



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

Emotional Management in Relationships; How to Respond Instead of React

This important presentation will provide an overview of the emotional self-management skills necessary to have effective interactions with others. The session will discuss ways to identify our feelings, be sensitive to the feelings of others, and manage our emotions so that we don't overreact during conversations.

Date: February 23, 2023
Time: 2:00 – 3:00 PM

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Emotional Management in Relationships: An Overview

Everyone experiences a range of emotions as they go through their day. One minute you may be belting out the lyrics to your favorite song in the car and the next minute, overwhelmed, anxious, and in tears after receiving a call with distressing news.

Emotional ups and downs will inevitably happen. It's how we learn to react and manage those emotions that is important. A lack of emotional management/regulation can lead to over-reactions in our day-to-day life that can impact our relationships, both at home and at work.

This article outlines key steps to elevating your emotional management skills.

Prepare to Respond Rationally

It can be easy to over-react to a situation. One of the first steps to emotional management is to understand the reasons behind your over-reaction. Three common dynamics that may lead to an overly-reactive response include:

- underlying issues (control, safety, self-image)
- contributing factors (energy level, stress level)
- button-pushers (difficult people)

By identifying the reasons behind your reactions, you can then be aware of your triggers and learn to pause prior to reacting so you can train yourself to respond calmly and rationally instead of emotionally.

Manage your Stress Level

Everyone knows that when you're overly stressed, it is easy to become impatient or overwhelmed emotionally, which leads to a more reactive response. Therefore, it is important to proactively manage your stress level. Individuals who strive to keep their lives in balance and are relatively calm tend to be better prepared to handle difficult circumstances and conversations.

Be Thoughtful When Planning Interactions

If you know that you need to have a difficult conversation, it's important to thoughtfully plan the interaction. If you're not in a good place mentally or emotionally, it may be better to put off the interaction if possible for a time where you are in a better head space and can be better



able to rationally respond. Selecting a time and place that is suitable for both parties is also important to planning a conducive interaction.

Make It a Goal to Respond Instead of React

A part of emotional management is striving to intentionally respond calmly and rationally instead of reacting emotionally or defensively. Always try to think before you speak, even if you have to excuse yourself for a moment to gather your thoughts.

Stay Positive in Your Communication Style

It is important to try to remain positive when communicating, especially during difficult conversations. Start by listening first and then responding in a respectful and courteous way, keeping in mind other people's requests and opinions, even if you don't agree.

Putting It All Together During Interactions

Step 1: Recognize the difficulty of the situation

- Be aware of your feelings and calm yourself
- Pause to prepare (take a deep breath, count to 10, etc.)

Step 2: Begin the conversation by listening

- Ask questions and listen respectfully
- Respond calmly and rationally

Humor and Laughter Strengthens Relationships

Humor and laughter work to reduce stress, ease pain, and lift your mood. Positive humor also draws people together and strengthens the bonds in relationships.

People who can make you laugh are a pleasure to spend time with. People who draw out your sense of humor help you keep worries in perspective and make you feel better about yourself.

Laughter helps with the awkward moments as people get to know each other. Positive humor can help friends and couples work through conflicts. It helps long-term relationships continue to feel fresh and exciting. Sharing laughter and funny moments together builds intimacy and strengthens feelings of connection.

Laughter isn't a cure-all for relationship problems, but it can help you through rough patches. If you have a history of laughing together, you're more likely to be flexible, open-minded, and forgiving as you deal with disagreements and disappointments. Knowing how to make each other laugh can help keep your relationship resilient.

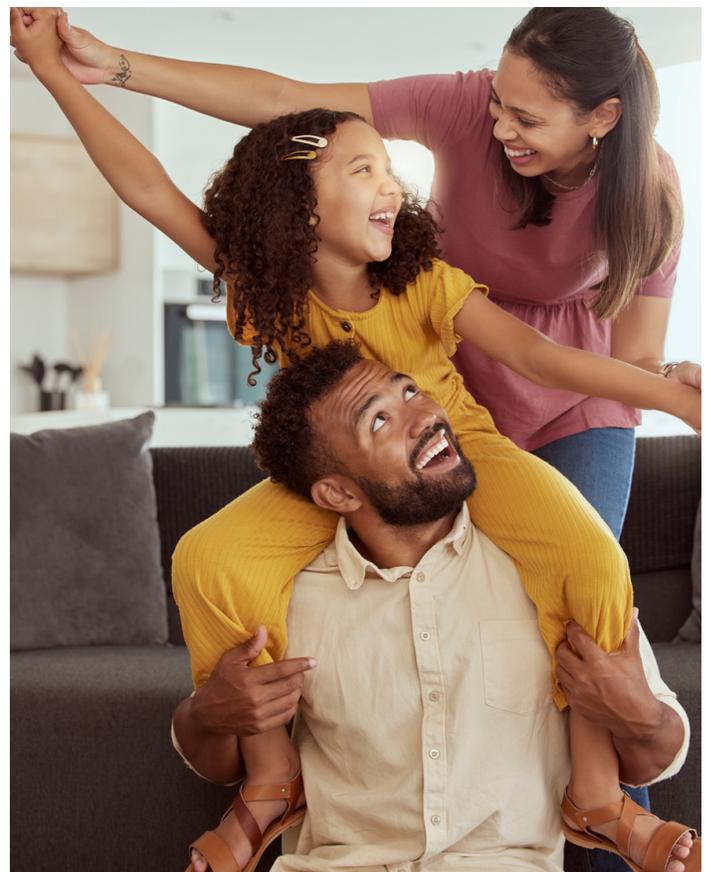
How to Bring More Humor and Laughter Into Your Relationships

Even if you don't think of yourself as naturally funny, you can learn to appreciate humor and be humorous in ways that strengthen your relationships. If humor comes easily to you, there may be ways that you can refine your humor to build stronger bonds. Here are a few suggestions:

- **Smile.** Show that you're relaxed and happy by smiling. Just as laughter is contagious, a smile is likely to draw smiles in return—and a smile is the first step toward a laugh.
- **Create calm spaces in your life for shared laughter.** If you or your friend or partner are hurried or anxious, attempts at humor may fall flat or even be perceived as irritating. While humor can be used to defuse tension, it's easier to spark a laugh when you and the person you're with are both calm. If you find yourself too tense to laugh, step back from what's worrying you, and take a few deep breaths to relax. Help your friend or partner create calm spaces, too, then find ways to share a laugh.
- **Find things to laugh about in your everyday life.** Absurdity and silliness are all around, waiting to be noticed and laughed about. Young children are naturally funny if you're lucky enough to have them in your life. Pets and other animals can make you

laugh. Even things that don't seem funny at first can be if you consider them from different perspectives. That aggravating request at work almost surely has an element of absurdity to it if you let go of your frustration and consider it with humorous eyes.

- **Learn to laugh at yourself.** Let go of your defensiveness and own up to the fact that, like everyone else, you make mistakes—that you have quirks and awkward moments. Set aside your pride, and turn an embarrassing interaction into a funny story. Your partner or your friends will appreciate the laugh and respect you for both your openness and your sense of humor. (One caution here: If you find that all your jokes are at your own expense, you may be overdoing the self-criticism, perhaps because of self-esteem or self-confidence issues.)
- **Share things that make you laugh.** When you find yourself laughing out loud at a joke, cartoon, or video, share it with your partner or a friend. Share entertainment that makes you both laugh, like funny movies, TV shows, or comedy acts.
- **Do something silly together.** Play a game designed to make you laugh. Go out for a karaoke night. Try something you're not very good at, like bowling or miniature golf, and laugh at your mistakes. Crank up the music and do some outdated dance moves together.



- **Remember funny incidents from your past.** Keep a mental inventory of things that have made you laugh together in the past. Bring them up as funny memories when you both need a lift.
- **Draw on inside jokes.** Inside jokes are the words or phrases that spark funny memories for you and your partner or friends, but no one else. When you're together, use them for a private laugh.
- **Don't use humor to avoid serious issues.** While humor can defuse tension and help you discuss tough issues calmly, it can also be used to change the subject and avoid those issues. Watch that you are using humor to grow closer in your relationship, not to "keep things light" when significant problems or painful emotions need discussion.



Humor Cautions in Relationships

Tastes in humor vary widely, and different types of humor can be experienced as warm-hearted and uplifting or mean-spirited and cruel. Use care with humor in your relationships. When you're laughing together, what you're doing is working. When you find yourself laughing by yourself, your attempts at humor may be doing more harm than good:

- **Pay close attention to the other person's reactions.** If they're not laughing with you, you've missed the mark. No matter how funny you think you're being, if it's not funny to the other person, stop. Learn what the other person finds to be funny, and calibrate your humor to lift their mood.
- **Aim to laugh with others, not at them.** Positive humor includes others by finding things to laugh at in shared experiences and everyday absurdities. Aggressive humor, sarcasm, and ridicule get laughs at other people's expense, and can be offensive and hurtful. Lighthearted teasing is appreciated by some people, but not by everyone. Mean-spirited teasing is almost always damaging to relationships.

For More Information

"The Two Sides of Humor in Relationships," Psychology Today (B. Goldsmith, May 2019)

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/emotional-fitness/201905/the-two-sides-humor-in-relationships>

"Managing Conflict with Humor," HelpGuide.org (Updated 2022, August)

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/managing-conflicts-with-humor.htm>

"How Laughter Brings Us Together," Greater Good Magazine (J. Suttie, July 2017)

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_laughter_brings_us_together



How To Be Happy: Tips for Cultivating Contentment

Ten Tips from the Science of Happiness

Behavioral scientists have done a lot of research into what makes people happy and what doesn't. It turns out that most people are quite bad at predicting what will make them happy. Wealth and possessions, for example, have far less impact on happiness than is commonly believed. For deeper, longer-term happiness, scientists have found that other things are far more important. These include some habits for living that can be learned and practiced. Most cost nothing and are available to virtually everyone.

Here are some lessons from the science of happiness that you can apply to your life. (One caveat: For people with clinical depression, anxiety disorder, or other mental health issues, these practices aren't a substitute for therapy, medication, and other professional support. They may be helpful as supplements to those treatments.)

1. Make time for friends and family.

Multiple studies have found that long-term, caring social connections are the biggest factor driving personal happiness. Friends and family support you when you need a lift, act as a sounding board when you need to process your feelings, and celebrate with you when things are good. And it can feel good to provide that support and emotional uplift in return. This isn't about how many social media friends you have. It's about that core set of meaningful relationships—maybe just one or two people—who love you for who you are and make you feel good. Think about the people who make you laugh and smile and who have been there for you when you've felt down. Make time for them, no matter how busy you are. Show them that you appreciate and care about them.

The flip side of this advice is to let go of grudges. Even the best relationships can hit rocky spots. Don't get stuck there. Harboring resentment takes energy and saps happiness. Reach out to forgive and move on.

2. Be kind and generous.

You've probably seen the bumper sticker: "Perform random acts of kindness." It sounds sweet and maybe a little sentimental, but happiness studies have found that it works—in an oddly selfish way. By being kind and helping others, you actually help yourself. Bring a smile to someone's face by giving a compliment, doing a favor, offering help, or just being kind. You'll make someone else's day brighter, and you'll be happier yourself.

In the same way, spending money on someone else is a surer path to happiness than spending it on yourself. And volunteering in ways that help others has been found to boost the volunteers' psychological health.

How
contentment
can make you
rich!

3. Curb excessive self-criticism.

Self-talk is the feedback people give themselves, and it's often critical, undermining your happiness. Be kind to yourself in reviewing your own actions and behavior. Learn from the setbacks and move on from them, rather than blaming yourself and digging yourself into an emotional hole. If you find yourself being overly self-critical, imagine how a caring friend would talk to you, or how you would talk to that friend. Retune your inner voice to be as kind.

If you need a nudge to shift to more positive thinking, make a list of your good qualities—the reasons people like to be with you and choose to have you as a friend, your skills and talents, your most important strengths. Just the act of writing those qualities down is often enough to break a cycle of self-criticism.

4. Pay attention to the good.

Another key happiness habit is optimism—not the blind optimism of people who can't see both sides of something, but realistic optimism that accounts for the downside while looking for the upside and working toward that better outcome. There's truth in the adage, "Every cloud has its silver lining." When you find yourself having a knee-jerk negative reaction to something—an event, a change at work, or another person—step back and look for the positive. What good might come of the event or change? What might you learn from this that could help you in the future? How might you reinterpret another person's behavior in more positive ways?

Once you find the good in a situation, even if it's just a faint glimmer of hope, that gives you something to work toward. Optimism is the habit of finding the good in life, even in what may seem like negative circumstances. And cultivating an optimism habit can make you happier.

5. Practice gratitude.

Contented people take time to think about what they're grateful for. It's a simple exercise, and it can work wonders to boost your mood and your outlook on life. By thinking about what you're grateful for—what you appreciate in other people, small and large things that give you pleasure, and what's going well in your life—you can pull yourself out of negative thought cycles. It's easy to focus on what's hard and what's going wrong, and that can make you miserable. Practicing gratitude pushes you to step back and consider what's good and going right.

To get started on the habit of practicing gratitude, you might write down three things you're grateful for at the end of every day. Go to sleep with those positive thoughts and remind yourself of them when you wake up. Over time, this can become your gratitude journal. You'll get better at seeing the good in life with practice, and reviewing what you've written can give you a lift when you're feeling down.

6. Focus on the present.

Dwelling on the past and worrying about the future can make you anxious and unhappy. When you make an effort to focus on the present moment, you can pull yourself out of those unhealthy thought patterns. Being present is at the core of mindfulness and meditation, practices that have been found to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety. You can find an app or take a class in mindfulness or meditation, or simply carve out a quiet time in your day to spend a few minutes contemplating the here and now.

The goal of being in the present moment isn't to force yourself to be happy. This moment may not be a happy one. Instead, the objective is to recognize and accept your emotions, whatever they are. That acceptance is what calms you and can bring you a more positive outlook.

7. Find your purpose.

Another ingredient in the happiness formula is to find your purpose—to be true to yourself and engage in activities that are meaningful to you. Think about what excites and energizes you, what acts or accomplishments you're most proud of, and how you want others to remember you. These priorities are sometimes called eulogy values as opposed to résumé values.

Once you've given some thought to these deeper priorities, find ways to make more time for them. That might be by doing more for the people you love, volunteering to help those in need in your community, working on a creative talent, spending more time in nature, cultivating a passion for gardening or woodworking, or anything else that has significant meaning for you.

8. Get moving.

Regular physical activity is good for your body and mind. Whether it's a walk outside, a workout at the gym, or a yoga session, getting your body moving can lift your mood and sharpen your thinking. Exercise triggers the release of chemicals known as endorphins that make you feel calmer and happier. It reduces stress hormones, and it improves blood circulation throughout your body, including your brain. So, making a habit of regular physical activity can also be a happiness habit.

9. Resist the urge to compare yourself to others. You can make yourself miserable by comparing yourself unfavorably to others—to their achievements, possessions, social ease, or beauty. It's a natural tendency, but taken

too far it can be damaging to your self-esteem and mental health. As the Dalai Lama put it, "We need to learn to want what we have, not to have what we want, in order to get stable and steady happiness." Many of the ideas offered here can help you get past unhelpful comparisons with others. Practicing gratitude is a wonderful way to focus on the good in your life, for example:

Be careful in your use of social media, too. Recognize that people don't present their whole selves—with all of their ups and downs—on these platforms. They tend to show an artificially sunny view of their lives by choosing only the happiest moments and pictures for their posts. You'll always come out the loser if you compare yourself to those carefully curated presentations.



10. Spend time in nature.

Studies have found that spending time in nature—even as little as 30 minutes a week—can reduce stress hormones and lower blood pressure. Other studies have linked the experience of awe—the feeling you might get from looking at the stars or noticing the beauty of a forest path—to more positive emotions. As you work more physical activity into your life, consider doing some of it in nature, giving yourself the flexibility to slow down and savor the natural environment.

As you can see from this list, greater happiness is within your reach. You don't have to be born with a sunny disposition or an optimistic personality. You can practice habits of thinking and being to make yourself happier. The goal isn't to be bright and cheerful every hour of every day. That would be exhausting, and life doesn't work like that. Everyone experiences setbacks and losses. It's human to be sad at times, even deeply unhappy. But the habits offered here can help you accept and cope with those negative emotions and, in time and on average, enjoy a happier life.

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

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We Help
You?



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