

A Healthy Outlook

Developing Optimism

Optimism is a set of beliefs that helps to focus your attention and behavior on the opportunities and possibilities of life. Optimism is not a rose-colored lens, but a clear lens, without distortion, that allows you to see life realistically and clearly. Being realistic is being optimistic. Optimism allows you to see that opportunities exist, even when you are confronted by challenges and changes in your life. Pessimism, on the other hand, is an internal stressor that creates a sense of threat around the stressors in life. The challenge associated with moving to a more optimistic world view has to do with practicing new beliefs and new behaviors, which are then reflected in the choices you make in your everyday life. Where the pessimist sees problems, the optimist sees opportunities.

● Change Your Lens: Six Steps to Realistic Optimism

Begin challenging your own assumptions. "Your assumptions are your windows on the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won't come in."—*Alan Alda*

STEP 1: FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE.

This is important for increasing resilience, because people frequently focus their attention on what goes wrong, what could go wrong, or what almost went wrong. It is important to retrain your thinking and begin to focus on the experiences you have in life that work out well, even when they are not perfect. This also allows you

to increase the level of gratitude in your life, which is a characteristic of resilient people.

STEP 2: RESIST THE DESIRE TO COMPLAIN. While you tend to think that "getting things off your chest" has value, the reality is that complaining usually makes you feel worse by keeping your attention on an unhappy situation. The idea that people are "pressure cookers" who need to let off steam has been discredited by psychological research. Complaining distances you from positive people and attracts negative people who encourage anger, hostility, and envy.

STEP 3: DECIDE FOR YOURSELF WHAT IS AND IS NOT POSSIBLE. Be skeptical about limiting yourself to beliefs that say something cannot be done. The statements "that's impossible" or "that can't be done" have been made about every advancement in human history. Of course, not everything is possible. People cannot fly to the moon by flapping their arms. There are many things that can be dismissed too easily, however. This is about learning to "think outside the box."

STEP 4: BE FOR THINGS, NOT AGAINST THINGS. This is a critical piece of developing your optimistic approach to life. When you are against something, you are focused on creating less. Creating less requires attacking, punishing, complaining, and reacting. When you are for something, your focus is on creating more. Creating more is about new ideas, options, and productivity. Instead of saying "no" to pessimism, say "yes" to optimism.

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MEDIATION as a Tool to Prevent Conflict

Mediation is most commonly used to resolve conflicts. In many cases, after a conflict has escalated, erupted, or "gotten out of hand," a mediator is brought in to help deescalate the conflict between the people and help resolve the situation that led to the conflict. However, mediation serves as an equal, if not more important, tool for preventing conflict.

Conflict prevention involves both self-awareness and planning. To be self-aware is to recognize your own feelings and to know what external triggers (a disrespectful email, someone showing up late for a meeting)

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STEP 5: LAUGH AT YOURSELF, BUT NOT AT OTHERS. Humor opens you up to possibilities. It reminds you that many of the solutions you thought were foolproof in the past were not, or that many of the limitations you thought were set in stone were not. Your current point of view on any subject, therefore, should not be held on to with a death grip. Even if you believe you have the perfect solution, your foibles of the past should remind you to keep an open mind. Think back to what you thought to be absolutely true 10 years ago. Has any of that changed? Can you laugh at it now? Optimists do not use humor to hurt others. Avoid the pessimist's use of cynicism and sarcasm as a substitute for genuine humor. Remind yourself, on a regular basis, that you can increase your sense of accomplishment and well-being by your own efforts. Feeling good about yourself should not require that you put others down, judge them, or compare them unfavorably to yourself.

STEP 6: FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT. A shortcut to changed behavior is to engage in the desired behavior, even if it goes against how you would normally act. Practice new habits, even if they feel awkward. Research is clear that one of the best strategies for behavior change is to change behavior first and let your feelings about it catch up. If you put off change until you are comfortable with the idea, you may never change.

Defense Centers of Excellence, National Center for Telehealth & Technology. (n.d.). Developing optimism. Washington, DC: National Center for Telehealth & Technology. Printed with permission. ●

**"Anyone who does
anything to help a child
in his life
is a hero to me"**

Fred Rogers

Mediation

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usually bring on those feelings that you do not like (frustration, discomfort, hurt, offense). To be self-aware is also to know what is important to you or what you value (safety, respect, honesty, courtesy). Knowing what those triggers are allows you to anticipate when you will experience unpleasant feelings before you feel them. Anticipating a feeling does not mean that you will not feel it, but it allows you to respond differently when that feeling arises. Conflict prevention also involves planning. Effective planning requires anticipating difficult circumstances and recognizing what topics (schedule, workspace, communication) will likely spark conflict.

Mediation is a useful tool for preventing conflict because it relies on feelings and values to serve as a guide for making plans around specific topics. Two coworkers who feel disrespected (feeling) in how they communicate with one another can make a plan around communication (topic) that provides the respect (value) they both want from each other. An employee who feels monitored (feeling) and controlled (feeling), and a supervisor who feels ignored (feeling) and disobeyed (feeling), can



make a plan around his or her schedule (topic) that provides both a sense of independence (value) and flexibility (value) for the employee, and accountability (value) for the supervisor.

Any two people who choose to use mediation to make plans will understand and anticipate that conflict will emerge between them eventually. Mediation does not prevent conflict from happening; it empowers participants to make their own decisions, get their own needs met, and make intentional choices about how they respond to conflict, before and after it emerges.

Article provided by the Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County (CRCMC). For more information about the MCPS mediation program, please call the EAP mediation line at 240-314-1041. ●



Well-Being Matters

Well-Being Matters is a new MCPS video series, focused on a variety of important mental health topics. Robyn Rosenbauer, LCSW-C, Employee Assistance Program, talks with local mental health experts on how staff members and their families can take care of their emotional health and well-being during the ongoing dual uncertainties

of pandemics and distance teaching. Topics covered so far have been Managing Anxiety, Substance Use, Work-life Balance, Anxiety, Ergonomics, Improving Sleep, and Domestic Violence. You can view these videos [here](#).

New episodes will be released over the next few months. Be sure to check them out! ●

Take Care of Your Mental Health: Resources Suggested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

You may experience *increased stress* during this pandemic. Fear and anxiety can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. Here is how to get immediate help in a crisis:

- Call 911
- **Disaster Distress Helpline:** Call or text 1-800-985-5990 (press 2 for Spanish).
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for English, 1-888-628-9454 for Spanish, or **Lifeline Crisis Chat**.

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522.
- **National Child Abuse Hotline:** 1-800-4AChild (1-800-422-4453) or text 1-800-422-4453.
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline:** 1-800-656-HOPE (4673) or **Online Chat**.
- The **Eldercare Locator:** 1-800-677-1116 **TTY Instructions**.
- **Veteran's Crisis Line:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or **Crisis Chat** or text 8388255.
- Find a healthcare provider or treatment for substance-use disorder and mental health:

- » **SAMHSA's National Helpline:** 1-800-662-HELP (4357) and TTY 1-800-487-4889.
- » **Treatment Services Locator Website.**
- » **Interactive Map of Selected Federally Qualified Health Centers.**

For more information about available resources, contact the MCPS EAP as follows:

MCPS IN-HOUSE EAP (240-314-1040)
Email: Jeffrey Becker, Robyn Rosenbauer.

EXTERNAL EAP-KEPRO, Passcode MCPS (866-496-9599). ●

Reframing to Reduce Stress

Reframing is the concept of looking at something from a different perspective. It can help during stressful moments. Try these steps the next time you start to feel yourself spiraling into a potentially unhelpful, unproductive loop.

- Identify your thinking patterns. Are you prone to overgeneralization (these things always happen to me), distortion (I've probably done something wrong), or overlooking the positives?
- Reject negative thinking. Catch yourself when you start to go to a place of pessimistic thinking.
- Challenge yourself to view the situation differently. Instead of thinking these things always happen to you, try to ask yourself what benefits you could gain from the situation. Consider the potential learning opportunity the event is presenting.
- Avoid labeling events as your fault. Instead of thinking you have done something to deserve a difficult situation,

acknowledge that there are extenuating circumstances that contribute to events.

- Focus on your strengths. Instead of telling yourself that there is no way you can manage this; try shifting your perspective to acknowledge the unique skills and qualities that you possess.

Are you having a hard time managing your stress level? Consider contacting your Employee Assistance Program for help today.

Scott, Elizabeth. "How to Reframe Situations So They Create Less Stress." <https://www.verywellmind.com/cognitive-reframing-for-stress-management-3144872>. Printed with permission. ●



ASK THE EAP

- Q.** *If I participate in short-term EAP counseling, how frequent would my sessions be? I'm concerned that scheduling sessions once a week would be difficult on my schedule.*
- A.** *Participating in short-term counseling through the EAP does not mean you have to be seen once a week. After the counselor conducts an assessment, if it is determined that short-term counseling is appropriate, you will work with your counselor on a plan that makes sense. Important factors include the assessed issue and your schedule. Some people have weekly sessions, while others meet with their counselor every other week, or even once a month. The final decision is based on a mutually agreed-upon plan between you and the EAP counselor. In addition, because sessions currently are being done by phone or Zoom, there is additional flexibility regarding how to arrange the sessions.*

Do you have a question for the EAP? Send us your questions via Outlook or through the Pony to Jeffrey Becker. ●

UPCOMING EVENTS

● Caregiver Support Group

To support our Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) caregivers, the In-House Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers a Caregiver Support Group, designed to provide helpful resources and establish connections among the caregivers within our MCPS community. The virtual meetings are held from 4:00–5:00 p.m. Guest speakers present on important topics related to caring for a loved one. All are welcome to attend. **For more information, please email EAP specialist Robyn Rosenbauer, LCSW-C, CEAP, at Robyn_I_Rosenbauer@mcpsmd.org.** ●

● MCPS has Launched a Well-Being Website for Employees

This online resource is a one-stop shop where employees can get information to help them navigate and balance their work, home, personal, and community life, with an emphasis on staff well-being and self-care. The last few months have been challenging for all of us, and MCPS is committed to ensuring that our staff members stay safe and feel supported. ***[Click here to browse the site.](#)*** ●

Articles from KEPRO Available on the MCPS EAP Website

MCPS EAP has partnered with KEPRO to offer you a full range of employee assistance services. Each month, we receive valuable links to tips, newsletters, and webinars from KEPRO that we think are a great resource. To find this information, go to the EAP website, scroll down the page until you see a green box on the right side with the heading "Resources." This is where you will find this information.

You may address any comments or questions you have about these resources by email to [Jeffrey Becker](mailto:Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org) or [Robyn Rosenbauer](mailto:Robyn_Rosenbauer@mcpsmd.org).



"Better than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher."

Japanese Proverb

A HEALTHY OUTLOOK

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Important Notice: Information in *A Healthy Outlook* is for general information purposes only and is not intended to replace the counsel or advice of a qualified health professional. For further questions, or help with specific problems or personal concerns, contact your employee assistance professional.

You may contact us or send your questions and comments to Jeffrey_Becker@mcpsmd.org. Please note that email is not necessarily confidential.

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HELP when you need it
with life's challenges—
BIG OR SMALL