressful times.

Date: September 21, 2023

Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

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MAKE GRATITUDE A LIFE-CHANGING HABIT

Practicing gratitude is easy, and the results can change your life. Simply reflecting on what you're grateful for turns your outlook toward the good and away from the bad. Making a habit of feeling gratitude can lift your mood, reduce your stress, and improve your relationships. It can also help you adopt other healthy habits. Gratitude is what experts call a keystone habit. Like regular exercise, adopting this one good habit can have a cascade of positive effects.

It takes just two minutes a day.

Shawn Achor, an expert on happiness and gratitude, advocates small changes and simple steps as a path to greater happiness and success in life. He proposes five key areas of focus, the first of which is gratitude. (The others are doubling positive experiences by reviewing them daily, 15 minutes of fun exercise, meditation, and conscious acts of kindness.) He has found that two minutes of daily gratitude practice is enough to realize life-changing benefits. That's well within the reach of even the busiest people.

Make the practice of gratitude a daily habit.

- **Pick a regular time for gratitude.** That might be before you get out of bed in the morning, as you sit down to a meal, or at a quiet time in the evening. Choose a time to practice gratitude and try it for a few days. If it doesn't seem right—if your mind is too distracted then, or the presence of other people makes it hard to focus on gratitude—try another time and see how that works for a few days. To build any new habit, a key step is to make it part of your daily and weekly routine.
- **Think outside yourself.** To feel genuine gratitude, focus on positive forces and circumstances, both large and small, that are outside of your direct control. That might be the kind act of a friend or a stranger, the food you eat, your spiritual faith in a higher power, a moment of calm in your day, a beautiful view, the affection of a pet, the pleasure of reading, your partner's patience, or even finding a convenient parking space. The human mind tends to emphasize and remember the negative. Pushing yourself to think about the good tends to change the balance of how you look at life.



- **Think of three new things you're grateful for every day.** Gratitude isn't as powerful when you think in generalities as it is when you think more specifically. You may be grateful for the comfort of your home or the loyalty of a friend or your partner, but you'll get more benefit from considering new and more specific events and circumstances every day. You also won't fall into an unthinking rut of being grateful for the same things every day.
- **Try it for just two minutes a day for 21 days.** There's nothing magic in those numbers, but two minutes a day, for most people, is enough time to consider three new things that they're grateful for and to savor the pleasure of those feelings of gratitude. Repeating for 21 days is typically long enough to experience the practice as part of your routine and build the foundation of a new habit.



- **Notice the good throughout your day.** As you get in the habit of feeling gratitude for three new things every day, start to notice those things as you go about your day. Become a collector and connoisseur of these positive aspects of your experience. That might be the song of a bird out your window, the polite action of another driver, or another person's smile when you do something kind. Savor these experiences in the moment, then relive them in your daily gratitude practice.
- **Keep a gratitude journal.** Some people (though not all) find it helpful to write down what they are grateful for as part of their daily gratitude practice. The act of writing—whether in a paper journal or using an app on your phone—can help to fix the positive thoughts and memories in your mind. Over time, as your gratitude journal grows, you can review past entries and re-experience good feelings you might otherwise forget.
- **Express your gratitude.** Thank other people when they are thoughtful, kind, and generous. Reach out and thank people who have made a difference in your life, even if it was years ago. Expressing gratitude to others feels good and it can brighten another person's day, just as they have brightened yours.



For More Information

Shawn Achor, "The Happy Secret to Better Work," TEDx talk (2012)

https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work

Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier by Robert Emmons (2007). New York: Houghton Mifflin.

"These two-minute daily habits will make you happier immediately, researchers say," (by Brigid Schulte, 3 July 2015), Independent.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/healthy-living/these-two-minute-daily-habits-will-make-you-happier-immediately-researchers-say-10364823.html>

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH

Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States and a major public health concern. When a person dies by suicide, the effects are felt by family, friends, and communities. This information can help you, a friend, or a family member learn more about the warning signs of suicide, ways to help prevent suicide, and effective treatment options.

If you know someone in crisis, dial 911 in an emergency. You can also call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988 or chat at <https://988lifeline.org>, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Lifeline is free, confidential, and available to everyone.

What is suicide?

Suicide is when people harm themselves with the goal of ending their life, and they die as a result. A suicide attempt is when people harm themselves with the goal of ending their life, but they do not die. Avoid using terms such as "committing suicide," "successful suicide," or "failed suicide" when referring to suicide and suicide attempts, as these terms often carry negative meanings.

Who is at risk for suicide?

People of all genders, ages, and ethnicities can be at risk for suicide. The main risk factors for suicide are:

- A history of suicide attempts
- Depression, other mental disorders, or substance use disorder
- Chronic pain
- Family history of a mental disorder or substance use
- Family history of suicide
- Exposure to family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Presence of guns or other firearms in the home
- Having recently been released from prison or jail
- Exposure, either directly or indirectly, to others' suicidal behavior, such as that of family members, peers, or celebrities

Most people who have risk factors for suicide will not attempt suicide, and it is difficult to tell who will act on suicidal thoughts. Although risk factors for suicide are important to keep in mind, someone who is showing warning signs of suicide may be at higher risk for danger and need immediate attention.



Stressful life events (such as the loss of a loved one, legal troubles, or financial difficulties) and interpersonal stressors (such as shame, harassment, bullying, discrimination, or relationship troubles) may contribute to suicide risk, especially when they occur along with suicide risk factors.

What are the warning signs of suicide?

Warning signs that someone may be at immediate risk for attempting suicide include:

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty or hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable emotional or physical pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Putting affairs in order, such as making a will
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast
- Talking or thinking about death often

Other serious warning signs that someone may be at risk for attempting suicide include:

- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Making a plan or looking for ways to kill themselves, such as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling great guilt or shame
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Changing eating or sleeping habits
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge

Does asking someone about suicide put the idea in their head?

No. Studies have shown that asking people about suicidal thoughts and behaviors does not cause or increase such thoughts. Asking someone directly, "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" can be the best way to identify someone at risk for suicide.

Do people "threaten" suicide to get attention?

Suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress and an indicator that someone needs help. Talking about wanting to die by suicide is not a typical response to stress. All talk of suicide should be taken seriously and requires immediate attention.

What treatment options and therapies are available?

Effective, evidence-based interventions are available to help people who are at risk for suicide:



- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**—CBT is a type of psychotherapy that can help people learn new ways of dealing with stressful experiences. CBT helps people learn to recognize their thought patterns and consider alternative actions when thoughts of suicide arise.
- **Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT)**—DBT is a type of psychotherapy that has been shown to reduce suicidal behavior in adolescents. DBT also has been shown to reduce the rate of suicide attempts in adults with borderline personality disorder, a mental illness characterized by an ongoing pattern of varying moods, self-image, and behavior that often results in impulsive actions and problems in relationships. A therapist trained in DBT can help a person recognize when their feelings or actions are disruptive or unhealthy and teach the person skills that can help them cope more effectively with upsetting situations.
- **Brief intervention strategies**—Research has shown that creating a safety plan or crisis response plan—with specific instructions for what to do and how to get help when having thoughts about suicide—can help reduce a person's risk of acting on suicidal thoughts. Staying connected and following up with people who are at risk for suicide also has been shown to help lower the risk of future suicide attempts. Research also has shown that increasing safe storage of lethal means can help reduce suicide attempts and deaths by suicide. In addition, collaborative assessment and management of suicidality can help to reduce suicidal thoughts.



- **Collaborative care**—Collaborative care is a team-based approach to mental health care. A behavioral health care manager will work with the person, their primary health care provider, and mental health specialists to develop a treatment plan. Collaborative care has been shown to be an effective way to treat depression and reduce suicidal thoughts.

What should I do if I am in crisis or someone I know is considering suicide?

If you notice warning signs of suicide—especially a change in behavior or new, concerning behavior—get help as soon as possible. Family and friends are often the first to recognize the warning signs of suicide, and they can take the first step toward helping a loved one find mental health treatment.

If someone tells you that they are going to kill themselves, do not leave them alone. Do not promise that you will keep their suicidal thoughts a secret—tell a trusted friend, family member, or other trusted adult. Call 911 if there is immediate danger, or go to the nearest emergency room.

In a crisis, you also can contact the following resources:

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** Call or text 988 (<https://988lifeline.org>). The Lifeline provides 24-hour, confidential support to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. Call or text 988 to connect with a trained crisis counselor. Support is also available via live chat (<https://988lifeline.org/chat>).
- **Crisis Text Line:** Text HELLO to 741741. The Crisis Text Line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This confidential service helps anyone, in any type of crisis, connecting them with a crisis counselor who can provide support and information (<https://www.crisistextline.org>).

What if I see suicidal messages on social media?

Knowing how to get help when someone posts suicidal messages can help save a life. Many social media sites have a process to get help for the person posting the message. Contact social media outlets directly if you are concerned about a friend's social media updates, or dial 911 in an emergency.



How can I find help?

If you have thoughts of suicide, tell your health care provider. Your health care provider will listen to your concerns and can help you figure out next steps. To find mental health treatment services in your area, you can also contact your employee wellbeing services.

References

1. Hedegaard, H., Curtin, S.C., & Warner, M. (2021, February). Suicide mortality in the United States, 1999–2019 (National Center for Health Statistics [NCHS] Data Brief No. 398). Retrieved January 11, 2023, from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <https://www.cdc.gov>
2. Curtin, S.C., Warner, M., & Hedegaard, H. (2016, April). Increase in suicide in the United States, 1999–2014 (NCHS Data Brief No. 241). Retrieved January 11, 2023, from the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov>

QUESTIONS PARENTS ASK ABOUT SCHOOLS: WORKING WITH SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

How I can be more actively involved with my child's school?

When parents get involved in their children's education, the children do better in school, are better behaved, have more positive attitudes toward school, and grow up to be more successful in life:

- Attend back-to-school nights, student exhibitions, and other school events. Get to know the teachers and other school personnel. Listen to their plans, know what they hope to accomplish with their students, and understand why they chose these goals.
- Attend parent organization meetings. Voice your hopes and concerns for your child and for the school. Help organize parent-teacher meetings around your interests and those of other parents.
- Offer to tutor students. If you are comfortable with technology, volunteer to be a computer tutor for both students and teachers, or ask if there are other ways that you can help the school to use technology.
- Offer to help in the office or the cafeteria or to chaperone field trips and other outside events.
- Agree to serve on parent and community advisory groups to your school. They may consider everything from school policies and programs to the kinds of parent involvement activities the school plans.
- Work in a parent resource center or help start one. In these school centers, parents may gather informally, borrow materials on parenting and children's schoolwork, and get information about community services.



- If you are unable to volunteer in the school, look for ways to help at home: Call other parents to tell them about school-related activities, edit the school newsletter, or make educational materials for teachers. If you are bilingual, help translate school materials or interpret for non-English speaking parents in your school.

What can I do to help make sure that my child's school is safe and drug-free?

- Review school discipline policies with your child. Make sure that your child knows what behaviors you expect of him or her in school.
- Work with the school to develop a plan to handle safety and drug problems, such as drug education and violence prevention programs. Make sure the school has clear consequences for students who break school rules.
- Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Make sure their attitude about drugs is compatible with yours. If not, encourage your child to find new friends.

BACK TO SCHOOL



Employee Advisory Service

Support - Empowerment - Growth



2023

MENTAL WELLNESS SYMPOSIUM

A Virtual Event

Date: Thursday, October 26, 2023

Time: 12pm to 2pm



Employee Advisory Service

Support - Empowerment - Growth



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



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