

Employee Assistance Program

Preparation pays: get ready for flu season

Health experts are predicting a resurgence of the H1N1 (swine) flu this fall. Don't get caught by surprise. The following tips will help you prepare for the flu season:

- Reduce anxiety by staying informed. Know how to access state and local health departments for reliable, up-to-date information, which can vary by location. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) can help you find your state health department: Visit cdc.gov and enter the phrase "state health department" in the search box in the upper-right-hand corner of the page.
- Stop the spread of germs. Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds (or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer), cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper sleeve when you sneeze or cough, and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Wash your hands every time you blow your nose. Convey the importance of prevention to your children.

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Call
800-999-7222
or visit
anthemEAP.com

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- Get the vaccines for both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus, especially if you are in a high-risk category. Visit cdc.gov to learn more about the new H1N1 vaccine and the designated risk groups.
- Stay home when you're sick, unless you need to seek medical care. Keep your child home from day care or school if he or she is ill. Visit the CDC's or your local health department's website for specific recommendations on how long to stay home.



- Stock up on supplies. For example, water, food, pet food, cleaning supplies, batteries, over-the-counter medicines – anything you might need in the event of a severe flu outbreak. For a list of supplies, see the Pandemic Flu Preparedness guide available on anthemEAP.com. Be sure to keep toys, books, coloring books and other items on hand to keep kids entertained if schools should close.
- Ask your children's schools or child care centers and your adult loved ones' caregivers or residential facilities what they are doing to prepare. Discuss how you can work together. The CDC has guidelines and a flu preparation toolkit for schools. Visit cdc.gov to access these resources and share them with your children's schools.

Certain factual or statistical information contained in this article was derived from the following source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, cdc.gov.

Sticking with your goals

It ain't over 'til it's over.

— *Yogi Berra*

Yogi Berra was one of the greatest catchers and hitters in the history of baseball. He was a 15-time All-Star, a three-time Most Valuable Player and the winner of 10 world championships (the most in baseball history). He was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972 and named to Major League Baseball's All-Century Team. As a manager with both New York teams, he became the first person in over 40 years to win pennants in different leagues (Yankees in 1964, Mets in 1973).

Yogi's famous quote, "It ain't over 'til it's over," reminds us never to give up – something that Yogi himself never did.

Five tips to help you reach your goals

1. When you set a goal, make sure you plan out the steps you will need to take to reach that goal.
2. Be realistic about the time needed to accomplish your goal.
3. Track your progress on an ongoing basis. If you are encountering obstacles, take the time to brainstorm ways to overcome them.
4. Be persistent in your quest; fight against discouragement. If setbacks occur, reassess the situation and try again.
5. Eventually, you may have to give up or revise your goal, but first make sure you have exhausted every possibility for success!

Certain factual or statistical information contained in this article was derived from the following source: yogiberra.com.

Laugh! It's good for you

Have you ever watched someone else laughing and found yourself smiling, even though you had no idea what they were laughing about? Laughter is infectious – and good for your emotional and physical well-being.

Why do we laugh?

Researchers have known for some time that laughter is good for us, but until recently they didn't really understand why. Now scientists have found that when people laugh, a part of the brain's reward system is triggered, leading to feelings of pleasure and the desire to experience the same pleasant feelings over and over again.

Laughter is an important life tool. The good feeling that you get when you laugh remains with you even after the laughter subsides. Humor also helps you keep a positive, optimistic outlook through difficult situations, disappointments and losses.

Healthy reasons to laugh

Some mental health professionals say humor is one of the best ways to relieve stress. Laughter loosens muscles, lowers blood pressure and may lower levels of hormones that create stress and weaken immunity. It also aids communication and creates a sense of closeness between you and the people laughing with you.

Some of the physical benefits of laughter include:

- **Relaxation.** Laughing out loud can relieve physical tension and stress, and leave you feeling relaxed. In addition, laughter drives away feelings of anxiety, anger and sadness, allowing you to remain positive and focused.
- **A healthy immune system.** Laughter improves your resistance to disease. Research has shown that laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies.
- **A healthy heart and lungs.** When you laugh, your body moves blood to your heart and lungs, boosting your energy level and making you feel better instantly. As an ongoing effect, laughter increases blood flow, which can help protect you against cardiovascular problems.
- **Feeling good.** In general, laughter causes the body to release endorphins, which are naturally produced chemicals that promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily reduce pain. Over time, these effects can change your outlook on life. An attitude that includes humor will allow you to take things in stride and feel less overwhelmed.



Laughter does more than just drive away sadness; it gives you the tools to face challenging times. Even in the most difficult of times, a simple smile – if you're not quite ready to laugh – can make you feel better.

Let laughter into your life

Despite the benefits, laughing may not always be easy. You may want to laugh, but feel burdened by stress. Or you may have grown up in a household without much laughter and may be wondering just how to laugh. If you make laughter a part of your everyday life, it will become easier. Here are some ways to start:

- **Practice smiling.** Most laughter begins with a smile—and smiling is just as contagious as laughter. Practice smiling in front of a mirror, and try to keep a smile on your face as you greet people throughout the day. You'll find that people will smile back. Also, appearing to feel happy can actually contribute to positive feelings and you may be more able to find some humor in daily stressful events. So smiling can improve your overall outlook – as well as how people perceive you.
- **Notice the good things in your life.** Sometimes we get so focused on negative events and the things that go wrong, that we lose sight of the things that have gone right. Make a list if you need to, and use it to remind yourself of things that are meaningful to you when you start to feel down.
- **Respond to laughter.** Let yourself experience other people's laughter. If, for example, you're out to lunch or in the park and you pass a group of people who are laughing, allow yourself to smile along. The group's conversation may be private, but their humorous outlook gives you an opportunity to share in their joy even if you weren't in on the joke.

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- **Laugh at yourself.** So you spilled your coffee – it's okay! Don't be afraid to laugh at your mistakes or embarrassing moments. It helps put events in perspective so you don't stress out over little things. Remember, no one's perfect.
- **Spend time with happy people.** “Downers” or people who are constantly focused on negative things can negatively affect your mental health. These people want everyone to be sad or angry along with them. Instead, try to spend time with people who seem to take joy in everyday life and don't take themselves too seriously. Their positive attitude will rub off on you.

- **Find the humor in complex and challenging situations.** There are many things in life that you cannot control. Learn to look for humor in challenging situations and allow yourself to laugh at ironies. You'll not only improve your mood, but you'll be more open to creative solutions and be more apt to see the bigger picture if you aren't stressed over particular details.

Laughing and fun go hand-in-hand. Laughing with others will bring you closer together and can help improve your mental and physical health. Look for laughs to stay healthy!

Certain factual or statistical information contained in this article was derived from the following sources: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency (SAMHSA) and HelpGuide.org.

Banking on your child's strengths

One of the challenges of parenting is knowing when and how to let your children know they have done something wrong or something you disapprove of, without hurting their feelings.

We all know that to be successful we must take risks, fail and try again. So we want children to use mistakes as learning opportunities and to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. “Building on strengths” rather than “focusing on mistakes” is an important parenting tool for creating a cycle of success in your child.

Let's see how you can use the “BANK” method of ongoing encouragement to help children build their personal assets and grow into successful individuals.

B for “baby” steps – The key to building on strengths is to break learning down into baby steps. Whether you are helping your child learn to complete her homework, or teaching her to be honest, you can systematically build on strengths to help your child develop skills, values and character. For each area in which you are trying to encourage improvements, break it down into specific goals related to specific behaviors. So, if you want to develop better homework habits, identify the areas in which your child needs guidance and encouragement. It might be writing down assignments or bringing home the right books. Then set goals related to these areas and monitor the behaviors daily.

A for “acknowledge” what your child does well –

Once you have identified a goal for your child, get an idea of where he is on the path to reaching this goal. Acknowledge what he can already do well in order to build the confidence and motivation needed to progress to the next step. It's important to “catch” kids “doing well” and to encourage their successes.

N for “nudge” the child to take the next step – Learning requires many steps and gradual improvement. There are times when fear of failure may be paralyzing, making it difficult for a child to take the next step, and times when frustration may undermine her courage to move forward. This is when a nudge from a parent can give the child the encouragement to take the next step.

K for “keep” encouraging improvement and effort – Since a key to encouragement is to break the process into baby steps, it's important to offer encouragement along the entire route. Any improvement, no matter how small, is a step in the right direction and should be noticed and acknowledged in a specific way. If your child falls back a step, you can be there to encourage her to keep at it.

So whether it's completing nightly homework, cleaning their rooms, or being honest, using the BANK method of encouragement is a step-by-step way to build on the strengths your children need to succeed.

Certain factual or statistical information contained in this article was derived from the following sources: Active Parenting Publishers, Inc., activeparenting.com.