

Volume 6, Issue 2

Let's Talk

From your Employee Assistance Program

Elder Care Matters: When It's Time to Step In

In the course of one week, your aging parent has a fender bender and receives a shut-off notice because he forgot to pay a bill. After learning of these events, you think, "Is he at a point where's he's not able to take care of himself?"

Watching a loved one grow old can be difficult. But knowing when to step in to offer assistance or to develop a plan to avoid problems like the ones above can be just as hard. Older people value their independence, and anything to suggest that it might be taken from them — that they should stop driving or turn over their bill paying to someone else — may cause hurt feelings.

To help in such matters, eldercare experts Enid Pritikin, MSW, LSCE, and Trudy Reece, MSOT, suggest that if you're feeling uneasy about an aging loved one, show your concern and get involved. In their book, *Parentcare Survival Guide*, they list more than two dozen signs that something may be wrong with an aging person and that medical attention or some other form of help may be needed. Noticing any of these signs means it's time to step in and have an honest, straightforward discussion with an older loved one.

For example, learning that your father is urinating more frequently than usual is one such red flag, say to Pritikin and Reece, as it could indicate diabetes or some other health problem. Other things to look for in the older loved one include:

- Unsafe driving.
- Unusual skin growths or poor skin color.
- Itching or scratching.
- Bruises, burns or injuries.
- Sleeping more than usual.
- Seeming to be tired much of the time.
- Not paying bills or paying some bills more than once.
- Having little or no interest in things s/he once enjoyed.
- Swollen feet or legs.
- Bloodshot or discolored eyes.
- Squinting while reading or showing signs of poor hearing (talking loudly, asking others to repeat what they say, playing the TV or radio loudly).
- Walking with a limp.
- Having trouble getting up from chairs.
- Mood swings.
- Growing increasingly reclusive or antisocial.
- His/her home or yard is unkempt.
- Showing signs of forgetfulness or confused thinking.
- Misplacing things.
- Acting nervous or distracted.
- Answering questions vaguely or incompletely.
- Seeming afraid to leave the house.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or about ending his/her life.

If talking to an older loved one about his/her self-care is hard for you, contact your employee assistance program. The EAP can coach you on how to best communicate your concerns. Your EAP also will have a list of local resources to help care for elderly people, such as visiting nurses, senior day care programs and assisted living centers.

TURN MONEY INTO TIME

Impulse buying—buying with little or no regard for the financial consequences—is a major cause of personal financial trouble, according to experts at Credit Counseling Centers. As a solution, they recommend that impulsive shoppers turn money into time by estimating how many hours of work it would take to buy something. Changing your perspective in this way may change your mind about making a purchase. For example, if you earn \$10 an hour, using a credit card to buy a \$150

jacket may cost you 20 hours or more of work once you account for taxes and interest. You then might ask yourself, "Is this jacket worth 20 hours of my time?" Of course an impulsive shopper may not spend as much time thinking about buying something—which is the very reason why they're called impulsive. If your spending habits have you in financial hot water, contact your employee assistance program.

Good Thinking

How to train your inner-voice to get the most out of life

Each of us has an inner-voice. It guides our thinking, interprets our experiences and comments on the events in our lives.

Trouble is, this voice isn't always right. It often jumps to conclusions, incorrectly reads between the lines and otherwise says things that cause us to worry or, even worse, to act in ways that cause problems.

Here are a few of the faulty statements our inner-voice makes and some tips on how to train this voice to your advantage.

"It's always that way." This kind of thinking is reflected in statements like "I'm always bad at this" or "He never listens to me." The problem with overgeneralizing is that it leaves no room for exceptions — after all, there are times when you're good at something, and there are times when he *does* listen. To keep yourself from overgeneralizing, train your inner-voice to

use the word "sometimes" and throw out words like "always" and "never."

"I know what you're thinking"

Perhaps nothing has caused more conflicts at work or at home than mind-reading. "I know how he thinks, I just do." "Of course that's what she's thinking. Didn't you see how she looked at me?" No one can read minds, and basing actions on presumptions may lead to embarrassment, hurt feelings and conflict. To keep yourself from being a mind-reader, don't draw conclusions until you have enough information.

"Everyone should know what I'm thinking"

Assuming that others can read your mind leads to feeling misunderstood and disappointed in others. The next time your inner-voice says something to this effect,

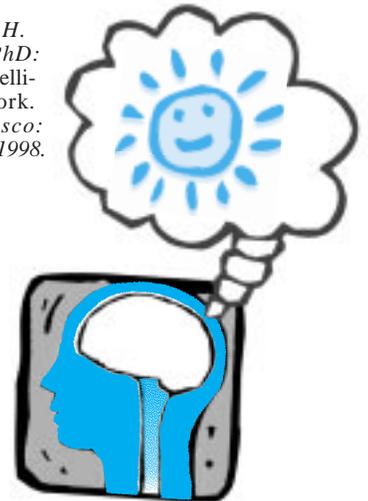
take a close look at the situation. Did you state your needs clearly and to the right person? If not, don't assume that person knows what you expect. Next time, be assertive and make your needs known.

"That's how things are." Our inner-voice sometimes concludes that what's right for you is right for everyone. But just as some people put both their socks on then both their shoes, others put a sock and a shoe on one foot at a time and still others don't wear socks at all. When your inner-voice learns to accept that there are different ways of achieving the same result, it's less likely you'll be angered or disappointed by the actions of others.

"This is bad... and it's going to get worse." Inner-voices do a great job of making mountains out of mole hills. For example, remember the last time a loved one was late coming home? First you imagined him/her just running late. Then your inner-voice convinced you that s/he was in a car accident and needed your help. Your anxiety grew and your imagination created dreadful situations. Then your loved one arrived, explaining s/he got caught in heavy traffic. Don't let your inner-voice cause you unnecessary grief. Train your inner-voice not to use words like "catastrophe" or "disaster" and to use words that best reflect the situation.

"You know what those people are like." This is an example of prejudice, and prejudice is never OK. Train your inner-voice to be tolerant of diverse people and lifestyles, and stay away from labels and generalizations about a group of people who share the same race/ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

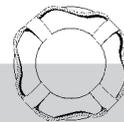
Source: H. Weisinger, PhD: Emotional Intelligence at Work. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.



The Federal Consortium EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, training and consultation to federal employees and agencies throughout the United States. For administrative details about the program, call Doug Mahy, Acting Vice President of EAP, Federal Occupational Health, at 214-767-3030. For assistance, call 800-222-0364.

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Call: 1-800-222-0364
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