



The Frontline Employee

February 2020

Is Past Trauma Still Affecting You?

Can past traumatic events affect your health today, even if you hardly ever think about them anymore? You may have “moved past” those memories of abuse or assault you experienced years ago, but if perceived as fearful enough—and you may not recall just how much—a type of invisible assault on the brain may have occurred involving stress responses of the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex. Effects can persist for years, contribute to nightmares, help explain your jumpiness, or perhaps why you’re easily startled, or struggle with vulnerability in relationships. Seven to eight percent of people will experience post-traumatic stress disorder at some point in their lives. The EAP can discuss symptoms, help you decide if PTSD affects you, and locate the right help. Learn more: www.ptsd.va.gov

Avoid Financial Health Denial

Are your money management habits leading to a financial crisis in the future? If you’re thinking, “maybe, but it will all work out later,” then you may be using financial health denial to avoid critical changes you need to make right now. See the EAP or get financial counseling if 1) credit card debt is growing, 2) you’re unable to save up a small emergency fund, or 3) money worries are zapping your energy, interfering with sleep, or undermining happiness.

Help for Compulsive Video Gaming

Video gaming addiction is obsessive preoccupation with online games at the expense of real-life activities or obligations. It is not a recognized psychiatric disorder, but has the same psychosocial consequences of other compulsive disorders like gambling addiction. In 2002, On-Line Gamers Anonymous (OLGA) was formed. It offers support, strength, and hope to addicted gamers and their families so they can heal and recover from this rapidly growing and disabling condition. Talk to a professional counselor first. Then discover what resources are available to help you or a loved one. Source: www.olganon.org

First Responders, Relationships, and Stress

If you are a firefighter or other first responder, you know that work relationships are critical for feeling support, buffering stress, and experiencing overall job satisfaction. Recent research shows, however, that you may be protecting and shielding your spouse or partner from the stress and horrible knowledge you are exposed to at work. You might behave at home as if work is not affecting you. This desire to protect but also pretend that all is well can create additional stress that leads to conflicts at home and ultimately in relationships you value. Sound familiar? If so, and you’re concerned, talk to the EAP. Read the study: bit.ly/firefighter22

Keeping Work Stress from Coming Home

Is work stress coming home with you, along with tension, irritability, and anxiety? Experiment with these environmental controls and behavioral tactics to see if they don't steer your thoughts and reflexes away from work and worries. 1) Before leaving work, participate in a ritual that "completes your day." For example, put things away, stack paper neatly, roll your chair under your desk, dust a couple of shelves, and empty the wastebasket. Take a good look at your office or work space, "feel the completion" of your day—and leave. These behaviors, practiced daily for just a week, will begin to compartmentalize work and home. 2) If bringing work home is unavoidable, don't place it on the kitchen counter, dinette, or with house clutter as you walk through the door. Instead, create a special location in your home physically removed from areas where you engage with loved ones. 3) Create digital communication habits that reinforce boundaries. For example, on your voice mail, say that you are gladly available, but only if it is urgent, along with instructions for the caller for what to do next. Note that you can experience a 99% reduction in unnecessary phone calls if you simply allow the caller to decide if the concern is so urgent that it can't wait. Most of the time, it really can. Compartmentalization, boundaries, and smartphone management—these are instruments of work-life balance. Make them work for you.

Making the Most of a Bad Day at Work

Everyone experiences job-related setbacks and mistakes at work ("a bad day"). Our initial focus is usually how awful we feel or how unfair "it" all seemed. The challenge is moving past the negativity. Accomplish these strategies that add to your resilience. Here are six "T's" to recapture a positive you: *Temporary*: Remind yourself that feeling bad is temporary; it will soon dissipate. *Teach*: What can the day teach you? What part of it will add to your skills and abilities? *Talk*: Talk and vent your experience with a friend to experience emotional release. *Twirl*: Move, exercise, or play—engage in physical activity to influence a positive mood. *Transcribe*: Write down your feelings. *Thanks*: Focus on two to three things you are grateful for despite the setback, to help reenergize positivity.

Couples Counseling: Finding Motivation to Go

More couples have discussed couples counseling than will ever go. Many checklists online will help you decide whether your relationship could use help, but only a strong enough reason will empower you to make the call. If you're hesitating, you may have misconceptions about couples counseling. One common fear is the therapist will align with your partner and together confront all your imperfections. That won't happen with an experienced professional. Instead, you will be put at ease, and what you envision as the stereotype will be quickly dismissed. Each of you will discover what you're doing healthfully, along with what you can consider doing differently in your relationship to make it what you want. The good news is the likelihood of feeling more empowered while you work toward changes you and your partner agree on. With commitment, most couples enjoy a reduction in tension they have grown weary of experiencing each day, along with hope that the changes sought will last.

Mechanics of Making Deadlines

Don't allow the quality of your work to suffer by missing deadlines. Meeting deadlines is an acquired skill with two influences—motivational and mechanical. *Motivational*: Agree on the deadline with your partner (recipient of the work). Next, commit to the deadline. Then, acknowledge and empathize with the direct *and indirect consequences* of not meeting the deadline. Make an accountability pact—allow your partner to contact you at any time about progress. *Mechanical*: Know how much time each part of your project will take. Divide it into mini-deadlines. Adopt an early completion point (your buffer). Success will reinforce your on-time habit, and a positive reputation will follow.

Questions? Call during business hours 815.748.8334, or after hours at 800.373.3327