

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

Parking Your Personal Stress While at Work

We owe it to ourselves, and to our families, to let go of the worries of work when we're home and focus on spending quality time with our loved ones. Equally importantly, we need to recognize and honor our work commitments, by focusing our working hours on the job we are being paid to do.

By learning how to park our stresses, we give ourselves a break and may actually reduce further stress as we focus on successfully managing the responsibilities of the moment.

Tips and Tools You Can Use

The concept of "parking" worries, concerns or moods can be of great help when focusing on other matters. By "parking" them, you are making mental plans to go back to them later, but are giving yourself permission to temporarily move on to other aspects of life—here are some great tips that might help:

How Personal Stress Affects Performance

The mood you bring with you can affect the way you communicate with others. When you are distracted by personal thoughts, your work is not receiving your full attention and is likely to suffer; consider the following examples:

- Crankiness arising from personal frustrations can give the impression of annoyance with something or someone at work.
- Lethargy, distraction or depression can be interpreted as a lack of enthusiasm, interest or commitment, or as laziness.
- Constant personal phone calls will create an unprofessional impression.
- Displayed emotions, such as crying or anger, can be seen as a lack of control and discipline, which could indicate immaturity.
- Frequent outpourings of emotion to co-workers takes up valuable time and can affect their performance as well, and ultimately create resentment.
- Supervisors may feel that if you can't manage personal stress, you would be a poor candidate for additional responsibilities; it could cost you promotions.

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Valuable Strategies

If personal stresses threaten to rush back in during the day, here are a few suggestions you can try:

- Take advantage of commuting time to make a positive transition from home to work. Cleanse your mind of family and home stresses.
- Try counting backwards from 10 to zero, imagining your personal stresses dissipating as you do. Or, try breathing slowly and deeply. Imagine you are “blowing out” your personal stresses as you exhale.
- Tell yourself that you can't do anything about your personal responsibilities while you are at work. They are temporarily out of your control, and what you cannot control is not worth worrying about.
- Use your lunch break to relieve stress. Try yoga or stretching while listening to your favorite CD. Take a walk in the park or around the block.
- If you absolutely have to deal with personal responsibilities during your lunch hour, give yourself a 15-minute transition period to ease back into work again.
- Remind yourself that a mental break from personal stresses during the day will leave you better equipped to deal with them later.

Creating a Positive Impression

It’s important to try and maintain a professional image and demeanor while at work. Wherever possible, try to practice the following:

- Avoid making all but the most essential personal calls from work and keep them short. Keep your voice down and avoid emotional discussions.
- Be discreet about personal problems. If you must confide in a co-worker, do it outside of work hours. If asked about personal issues at work, respond with a short, general statement. Don’t go into detail, and avoid getting emotional.
- Similarly, if you miss work or are late due to a personal problem, give your boss a brief overall explanation.
- Talk to a confidential counselor about your personal problems.
- If you are unable to control your emotions, tell your boss that it would be best for you to be away from the workplace right now. Give a projected date of when you will return and try to meet this timeline. Remember that the more time off you take, the more you impose on your employer.

It can be a struggle to juggle the challenges of work and personal life. Although it is often difficult to separate them, it is vital to try to create some distance between the two if either is to be the fulfilling and productive experience it can be.