

EAO Supervisor Newsletter-December 2020

During the holidays it is easy to focus on the needs of others. We encourage you to take a moment to also include time to focus on self-care. This issue is written to help you individually, and to provide information and resources to support your role as a supervisor.

Employee Recognition, Now More Than Ever

Employees are feeling stressed, anxious and isolated while facing serious concerns for their family's health and safety, salary reductions, potential job loss, and sadness due to the recommendations to limit gatherings during the upcoming holidays. Perhaps given all that, it's understandable that recognition fall by the wayside. However, a recent survey looking at employee feelings about recognition in these strange pandemic times, showed that 64% of employees say employee recognition and appreciation is more important while working from home. The survey contained responses from approximately 1,000 members of the U.S. workforce.

- Seven out of 10 employees (73%) felt that recognition and rewards motivate their work ethic and productivity.
- Yet only one out of 5 employees (26%) say their employer has implemented new ways to reward and recognize them since the current pandemic started.

Suggestions for Supervisors and Managers/What Employees Want

- Virtual social hours or personal check-ins at the beginning of meetings
- Acknowledge kids at home
- Make evaluations more frequent in order to know if things are working or changes are needed
- More positive feedback or verbal expressions of appreciation
- To be asked how they are feeling and what they need
- Try to keep things as normal/same as possible
- Better communication about office space and plans for the future
- Check in with the mental health and well-being of employees
- Share mental health and other well-being resources with employees and provide support so employees can use the resources

Loneliness and Social Isolation During the Pandemic

The global pandemic has led to unprecedented social distancing, working from home, and virtual learning to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. While these are essential measures to reduce the spread of the virus, there are also high costs associated with quarantine and social distancing. Loneliness is associated with both physical and mental health impacts; increased blood pressure, sleep difficulties, decreased cognition over time, and unhealthy lifestyle (smoking, alcohol consumption, lower physical activity, poor dietary choices, not following medical/pharmaceutical advice). There are many ways to maintain feelings of being connected to others while maintaining social distancing.

Ways to Cope

- Maintain social connections with technology; Facebook, Skype, Twitter, LINE, Instagram, FaceTime, Zoom. Try creating a regular schedule with family members and loved ones. Some family members may have more time and more freedom to connect now than they did before the pandemic.
- Structure your days. Predictable routines lower anxiety.
- Find time for physical, mental and spiritual well-being.
- Maintain physical activities.
- Pursue outdoor activities while following guidelines of social distancing and other public health recommendations.

- Manage mood and emotions. Conscious breathing, meditation and other relaxation techniques are helpful and can decrease anxiety and depression.
- Learn something new, focus your mind and engage in the present moment.
- Seek assistance when necessary, particularly if having thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- Download and share with your staff the LifeMatters handout, *Coping with Social Isolation* <https://www.empathia.com/promos/COVID19.php>

The impacts of this pandemic have been broad and very challenging. Quarantine and social distancing are necessary measures to prevent the virus from spreading but also lead to more loneliness and social isolation which produce physical and mental health related consequences. Adopting steps to maintain social connections, healthy activities and to manage emotions can help relieve the negative consequences of loneliness and isolation.

A New Way to Holiday

Information adapted from Mental Health America, Inc. article, Preparing for the Holidays During COVID-19

The holiday season will look quite different this year. The typical year-end celebrations, travel plans, large gatherings with family and friends simply are not possible due to COVID-19. People have lost loved ones and will miss their presence during the holiday season. Some have lost their jobs or have received pay cuts, and experienced financial stress. Our essential workers and healthcare providers may be working overtime and unable to spend time with their family to celebrate the holidays. For those who typically only see their loved ones during the holidays, this can be an especially difficult time.

Coping with a lot of change and uncertainty is difficult in the best of times. To have to suddenly shift our valued traditions leaves us feeling a loss of control on top of disappointment. People with mental health issues may find the uncertainty and change of plans to be especially difficult to deal with. Here are some suggestions on how to cope with the tough feelings and still enjoy the holidays:

Identify how you are feeling.

It can be difficult for our brains to process having many different emotions at once. This year has been difficult, for sure, and it is completely normal to be more emotional than usual now. Identifying your emotions can make things feel less overwhelming and help you make plans for coping with them. To “tune in” to yourself, try these practices; keep a journal, talk to a friend, spend some quiet time alone.

Acknowledge what you have lost.

Holidays can be challenging even during normal circumstances. It can be difficult to focus on thankfulness and celebrations if you are missing a loved one, lost a job, feel concerned for the health and safety of your friends and family. We have all lost any sense of normalcy in 2020. Allow yourself the time and space to honor loved ones, recognize the challenges and grieve the losses.

Make the most of it.

Rather than focusing on what you are not able to do this holiday season, focus on the traditions you can still do. Also, consider learning about how other cultures celebrate holidays at this time of year. Change is hard, but it is not always bad. In fact, finding ways to adapt or learning new traditions may add even more meaning to your holiday season. Here are just a few ideas:

- Create your favorite traditional meal, decorate the interior and exterior of your home, light candles, send heartfelt greetings to those you cannot be with, break out confetti poppers for New Year’s Eve.
- Play [online games](#), plan a video chat with friends and family.

- Learn about a different culture’s holiday tradition; customs, songs, symbols, traditional meals and sweet treats.
- Read aloud traditional holiday stories such as *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* or Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. For Hanukkah, read *Latkes and Applesauce, There's No Such Thing as a Chanukah Bush*, Sandy Goldstein. For Kwanzaa, read the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles).

Practice gratitude.

Considering the stress of the pandemic, post-election uncertainty, and the holiday season, taking the time to find things you are grateful for can make a difference in how you are feeling. It can be something as broad as your health or the food on your table, or as specific as hearing your favorite song, or an unexpected, perfect winter day.

Resources for mental wellbeing.

- If you are finding yourself sad, hopeless or unable to enjoy the holidays you may be experiencing depression or anxiety. Consider taking a [mental health screening](#) to learn more.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administrations ([SAMHSA](#)) national helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357), a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders.
- U.W. Employee Assistance Services can help employees during times of stress, anxiety and change and as well as assist with locating resources to help.
- LifeMatters has a wide variety of downloadable articles at your fingertips, including Self-Care for Stress, Path to Coping, Understanding Grief, Positive Ways to Manage Change, to name a few.
<https://www.empathia.com/promos/COVID19.php>
- Apps can be a useful way to supplement emotional health and wellbeing. There are many available, and as an employee you have free access to the evidence-based online mental health app [Silvercloud](#)

Additional Resources for You and Your Employees

Responding to Stress Webinar

Stress is a regular part of life. It can be beneficial and motivating and it can also be difficult and debilitating. Your experience of stress may be amplified at this time by the pandemic, remote work, socio-political unrest, discrimination, family responsibilities, or natural disasters that impact you or your loved ones. This three-session online webinar will help you attune to stress in your life, better understand how it functions, and to gain skills to more effectively manage it. Produced by UW EAO. To access the webinar: <https://hr.wisc.edu/employee-assistance-office/responding-to-stress/>

LifeMatters Monthly Resources and Promotions

https://www.empathia.com/promos/current_wpo_complete.php

Resources, promotions, newsletters and more! Don’t miss their upcoming employee and management webinars! Go to mylifematters.com and sign in with Bucky2. Webinars are located under “Quick Links.”

LifeMatters Free Training and Educational Programs

Lunch and Learn: Stress, Parenting, Organizing at Work, Managing Life Outside of Work, Improving Communication Skills and Managing Well-being.

Workplace: Developing Interpersonal Skills, Defining Organizational Boundaries, Empowering Managers.

For more information and to request a full training catalog: training@empathia.com or Haleh at hpals@empathia.com

LifeMatters requests a 4-week lead time.