



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 Handle Extremely Stressful Circumstances

About this webinar:

This important session will discuss several strategies for handling the extremely stressful circumstances (trauma, loss, significant changes, etc.) that we experience at times in our personal or professional lives.

Date: May 24, 2022
Time: 2:00-3:00 PM

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Learn to Manage Stress

Everyone feels stress at one time or another. It's a normal and healthy reaction to change or a challenge. However, stress that goes on for more than a few weeks can affect your health. Keep stress from making you sick by learning healthy ways to manage it.

Learn to recognize stress

The first step in managing stress is recognizing it in your life. Everyone feels stress in a different way. You may get angry or irritable, lose sleep, or have headaches or stomach upset. What are your signs of stress? Once you know what signals to look for, you can start to manage it.

Also identify the situations that cause you stress. These are called stressors.

Your stressors could be family, school, work, relationships, money, or health problems. Once you understand where your stress is coming from, you can come up with ways to deal with your stressors.



Avoid unhealthy stress relief

When you feel stressed, you may fall back on unhealthy behaviors to help you relax. These may include:

- Eating too much
- Smoking cigarettes
- Drinking alcohol or using drugs
- Sleeping too much or not sleeping enough

These behaviors may help you feel better at first, but they may hurt you more than they help. Instead, use the tips below to find healthy ways to reduce your stress.

Find healthy stress busters

There are many healthy ways to manage stress. Try a few and see which ones work best for you:



- **Recognize the things you can't change**
Accepting that you can't change certain things allows you to let go and not get upset. For instance, you cannot change the fact that you have to drive during rush hour, but you can look for ways to relax during your commute, such as listening to a podcast or book.
- **Avoid stressful situations**
When you can, remove yourself from the source of stress. For example, if your family squabbles during the holidays, give yourself a breather, and go out for a walk or drive.

- **Get exercise**

Getting physical activity every day is one of the easiest and best ways to cope with stress. When you exercise, your brain releases chemicals that make you feel good. It can also help you release built-up energy or frustration. Find something you enjoy, whether it is walking, cycling, softball, swimming, or dancing, and do it for at least 30 minutes on most days.

- **Change your outlook**

Try to develop a more positive attitude toward challenges. You can do this by replacing negative thoughts with more positive ones. For example, rather than thinking, “Why does everything always go wrong?” change this thought to, “I can find a way to get through this.” It may seem hard or silly at first, but with practice, you may find it helps turn your outlook around.

- **Do something you enjoy**

When stress has you down, do something you enjoy to help pick you up. It could be as simple as reading a good book, listening to music, watching a favorite movie, or having dinner with a friend. You can also take up a new hobby or class. Whatever you choose, try to do at least one thing a day that’s just for you.



- **Learn new ways to relax**

Practicing relaxation techniques is a great way to handle daily stress. Relaxation techniques help slow your heart rate and lower your blood pressure. There are many types, from deep breathing and meditation to yoga and tai chi. Take a class or try learning from books, videos, or online sources.

- **Connect with loved ones**

Do not let stress get in the way of being social. Spending time with family and friends can help you feel better and forget about your stress. Confiding in a friend may also help you work out your problems.

- **Get enough sleep**

Getting a good night’s sleep can help you think more clearly and have more energy. This will make it easier to handle problems that creep up. Aim for about seven to nine hours each night.

- **Maintain a healthy diet**

Eating healthy foods helps fuel your body and mind. Skip the high-sugar snack foods, and load up on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat or nonfat dairy, and lean proteins.

- **Learn to say no**

If your stress comes from taking on too much at home or work, learn to set limits. Ask others for help when you need it.

Resources

If you can’t manage stress on your own, you may want to talk with your health care provider. Consider seeing a therapist or counselor who can help you find other ways to deal with your stress. Depending on the cause of your stress, you also may find it helps to join a support group.



Mental Health Support Is for Everyone

It's normal to need mental health support at times

Even people with good mental health can suffer setbacks and need emotional support at times. It's human nature to have emotional ups and downs, and it's healthy to respond to the downs by talking them through with someone who can listen, sympathize, and offer helpful support.

It's unfortunate that some people consider admitting to and seeking help for mental health issues as signs of weakness. They're not. They're signs of strength and resilience. It's perfectly normal to deal with mental health issues, and the best way to work through and get past them is with support.

It's estimated that in any given year, one in every five adults will experience a diagnosable mental health issue. Those range from unhealthy levels of stress and anxiety to depression, grief, and problems with substance abuse or other addictions. Over the course of a lifetime, most people will experience one or more of those mental health challenges. Why suffer alone and risk getting worse when help is available?

Fortunately, attitudes toward mental health are changing. Prominent figures in sports, entertainment, politics, and other public arenas are helping to normalize mental health challenges by being open about their own emotional issues and showing how appropriate help can make a difference.

If you're concerned about a mental health issue, be strong and seek help. You'll be glad you did.

What kinds of mental health support are available?

Social Support

Social support—through your network of friends and family—is an important element in maintaining good mental health. When you're feeling frustrated or down, talking through your emotions and the situations behind them can be tremendously helpful.

While your social support network can provide an emotional boost and a safety net for the normal twists and turns of life, it may not be all you need when you're dealing with a more serious or complex mental health issue. Depression, anxiety disorders, and addiction typically require professional support.

*make your
mental health
a priority*

Mental Health Awareness Month May 2022

Counseling

Counseling is the process of talking with a trained mental health professional to collaboratively work through a problem. In this interactive process, called talk therapy, the counselor helps you identify goals and possible solutions, strengthen communication and coping skills, and work toward improved well-being in your mental health and relationships.

Professional counselors typically have at least a master's degree in counseling, psychology, social work, or a related field. To be licensed or registered to provide counseling services, they are typically required to meet certain standards and participate in ongoing education.



Psychiatrists are medical doctors who provide mental health counseling and can also prescribe medications (which master's-level counselors are not authorized to do).

Counseling can happen in person, by phone, or on-line by video, depending on your needs. A common counseling arrangement is to meet once a week for 50 minutes. The meetings end when you are satisfied that you can address your problem.

That might be after a few sessions in short-term counseling, or after months or even years of sessions in long-term counseling. Even a single meeting or phone call with a counselor can help you resolve a problem

There are many approaches to counseling, including three main models:

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) focuses on changing negative or counterproductive thought patterns as a way to improve emotional wellbeing. In CBT, you learn skills to cope with problems and form new habits in the present, rather than delving into the sources of those problems and habits in the past.

Psychodynamic therapy involves the examination and resolution of inner conflicts by exploring how behaviors have developed unconsciously from experiences early in life. Psychodynamic therapy is typically a longer-term approach to counseling.

Humanistic or existential therapy emphasizes positive capabilities, creativity, and personal growth rather than focusing on negative behaviors of the past. In humanistic therapy, the counselor helps you reconsider how you perceive yourself and works to build on your strengths and potential.

Depending on your needs and the counselor's approach, different models may be combined to help you resolve your problem. The key is to find a counselor or therapist you trust and whose approach works for you.

Medication

For some mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and psychosis, medications can be a helpful supplement to counseling. A psychiatrist or another medical doctor can prescribe medication.

How to get Mental Health Support

The New Jersey Employee Advisory Service (EAS) can provide short-term counseling to help you resolve a mental health problem and can refer you to a qualified therapist for longer-term support. Your doctor can also refer you to a qualified therapist for counseling support and can discuss medication options with you.

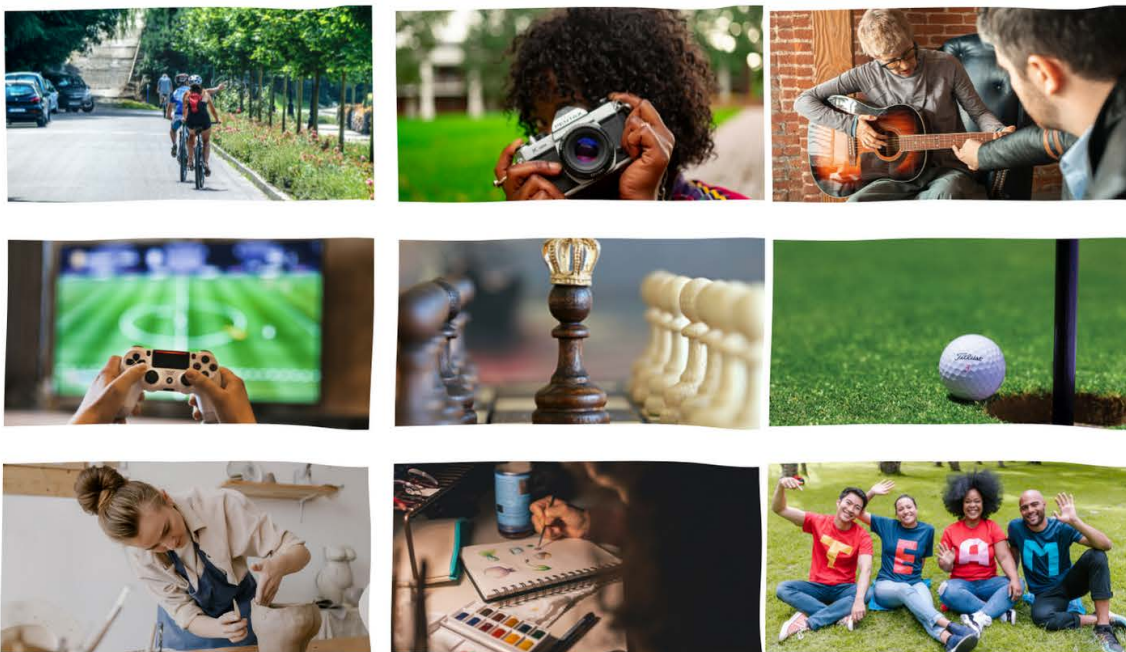
Hobbies Can Improve Your Life

With busy lives and demanding jobs, many people view hobbies as frivolous relics of the past—activities for children, retirees, or other people who have extra free time. That’s a mistake. It’s actually the busiest people who have the most to gain from engaging in a hobby.

Hobbies and leisure activities that engage your concentration are good for your health, mind, moods, and relationships. When they draw on or grow into a personal passion, they can add meaning and purpose to your life. By pulling your thoughts and your body out of work pressures and daily worries, they can provide a space to recharge your energy and renew your focus.

What is a Hobby?

Part of the bad rap given to hobbies these days might be a problem with the name. Think “hobby,” and you might have images of ham radio, string collecting, or other quaint activities of your parents’ or grandparents’ generation. Think instead of a leisure activity that engages your energy and enthusiasm, and you get closer to a hobby’s real value.



Your hobby might be gardening, woodworking, learning about your family history, reading, cycling, exploring nature, drawing, origami, glassblowing, cooking, rock climbing, knitting, playing music, restoring old cars, birding, or any other activity that pulls you out of your work mind and that brings you satisfaction and joy.

How Having a Hobby Can Be Good for You

A hobby is a leisure activity (stress on “activity”) that you do because you enjoy and are interested in it. It’s something you do because you want to. It’s also different from pure leisure in that it gets you off the couch, gets you thinking, and challenges you to gain new skills.

Engaging in a hobby can do the following:

- **Give you permission to take a break and do something you enjoy**
It’s like scheduling “me” time in your calendar. When you engage in a hobby regularly, you make it a habit. Instead of feeling guilty that you’re not working, it becomes part of your routine, something you plan your work and other responsibilities around.
- **Provide a pleasurable break from daily pressures**
A hobby can keep you from burning out in your job. It can help you carve out moments of personal time in a busy home life.

- **Reduce stress**

Engaging in an activity you enjoy can be far more effective in pushing worrisome thoughts out of your mind than a passive activity like watching TV. Immersing yourself in a hobby can help you break the rumination cycle of rethinking the events of your day.

- **Improve your physical and mental health**

Engaging in enjoyable leisure activities has been found to lower blood pressure, improve perception of overall physical function, and reduce stress and depression.^{1,2} Physical hobbies, like tennis, running, or cycling, can also help you build muscle, improve heart health, and maintain a healthy weight.

- **Help you develop new skills**

When you start a new hobby, you'll dive into a new body of knowledge and acquire new skills. Some of those new skills may serve you well at work and in other aspects of your life.

- **Boost your confidence**

A good new hobby is challenging at first and stretches your abilities. Over time, as you gain mastery, you'll also gain new confidence and a boost in self-esteem.

- **Enhance your creativity**

Some hobbies, like drawing, writing short stories, knitting or crocheting, jewelry-making, composing music, and designing in wood, require creativity. The more you engage in these activities, the more you'll build your creative abilities.

- **Forge new social connections**

Some hobbies, like playing games or music with other people, are naturally social. While engaging in these activities, you make and strengthen social connections. An interest in birding or hiking can lead to new friends with shared interests. Today, even solitary hobbies can lead to social connections by sharing your output, technique, or plans in online communities. A knitter in Canada can see the work of and communicate with other knitters in other countries.

Keys to Choosing a Beneficial Hobby

- Choose a hobby that engages your mind. The benefits of hobbies come from their ability to engage you and remove you from the swirl of everyday concerns. When considering new hobbies, try out activities that challenge you, make you think, and require that you learn new skills. The ideal hobby is one that leads you to experience flow—a state of mind in which you are fully absorbed in what you are doing and can lose track of time.

- Choose a hobby for the enjoyment of it. Avoid the temptation to seek out a hobby to provide a second source of income. When a hobby becomes a second job, you may be engaging in it for money instead of for pleasure.

Your hobby could become a source of stress rather than a relief from it. Be wary, too, of a hobby that appeals to you mostly because it will teach you skills that are useful in your work. Unless it's fun for you, that's more like job-skills training than an absorbing leisure activity.



The idea of taking up a hobby for pleasure, diversion, and stress relief can feel at odds with an always-on and always-productive culture. But give it a try. There's little risk and huge potential for improving your life.

References

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Source: Morgan, H. (2021, November). *Hobbies can improve your life* Options (Z. Meeker & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace

Connect with EAS!

Employee Advisory Service (EAS) is a program designed to help employees and their dependents with personal, family or work-related issues that may adversely impact their 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 employees and dependents with:

- Anger Management
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Critical Incident Stress
- Substance Abuse
- Stress Management
- Grief Counseling
- 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.



Support - Empowerment - Growth Employee Advisory Service

How Can
We Help
You?

Toll free number:
1-866-327-9133

Email:
EAS_Help@csc.nj.gov

Website:
[www.csc.nj.gov/csc/employees/
programs/advisory/eas.html](http://www.csc.nj.gov/csc/employees/programs/advisory/eas.html)

24 hours a day 7 days a week
(Emergency Mental Health Services)

