



DESPITE COMMON BELIEF: SUICIDE MORE PREVALENT IN SPRING

MELISSA YOUNG, EAP COUNSELOR

There are a number of different theories as to why suicide is more common in the spring, however no solid evidence supports one theory over the other.

Two of the most accepted explanations include; an increase in contact with others, potentially increasing relationship conflict and people having more energy as a result of the weather changes, giving them enough motivation to plan and execute a suicide attempt.

The United States lost 44,695 people to suicide in 2016. That's approximately one person every 12 minutes. Idaho's suicide numbers rank consistently high, ranking eighth amongst highest suicide rate per state. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Idahoans age 15-34 and, for males age 10-14. Although females attempt suicide more often than males, 78% of the completed suicides in Idaho were by men. Sixty percent of these deaths included the use of a firearm.

Youth can be particularly vulnerable to suicide. Between 2013-2016, 110 Idaho school aged children committed suicide. Twenty-five of these were age 14 and under. During the years of 2012 to 2016, an estimated 7,100 adults age 18 and up attempted suicide in Idaho. This resulted in an attempt rate of 686 per 100,000 people.

What are some of the signs that someone may be at risk of suicide? Although there are many answers to and opinions about this question, the following risk factors are often associated with an increased risk of suicidal behavior:



- Has the person experienced a recent significant loss?
- Does the person express feelings of hopelessness and a sense that "life is just not worth living"?
- Does the individual regularly use drugs or alcohol?
- Has he or she made a previous suicide attempt?
- Does the person state having a plan, time and method for committing suicide?
- Do they currently possess the means to acting on their plan?
- How reliable and available is his or her support network? Do they feel alone in the world?
- Can they offer reasons why they WOULD NOT hurt themselves?

Often people feel uncomfortable with broaching this subject with others. Although it is a difficult and awkward conversation, it is very important to directly ask the person you are concerned about if they are at risk of harming themselves. More often than not, people are relieved that someone cared enough to notice their distress and inquire about it.

If you are concerned about someone's immediate safety, it is important to notify an adult if the individual is a child, and/or law enforcement so that they can be escorted to their local emergency room for a mental health screening. The EAP is always happy to assist you in these difficult circumstances with resources and ideas. In addition to these resources, the National Suicide Prevention hotline is 1-800-273- 8255. Lastly, Idaho is fortunate to have SPAN Idaho, our own Suicide Prevention organization that offers guidance and help surrounding the issue of suicide. Their website is www.spanidaho.org.

EAP MISSION Saint Alphonus Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary, confidential counseling service that assists employees and their families with issues that affect their quality of life at home and work.



POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY: THE POWER OF FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE

BY JARED BELSHER, EAP COUNSELOR

Historically, psychotherapy has focused on what is going wrong in life and how to relieve suffering, and has not focused as much on what makes life worth living and what helps us live happier lives.

While psychotherapy can reduce our misery and help us feel better, how do we learn how to become happier and improve our enjoyment of life?

One way to achieve increased happiness is to use techniques from the field of positive psychology. The goal of positive psychology is to fill in the missing gap in psychotherapy of not only reducing misery but helping us live happy, fulfilling lives. Positive psychology does this by directing us to focus not on what is going wrong in life but on what is going right. This helps to redirect our mind's natural tendency to react more intensely to the negative things that happen in life.

Backing up the field of positive psychology are a number of studies of positive psychology interventions. Studies have shown that many positive psychology interventions can increase overall well-being and reduce depressive symptoms. The good news about positive psychology interventions is that many of the interventions are easy to follow and can be done outside of therapy. Listed below are some positive psychology interventions that studies have shown to be effective in improving well-being and elevating mood.



Three Good Things—Each night for a week, write down three things that went well that day and why they went well. Studies of this intervention have shown that participants had less depression and increased positive emotions six months later.

Using Signature Strengths in a New Way—Complete the free VIA Survey of Character Strengths questionnaire at www.authentic happiness.org to identify your top five character strengths. Once you have identified your top five strengths, use one of these top strengths in a new and different way every day for a week.

Gratitude Visit—Write a letter to someone who was especially kind to you in the past but who you never properly thanked and read the letter to them in person. If you aren't able to meet with them in person, express your gratitude over the phone.

Acts of Kindness—One day each week, commit to making five acts of kindness. The acts of kindness can be big or small but they need to happen on the same day. You could pay for someone's coffee in line behind you, feed someone's parking meter, hold a door open for someone, allow a driver to merge in front of you in traffic, donate blood, or visit an elderly relative.

HONEY-GARLIC SLOW COOKER CHICKEN THIGHS

BY GINNY BAYUK, BILLING AND REPORTING SPECIALIST



INGREDIENTS

- 4 skinless, boneless chicken thighs (can do with bone)
- 1/2 cup soy sauce
- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 1/3 cup honey
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp dried basil

INSTRUCTIONS

Lay chicken thighs into the bottom of a 4-quart slow cooker. Whisk soy sauce, ketchup, honey, garlic and basil together in bowl; pour over the chicken. Cook on low for 6 hours. YUM!



COPING WITH WORKPLACE BULLYING

BY SUSAN MURPHY, EAP COUNSELOR

Workplace bullying is the tendency of an individual or groups to use persistent aggressive or unreasonable behavior against a co-worker or subordinate. The bully employs strategies that range from physical abuse, humiliation, and sexual harassment/predation, to verbal/non-verbal and psychological tactics.

A recent study revealed that one in seven employees are bullied at work—usually by their bosses—and that women are more likely to be targets of bullying than their male counterparts.

Workplace bullying generally involves an abuse or misuse of power, which creates feelings of defenselessness and injustice in the target while undermining an individual's right to dignity at work. It is overall a pattern of behavior that emotionally injures, intimidates, offends, degrades, or humiliates an employee, sometimes in the presence of other employees, clients or customers.

Many bullies go unnoticed and “stay under the radar” because they often operate within the established rules and policies of their organization and their societal norms. Most of the workplace cases reported have pointed the finger at management, but with an estimated 64% of targeted employees quitting their jobs, a range of levels of leadership are most probable.

Bullying can also be horizontal (co-workers bullying co-workers), and upwards (subordinates bullying managers), or a group of co-workers targeting another worker (mobbing). Bullying, be it covert or out in the open, may be either unseen by superiors or known by many throughout the organization.

Examples of workplace bullying include:

- unwarranted or invalid criticism;
- unjustified blame, sabotaging another's work, or taking credit for another's work;
- being treated differently from others in your workgroup;
- being sworn at, shouted at or humiliated;
- ignoring or excluding a co-worker, social isolation; and/or
- excessive monitoring, micro-managing or being given unrealistic expectations and/or deadlines.

It's important to note the difference between bullying and single act of aggression—bullying,



which generally constitutes repeated attacks against the target, is recognized as an ongoing pattern of behavior. In contrast, managers who are often considered “tough” or “demanding” bosses aren't necessarily bullies as long as they are respectful, fair and their primary objective is to obtain the best performance by setting high, yet reasonable expectations.

Additionally, the victims often suffer from serious health and safety issues—longitudinal research data illustrates that targets of bullying may suffer from physical and mental health problems that can last for many years. These may include lowered self-esteem and depression, financial problems from the missing income, musculoskeletal problems, sleep and digestive disorders, chronic stress disorders such as high blood pressures and migraines, family tension, and an increase in the frequency of illness, accidents and injuries.

Negative effects are not limited to the targeted individuals, and lead to a decline in employee morale and company culture. The cost for organizations is often measured in loss of productivity, inability to retain quality staff, excessive replacement hiring and training and increased medical costs, not to mention the possibility of lawsuits and investigations.

And remember that bullying is about control—it has nothing to do with your performance! Realize

that while you are not the source of the problem, the person giving you grief may feel threatened by you in some way. **You can:**

- Keep a log or journal that describes the dates, times, places, who was present and specifically what was said or done by the bully.
- Maintain copies of documents that protect you from false accusations, if applicable.
- You might (with someone you trust to be present) let the bully know you are aware and consider the behavior unprofessional, but be prepared for his/her denial of the fact.
- Avoid sharing personal information about yourself or your family to the bully because they tend to look for another's vulnerabilities.
- Talk to your boss if it is possible to do so, and keep in mind that being too passive or emotional may also place you as an easy target.
- Be assertive!
- Contact your Human Resources department, especially if your company or organization has an anti-bullying policy.
- Schedule an appointment with your doctor to be evaluated if you are experiencing medical concerns or repeated illnesses.
- If you are suffering from depression, anxiety, and some of the problems listed earlier, you may find counseling a great source of help to cope with the consequences of being a workplace bully's target.



BUILDING MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE TO MANAGE CHRONIC PAIN



*Adapted from article by Elizabeth Seward
By Carol Pangburn, EAP Counselor*

One thing's for sure: while chronic pain is an ongoing struggle, it doesn't have to be an inescapable spiral toward depression and unhappiness. If you're living with chronic pain, consider what science tells us that can empower you to live with more ease and peace.

Saint Alphonus Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

REGULAR APPOINTMENT HOURS

8:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m., Monday-Friday
(special appointment hours by request)

TELEPHONE
(208) 367-3300

LOCATION
6140 Emerald Street, Boise, ID 83704

COUNSELORS
Susan Murphy, LCPC, ACADC
Melissa Young, LCSW
Carol Pangburn, PhD
Jared Belsher, LCPC

Excel in Good Sleep Hygiene

Not sleeping well? Being cranky and tired isn't the only side effect you'll feel—studies tell us that sleep disturbances can increase the body's sensitivity to pain. Adopting good sleep hygiene is easier said than done, but consider starting with exercising during the day, keeping your sleeping area at a cool and comfortable temperature, and investing in bedding that makes you feel at ease.

Learn Mindfulness Through Meditation

Numerous studies support the assertion that regular mindfulness meditation can work to lower the body's level of pain as well as improve sleep. One study found that pain levels were significantly decreased over a 10-week period when subjects practiced regular mindfulness meditation. Studies from 2006 and 2010 also demonstrated enhanced SWS and REM sleep in participants who practiced mindfulness meditation.

Move Your Muscles

Research shows that exercise is an effective tool for managing chronic pain. Movement helps to keep the body in optimal shape, but in addition to that, exercise can release powerful endorphins, which can help to lower pain levels. Start by incorporating gentle forms of exercise, like yoga for beginners, water aerobics and walking. Find what feels good and stick to that!

Laugh Until Your Cheeks Hurt

As is the case with exercise, laughter releases endorphins throughout our body, which help us to lower our pain levels. Find what makes you laugh and engage in that activity intentionally and regularly. Laugh until your cheeks hurt and your belly aches!

Use Your Support Network

Identify the people who make up the core of your support network and reach out to them when you need to talk, when you need help or even when you simply want some company. A study that examined the role of family support in chronic pain patients found that patients who reported having a supportive family did not feel pain as intensely, relied on medication less and were more active than those who reported having an unsupportive family. If you don't feel like you have the support you need, seek out a local or online support group for chronic pain management.

Examine Your Relationship with Prescription Painkillers

Prescription painkillers might be a part of your pain treatment plan, but if it's possible for you, consider talking to your healthcare provider about slowly lowering your dosage. Long-term use of prescription painkillers not only will increase a patient's tolerance—requiring an increase in dosage in order to receive the same initial level of pain relief—but recent research suggests that extended use of prescription painkillers like codeine can actually increase the body's sensitivity to pain.

Train Your Brain

Research indicates that positive personality traits like optimism can impact the body's perception of pain. Start training your brain by aiming to become intentionally aware of when you begin a negative thought pattern. When you notice this happening, work to snap yourself out of the cycle. Also finding things to savor or be grateful about throughout your day helps train your brain toward the positive.

Find the Right Healthcare Team

Perhaps your primary care provider doesn't have extensive training in chronic pain management or perhaps you would feel more comfortable consulting a nutritionist in addition to your provider. Whatever the case may be, examine your relationship with your healthcare team and address any issues that might exist for you. You should feel safe and supported when you talk about your condition and your pain with your healthcare providers.