



## Are You Obsessing?

Perhaps you've been thinking about that *thing* that could have gone better. Or you are worried about that *thing* in the future. In either case, you're unable to put that *thing* aside for a moment. Panicked about it occurring or how it will happen. All of the should've, would've and could've circle in your head. Instead, you feel stuck and frozen. Unable to think of anything else and struggling to focus. You are obsessing.

This may be a familiar story, as most of us at one time or another have beaten ourselves up over something. The following tips may help in letting go of compulsive thoughts that don't seem to want to go away on their own.

**Present focus:** Rarely do we obsess on what is happening in the present. Instead, we second guess the past (regret) and worry (anxiety) about something in the future. Our mind then ping-pongs between the past and the future (regret and anxiety).

Try activities that force you to stay in the present, like conversations with others or group activities/projects. Solitary activities leave the door open for those obses-

sive thoughts to creep in. Remember, it is usually worse when alone with your own thoughts.

**Don't feed it:** It feels counterintuitive but over analyzing, over thinking or trying to reason your way out of obsessive thoughts may only serve to extend its time in your head. Remind yourself that these thoughts will pass with time. Most intrusive thoughts dilute after a couple of days. The antidote is to starve them instead.

**Tune in:** A quick and simple way to "ground" yourself when feeling flooded by thoughts is to use your senses. Focus on something you can touch, hear, see, or smell one at a time. Deliberately noticing something in detail keeps us in the here and now. It forces our racing mind to slow down and be in the present.

**Increase rest and relaxation:** A major cause of stuck thoughts is stress and fatigue. Increasing your body's rest can help the brain eliminate stuck thoughts. Don't skip on exercise, healthy eating or a full 8 hours of sleep. Taking good care of your body is crucial for mental health.

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Employee Assistance Program



City of Milwaukee EAP

# Are You Mentally Strong?

Americans overall are becoming more and more health conscious. We have seen this trend reflected in healthier restaurant menu offerings (even our fast food restaurants), the increase in gym facilities and the rise of employer based Wellness Programs. While exercising our body and making healthier food choices are great, we must not forget to also exercise our mind if we also want it to be strong.

Like weight training, walking, biking or running, each time we practice these tips we are developing fortitude that will make us better equipped to handle future stress, difficulties and the unexpected.

The following are behaviors and attitude exercises that keep us *Mentally Strong*.

1. **Move on.** It is expectable to

feel bad following a big loss.

Establish new goals and objectives when old one's fall through.

2. **Self-control.** Decide that no one, or no circumstance, is going to provoke a reaction out of you.

3. **Embrace change.** There is comfort in the familiar. However, there is no personal growth without some level of change.

4. **Stay happy.** Take charge of how you want to feel. Do something healthy that gets you in a good mood.

5. **Be kind to yourself and others.**

6. **Be willing to risk a little.** Stretch your skills and experience a bit.

7. **Invest your (mental) energy in the present** because the past is just that...the past.

8. **Take responsibility for your behavior.**

9. **Celebrate the success of others.**

10. **Be willing to fail.** Learning what doesn't work is sometimes just as important as learning what does.

11. **Enjoy your alone time.** Disconnect and be still sometimes.

12. **Be prepared to put in the work.** There are no short cuts to success.

13. **Have staying power.** Don't give up at the first sign of trouble.

14. **Evaluate your core beliefs** and have well balanced priorities

15. **Expend your mental energy wisely.** Decide what is worth your mental energy.

16. **Think productively.** Keep solution focused.

17. **Learn to tolerate discomfort.** Use your personal stress management tools.

18. **Reflect.** Do more of what works and abandon what isn't working.



# Your Child's First Year in College

Sending a child off to college for the first time sets up a complicated set of feelings. For many students, college years prove to be their most formative. College offers a new role as student's toe-dip into adulthood. This role brings along its own set of challenges, disappointments, independence and responsibility. Likewise as parents, this time is also transformative as you begin to view your child in a new adult way.

Trying on these roles will be a process of trial and error, ups and downs, successes and failures. There is no "how to book" that prescribes answers to every college related challenge. However, there are a few tips and reminders that may ease the transition.

**Helicopter parent:** You've been involved in every aspect of your child's life up to this point. You've intervened on your child's behalf, advocated, prioritized, monitored, done your research about what's best, weighted options and carried plans out. You've done all this because you care.

Yet experts agree, when parents cross the line from caring to hovering, they inadvertently stifle their child's coping capacities. Avoid hovering by allowing your child to set the communication agenda. This gives your child space to begin building their own resiliency and problem solving skills.

Rest assured, they will communicate. Studies report that the majority of college age children turn to their parents when times get tough.

**Support vs. Fix:** Continue to allow your child to flex their problem solving skills rather than offering solutions right away.

- ◆ Have your child explain the problem without interrupting.
- ◆ Offer cues. "How can I be helpful? What do you think you should do? What options are you considering?"
- ◆ Help your child evaluate their choices, but don't choose for them. If your child still seem stuck, ask, "What do you imagine my advice would be?"
- ◆ Assure your child with supportive words like, "I think you can handle this." At the same time, let them know that "No matter what, I'm here for you."

Be prepared for whatever your child wants to talk about. Common college student stressors are:

- ◇ Trying to make friends
- ◇ Being on one's own in a new environment
- ◇ Relationship issues, including changes in family relationships
- ◇ Financial responsibilities
- ◇ Exposure to new people, ideas, and temptations
- ◇ Awareness of one's sexual identity and orientation

**Communication Contract:** Have a conversation with your child about how, and with what frequency, you will communicate. How often (daily, weekly, monthly, on an as-needed basis) do you expect to hear from your child? How frequently does your child want to hear from you? Many families agree to once-a-

week phone calls. Work out a plan that fits your family's needs.

Keep in mind that students today are part of a new, digitally connected generation. Using email, instant messaging (IM) and mobile texting is sometimes less intrusive, and frees your child up for communicating.

**Stress:** As a parent, be prepared to hear a lot about how stressful college is from your child. Again, this is a major role change and stress is expected. Significant changes in the following may signal issues beyond what is expected college stress.

- Changes in sleep patterns (taking longer to fall asleep, waking up tired, not feeling well rested)
- Changes in eating patterns
- Increased frequency of headaches
- More short-tempered than usual
- Recurring colds and minor illness
- Frequent muscle ache and/or tightness
- More disorganized than usual
- Increased difficulty in task completion
- A greater sense of persistent time pressure
- Increased generalized frustration and anger

If you think your child is experiencing higher than typical stress levels, urge contact with the school's mental health or counseling center.



## I'm sorry, so why are you still angry?

Ever had your apology fall on deaf ears? Chances are the **way** you apologized wasn't heard by the other person as sincere. Dr. Gary Chapman has studied communication with couples and identified five different ways to apologize. Each of these apologies is legitimate in themselves. However, the problem occurs when the apology type used doesn't "match up" with how the other person understands an apology to sound like.

1. **Expressing regret** -This language appeals to the emotions. It indicates that we are aware that we caused pain. *"I'm sorry I spoke harshly. I know I've hurt your feelings and I'm so sorry for that."*

2. **Accepting responsibility** – This language spells out what was done wrong. *"I was wrong to speak to you in that tone. I shouldn't have reacted like that."*

3. **Making restitution** – This one is all about how to make up. *"I can't believe I*

*reacted that way. What I can do to make it up to you."*

4. **Expressing the desire to change behavior** – This one is pretty self-explanatory. *"I keep losing my temper and I know that's not right. I don't want to repeat this."*

5. **Requesting forgiveness** – This is where forgiveness has to be requested before the apology is seen as being sincere. *"Will you please forgive me? I'm so sorry I spoke harshly and reacted the way I did."*

Your apology will sound sincere and more likely accepted if you know which apology type best meets the needs of the other person.

## EAP Mission Statement

*It is the mission of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to assist employees who develop behavioral/emotional problems that may directly affect their work performance, and to provide Key Personnel with policy and procedural guidelines for the management of these problems.*

## City of Milwaukee Events and Reminders

•**Stressed or have wellness questions?** Visit the *Wellness Center* every Monday 10:00a.m. and 2:00p.m. in the ZMB inside the Market/Kilbourn entrance. Call 414-777-3510 for information or to schedule an appointment.

• **Walk 100 Miles in 100 Days Challenge.** Sign up online at [www.milwaukee.gov/walk100](http://www.milwaukee.gov/walk100).

## Personal Crisis at Work

1. **Disclosure** The decision to tell co-workers and/or your boss is entirely your own. However, be mindful of sharing that would violate any unwritten social norms in the work group. Ask yourself, what purpose would disclosing have? If the decision is made to disclose, think about how much explanation or detail you want to give.

2. **Make time to deal with it.** Seek counseling and/or support from loved ones outside of work.

3. **Build off of small tasks** Stress makes focus and attention difficult. Keep a "to-do" list to help with organization and productivity.

4. **Take your breaks.** Avoid working through lunch and scheduled breaks. You will need this time to regroup.

5. **Set realistic goals and boundaries.** Scale back as much as possible. Set priorities to focus on and resist adding too much on your plate.

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