When Trauma Affects a Loved One Who Is Far Away

Distance compounds worry and fear when someone you love is in harm’s way. Such events can cause stress overload in four key ways: (1) incomplete information and worry about the whereabouts of your loved one, (2) inability to communicate, (3) feelings of helplessness, and (4) a repeating media “loop” of bad news. Be specific about the things your employer can do to help you cope (such as flexible hours and unscheduled time off); most employers are willing to help. Turn off the television as an information source, and turn to official websites/information sources that disseminate important details. Maintain routines, because familiarity and normalcy in everyday life provide a natural antidote to emotional upheaval. Keep up an exercise routine. Stick to a schedule. Focus on things that you can control, like cleaning and organizing your surroundings. To satisfy the need to “do something,” join forces with others organizing fund-raising events or working together to assemble care packages or to provide relief. Talk about what you’re feeling with someone you trust. Write or e-mail your loved one even if he or she can’t receive the message yet, because getting your thoughts on paper is a helpful emotional release. Don’t keep children in the dark, and instead provide appropriate information. Let younger ones express their feelings through art projects, writing, and play. Consider turning to your employee assistance program for support and advice.

Getting to Know Your Neighbors

Do you know your neighbors? Many people don’t know the last name of next-door neighbors, although they may periodically wave to them. Although you may be missing out on an opportunity for community building and socializing, not knowing your neighbors also could be a safety and support issue. Failure to nurture these relationships may prevent you from seeking help during personal emergencies or cause you to feel hesitant about offering assistance when it’s needed. Here’s how to turn things around:

1. Instead of hitting the couch, relax in a chair outside, see who walks by, and say hello.

2. Take a walk in the neighborhood, and when you meet others, greet them. (This tactic also counts as exercise.)

3. This year, attend the neighborhood barbeque. Perhaps it crossed your mind last year, but this year put the date on your calendar. If your neighborhood doesn’t have an annual barbeque, consider organizing one.

4. Have a garage sale. It’s a surefire way to get to know neighbors.
Don’t Underestimate Sleep Disorders

It’s frustrating dozing off at work. Could you be suffering from a sleep disorder? The most common disorders are sleep apnea; narcolepsy; and restless leg syndrome, or RLS. Sleep problems take a big hit on health and workplace productivity. Inadequate sleep has been linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression. Sleep problems are also associated with accidents, absenteeism, lost time on the job, leaving work early to sleep, oversleeping on break and missing work, and tardiness. If you’re falling asleep at work, stop pinching yourself awake. Talk to your doctor to find out about sleep study/assessment programs (often part of university medical research programs) and other appropriate treatment.

How to Change Your Mood

There’s nothing unusual about a difficult or “bad” mood, but don’t stay frustrated in this state of mind hoping it will lift like a morning fog. A chronically bad mood might indicate an illness like depression, which should be evaluated by a health professional. Many things can influence moods, but images in our minds and “self-talk” in response to what’s going on around us are big players. Try this intervention technique: Spend about three or four uninterrupted minutes imagining something you thoroughly enjoy doing. See, hear, feel, and even smell success at accomplishing this thing. This technique forces you to change the self-talk script. See if you don’t notice a more desirable mood following the exercise.

Spring Rains, Floods, and Such

Plan now to protect yourself and your family if you live in a part of the country that is subject to severe weather during spring. Follow instructions and guidance offered by local emergency preparedness experts. Don’t find yourself rushing to the store for supplies at the last second, only to face empty shelves. Get a kit, make a plan, and be informed. For planning tips and checklists, visit the updated federal government website: www.ready.gov.

Avoid Mistakes at the Gym

If you’re using gym equipment to help create a “new you” in 2010, follow a few simple rules to keep yourself safe. Start with an OK from your doctor, and get expert advice on using gym equipment. The American Council on Exercise says the following mistakes are commonly made by new gym-goers:

1) Not warming up prior to training (muscles need time to adjust to demands before you start);
2) Lifting too much weight (gradual and progressive resistance is much better);
3) Not cooling down after exercise (this lowers your heart rate and boosts flexibility);
4) Not doing enough stretching after an exercise (this can help you prevent injuries); and
5) Consuming energy bars and sports drinks during moderate workouts (unless you are working out for two hours a day or more, you’re piling on calories you don’t need).

Don’t Forget About MRSA

Swine flu virus has made headlines, but other contagious and dangerous bugs exist. A bacteria that is getting increasing attention is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, or MRSA. MRSA (staph) infections include painful boils and can be fatal. Only one or two antibiotics can stop such an infection. Staph has long been a problem for hospitals and nursing facilities, but it has been detected more frequently in communities. Staph germs are common. Oddly, some people can be carriers without becoming infected, but a person with a weakened immune system is very vulnerable to it. Body contact with an infected person or sharing towels and athletic equipment can also dramatically increase risk of infection. Wash your hands, wipe down equipment, and read more about MRSA to protect yourself and family members. Source: www.mayoclinic.com.
Workplace Relationships

Exercising your ability to influence others; feeling in control of your work; and getting opportunities to demonstrate your skills, especially to top management, make work satisfying. Earning trust in the organization is a door through which you must pass to maximize these experiences. Knowing how to manage work relationships is key. All good relationships are created and managed. This doesn’t mean control and manipulation. It means awareness and an understanding of what you must do to improve them and help them thrive. Think of it like maintaining a garden—a little fertilizing, weeding, and waiting. If you find yourself wondering why your job isn’t more exciting or why others get the opportunities that seem to elude you, the answer may lie in how you manage relationships. Consider talking to your employee assistance representative about the care and feeding of your workplace relationships.

Gender Equity in Math

Bury the myth. Girls around the world are not worse at math than boys, even though boys may be more confident in their math abilities. Girls from countries where gender equity is more prevalent are more likely to perform better at mathematics, according to a new analysis of international research. The analysis of data represented nearly 500,000 students in 69 countries. The critical factors that will support more girls excelling in math are female role models excelling in math, positive messages about capability, perceived expectations, and the right educational tools. Source: American Psychological Association, Jan. 5, 2010.

Weight Management and Children

Findings from a recent national study suggest that preschool-aged children have a 40 percent lower risk of obesity if they regularly engage in one or more of three specific household routines: eat dinner as a family five or more days per week; get adequate sleep (10.5 hours average); and limit weekday television viewing to two hours or less. The study is significant because it involved more than 8,000 children and the results held true for every socioeconomic and ethnic group studied even for families in which there was a higher risk of obesity. Source: Ohio State, Research Communications, February 8, 2010.

Fight Deadlines with Deadlines

If you hate procrastination yet frequently find yourself in its clutches, implement the following strategy to experience a renewed sense of control and freedom from work pressure: When you are handed an assignment, decide on the spot to complete it within 75 percent of the allotted time. Decide on the earlier yet artificial deadline. Then, treat this earlier deadline as the real thing. Stoke your motivation by getting someone to whom you are accountable to inquire about your progress halfway through. This productivity strategy, ironically, will not generate the same type of anguish that you would otherwise experience with the real deadline. Relish the positive feelings of finishing early. Plan a reward—a movie, a night out, or a mini celebration. Become more proactive with creative with deadlines and you’ll stay out of the grips of procrastination.

Positive Affirmations

The self-talk technique of repeating an affirming, positive message daily to improve your life can work wonders, say the goal achievement gurus. But there is a right way to do it if you want to increase your chances of success—be specific. Rather than repeating a general statement of self-improvement such as “I am becoming a better salesperson every day,” rework your affirmation to be precise, targeting the goal you want to achieve. For example, “I am focused on acquiring new customers every day, and I will become a district sales manager within eighteen months.”
Calling in “Sick”

Have you phoned in sick just to get a day off? One national survey found that 20 percent of employees have. The most common reason: “I felt stressed and wanted a day off.” Consider phoning your employee assistance program (EAP) the next time the unexpected desire to take off looms. It might be a signal that a personal difficulty or workplace issue needs to be resolved. For example, is it a conflict with a coworker or a supervisor, or a need for better organizing skills to cope with too much work, that is making you feel overwhelmed? What about an argument with a customer or some unfair workplace experience you need to discuss? Instead of taking a day off for short-term relief, talk to the EAP. It may have a long-term cure. Source: Kronos Sickness Absence Survey 2010.

Portion Distortion

Increase your awareness of “food portion distortion.” Over the past several decades, the size of food portions has exploded. What was a tiny bag of French fries is now a box, a small drink is now a large, and a large drink is now a bucket! Even triple-patty hamburgers are now available. The ill effects on health have always existed, but now what we think of as a portion has also increased! To avoid the potential impact on your health, consider interventions such as using smaller plates, sharing food, ordering only the appetizer if the entrée is huge, or simply asking for less. Source: NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. www.nhlbi.nih.gov.

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: 800.424.1749