

EmployeeCare News

Keeping you informed from EmployeeCare, your employee assistance program, a benefit extended by your organization to all employees and their household members.



Couple Communication: It's Like Growing a Garden

By Joe Hammann LPCC/EmployeeCare Counselor

EmployeeCare provides counseling services for couples. Our experience with adult partners tells us many relationships do not find the time to talk. Sometimes the couple arrives “in crisis” and one member of the twosome will say “I thought everything was just fine. My partner’s unhappiness caught me by surprise.”

This experience and others like it can develop because the couple is often not “tending their garden.” We know from experience if one desires a thriving garden, a person must water, weed and nurture it. Whether someone has had a garden one year or 50, if it is neglected one season, it will quickly wither and perish.

So, too, with a marriage or relationship. With children and work, there is little time to tend to the togetherness of the couple. So, setting some time aside at least once a week to address the rough edges of the preceding seven days as well as express regular gratitude can pay long term dividends. Touching base in an attempt to ask one another about any distressed feelings gives the couple a chance to connect and achieve deeper feelings of understanding.

Putting off this “check up” with each other can lead to mounting resentments with the partners going in different directions. Often one or both partners will meet someone at work or elsewhere who does extend this listening ear and over time one member of a relationship will start to feel more drawn to a different person than to their significant other. Then some other garden may start to be tended rather than the one at home.



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What are some belief systems that partners in a relationship possess that can lead to couples not talking?

- My partner will let me know when something is wrong. No news is good news.
- I am afraid to express certain feelings to my partner, if I do, they will leave me.
- If I love my partner, I will not bring up negative feelings.
- I do not want to create a crisis.
- I don't know how to talk to my partner about stress.
- I will not be able to deal with my partner's anger.
- We are so busy we do not have time to talk.

The above beliefs make up some of the many views that discourage heart-to-heart discussions. Some of these beliefs are understandable. Indeed, our partner might express anger if the other partner addresses certain topics. If so, ask your mate what

is behind their anger. Let your companion know you have a desire to understand their feelings of frustration. Possibly your spouse or significant other will open up with this approach. Listen carefully to the words spoken in their thunder if they respond in an angry tone to you.

Ask your partner if they would be willing to attend just one counseling session in order to acquire some new ideas of how to talk better with each other. Even if one partner says no, it is often the case that just one member of the couple will come in. This can also work. The counselors at EmployeeCare are trained to imagine how your partner may be viewing the situation. From these new perspectives the counselor can suggest new ways to approach your partner. These new communication strategies can then get you and your partner back to tending your garden together.

Call 208-6626 or 800-628-9343 to schedule your confidential session today.

Bullying in the Workplace



The word “bully” typically brings to mind individuals from our past whom we encountered or avoided on the playground or in the neighborhood where we grew up. There has been recent U.S. and international research focused on measuring the

prevalence of bullying in work settings. In 2003 the National Institute for Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) used data from the National Opinion Research Center which determined that 24 percent of the surveyed companies reported

some degree of bullying. There is a growing awareness in many organizations that bullying can be as stressful as sexual or racial harassment.

Loraleigh Keashly, PhD, a psychologist who teaches at Wayne State University in Detroit, published her 1998 study in the *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, in which she identified seven components of bullying. They included conduct that:

- Is verbal or nonverbal that serves to intimidate and/or threaten
- Is repetitive or patterned
- Is unwelcome and unsolicited by the target of the bullying
- Violates standards of appropriate workplace conduct
- Causes psychological or physical harm to the targeted person
- Is intended to hurt or demean the targeted person
- Sometimes exploits the employee's position of power

Gary Namie, PhD, director of the Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute of Bellingham, Washington, defines bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment of an employee by one or more persons manifested in one or more ways: verbal abuse, threatening and intimidating conduct (verbal, nonverbal, nonphysical) that interferes with work and undermines legitimate business interests.

There is usually a range of negative effects for the individuals involved as well as for the entire organization. Some of those outcomes include a state of anxiety, irritability, social withdrawal, suspiciousness, depression, aggressiveness toward others, lower confidence levels, physical symptoms and calling off work, all of which have an impact on productivity and workplace morale. Targets of bullying may end up quitting, being fired, or pursuing disability. Employees who witness the bullying may experience similar symptoms and lose faith in the company. Escalation of bullying can also lead to workplace violence. Statistics reveal that almost all incidents of physical violence have been preceded by nonphysical aggressiveness.

Bullying II

Dignity: The dictionary defines this as the respect and honor we as individuals can accord others. I think it is safe to say we as humans desire dignified regard from others in return and can easily sense its absence. When dignity is absent in the ways we relate with our coworkers in the workplace, it can affect the morale of the entire organization.

As stated above, the concept of bullying of one person or group at work by others is currently being addressed more often in management articles. Specific bullying behaviors can range from telling ethnic jokes to not sharing certain key information to a co-worker, which can result in the co-worker feeling sabotaged. Many of us have heard tales at work in which one employee feels "set up" by another and appears to be out of touch with the rest of the team.

In fairness to some initiators of bullying behavior, sometimes a person can be unaware of how their humor or outspokenness impacts others. A person who feels offended by a remark or a gesture may be perceived by the offender as taking him or her too seriously. The person who feels offended may believe the unintentional offender does not take the targeted person's feelings seriously enough.

Companies can assist their workforce in these gray areas by publishing a list of behaviors that can be interpreted as bully-like. This list could include:

- Telling ethnic jokes
- Not passing information to those who need to know it
- Insensitive comments about another's appearance
- Patterned interrupting when one person is engaged in conversation with another
- Speaking in a patronizing tone as if the other person needs to be talked down to
- Calling someone by something other than their preferred name or nickname
- Spreading rumors
- Supervisors showing favoritism

Employees could be surveyed to expand on this list.

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Managers and supervisors can set the tone for their team by refraining from disrespectful behavior themselves. If one work associate communicates what feels to them to be bullying behavior coming from another, it sometimes could be effective meeting with both employees. In certain instances the supervisor could facilitate direct communication between the two employees concerning the perceived offensive behavior. Both employees will then have a witness and can contract in the supervisor's presence to treat one another with respect in the future. It is suggested the supervisor let the two parties know the meeting has been documented in case of future recurrences of offending behavior or unwarranted retaliation.

If disrespectful behavior toward certain persons crops up in your team from time to time, Employee Care counselors are available for objective telephone or on site consultation.

Call us at (937) 208-6266 or 1-800-628-9343 when calling from outside the Dayton, Ohio area.



Check Us Out on the Web!

Do you want to know more details about your Employee Assistance Program? Do you want more information about each counselor?

Here's how to access our web site. Type in:

1. www.PremierHealthPartners.org
2. Select: Miami Valley Hospital
3. Select: Services
4. Select: (A-Z)
5. Select: E
6. Select: EmployeeCare

EmployeeCare

Located: 409 E. Monument St.
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We have satellite offices in Eaton, Springboro, Troy, Greenville and on the Good Samaritan Hospital campus

Hours: 8 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Monday – Thursday
8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Friday

All counselors provide evening appointment times

Phone: (937) 208-6626 or (800) 628-9343
(24-hour, toll free)

Services Include:

- Voluntary, confidential assessments. Short-term counseling and referral services for employees and household members covering a wide range of issues. Services are free and number of accesses unlimited.
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- Workplace wellness
- 24-Hour Crisis phone service
- Substance Abuse trainings that meet state and Bureau of Worker Compensation requirements for drug free workplaces

M-COM0609-3/10

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