

Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Emotional support at all ages and stages

Life can be like a roller coaster—full of ups, downs, twists and turns. You may prefer a steady and calm ride but sometimes life challenges find you climbing emotional peaks and bracing for the inevitable "drop" that happens when things don't turn out as planned. Below are some common life stages where extra support can help you keep or get your emotional health back on track, ensuring your journey remains a dynamic, supportive and eye-opening experience.

Teen Transitions

What do you get when you mix a rapidly evolving brain, raging hormones, peer pressure, family challenges and conflicting societal messages? Answer: the teenage years of transition from child to adult. While many teenagers go through these years relatively unscathed, for some, this can be a critical time that can set the course for positive or negative mental health patterns. From bullying, to drugs and alcohol, to eating disorders, to depression, teenage life is ripe with challenges.

While many adolescents gravitate towards friends in times of crisis, parents are still the most important connection in helping teens cope. Being proactive by setting reasonable boundaries and discussing issues openly before your teen is tested is your best defence. Seek professional support—be it family counselling, or one-on-one help, or both—as soon as you spot signs that your teen is in trouble.

Relationship Realities

While Hollywood movies paint a pretty picture of relationships and romance, most of us eventually experience a *relationship reality check*—when a once happy partnership takes a turn for the worse. The rough patch and/or failure of a relationship can hugely impact your emotional health and self-esteem and can also creep into other areas of your life.

If you hit a bump in the road of a relationship, consider working through your problems in couples counselling or a support group geared towards improved relationship communication. Professional help can often give you the impartial perspective you need to identify issues and change behaviours to handle them better.

Parted ways and can't move past it? Aside from seeking outside emotional support from a trusted person —be it a counsellor, religious advisor or another mental health professional—you might try practicing the art of distraction. Get involved in a new hobby, fundraiser, social activity, or reconnect with old friends. Studies suggest that people who spend time socializing with friends and family are generally happier than their more isolated counterparts.

New Parent Predicaments

It's a fact that's hard to put into words until you've actually lived it: becoming a parent literally changes your world. Most parents are happy to praise the virtues of being a new mom or dad, but fewer are willing to open up about the negatives—sleep deprivation, hormonal swings and feelings of isolation—that can leave many cranky, impatient and for some, downright depressed.

This is one stage where seeking out the social support of other new parents can have an extremely positive impact, letting you know that you're not alone. Many regions offer new parenting classes where you can meet other new moms and dads. More casual drop-ins can also give you a chance to get out of

the house and socialize with other parents. The Internet also helps moms and dads connect through local events, message boards and chat rooms.

If you suspect you or a new mom you know is suffering from *post-partum depression*—signs include feelings of despair, a loss of interest in what once were enjoyable activities or feelings of worthlessness—or *post-partum psychosis*—a very rare but serious psychiatric illness that can cause a new mother to hallucinate, act paranoid or have delusional thoughts about herself or baby—seek professional medical support immediately.

Retirement Resistance

Lots of people work their whole lives fantasizing about retirement, only to grieve the loss of their work life once it's gone. One way to beat the post-retirement blues? Only partially retire. In fact, a recent study out of the University of Maryland suggests that "bridge retirement," or continuing to work part-time in your current field beyond your official retirement, can have positive mental health benefits and protect you from depression. The thought is that a retirement bridge eases you into a new slower pace of life.

If this isn't possible for you, consider joining a book club, team or volunteering: several studies have linked an improved sense of well-being, self-esteem and even memory to social connectedness.

While its natural to want to share your emotional highs with the world and "hide out" while trying to ride out the lows, isolating yourself in times of emotional transition or trouble can do more harm than good. For every life stage, there's a challenge. But by working through these constructively and seeking support when needed, you'll know that there's likely another positive peak just around the next turn.
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