

CONNECTIONS

DECEMBER 2024

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 4

WHAT'S NEW IN EAP

Please Welcome Brooke Villella

Some of you have already met Brooke, she started with EAP in July

Hello everyone! My name is Brooke Villella, I have been on the City of Madison Employee Assistance Program team since July 2024. My background is primarily in the rehabilitation counseling world and was educated right here in town: a bachelor's degree in Rehabilitative Psychology and a master's degree in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling both from UW-Madison. With this background, I have worked in services to support individuals in their journeys through different roles including as a therapist, case manager, and in suicide prevention within private practice and addiction/recovery settings.



Additionally, I served in the Wisconsin Army National Guard where I promoted mental health within the ranks and worked in suicide prevention and the education of peers and superiors. What brought me to the city is the ability to support those interested in their wellbeing, education, or working through critical incidents. The EAP office is able to combine some of my vocational interests such as trauma, substance use, and outreach. I am truly excited to support you all when you need it most whether it's to help navigate personal, workplace, or mental health challenges.

City of Madison Internal Employee Assistance Program

The City of Madison Internal EAP is a HIPPA compliant, confidential program, serving all City of Madison employees, significant others and/or dependents that reside in the household. The City EAP scope of services includes comprehensive individual and couple's counseling, consultation, and information resource service. We also work with employees and their household family members to identify appropriate providers in the community that accept their insurance and can offer the best quality of care in addressing their needs.

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Welcome to the fourth and final 2024 EAP Connections newsletter.

We hope that you are finding joy in the holiday season and able to spend quality time with family and loved ones. We also understand that sometimes the holiday season may not be the happy time that everyone thinks it should be. Maybe there is too much stress around the holidays or there has been a loss and the holidays are a time when that loss is very large. Either situation is normal. Please take a look at the following articles in our newsletter and know that whether you are loving the holidays or not, it is ok and we are here to help you. You can schedule an appointment by calling our office at 608-266-6561 or emailing us at eap@cityofmadison.com. Take care of yourselves and it would be our pleasure to assist in any way that we can.

In this newsletter you will find

- Overcoming gridlock this holiday season
- From Stuck to Thriving: Key Actions to Unlock Your Potential
- Outdoor Winter Play for the Whole Family
- The wake-up call that changed a responder's health post-retirement

~ The EAP Team



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EAP scope of counseling is short term and solution focused offering up to 10-12 sessions **depending on availability**. When longer term, and/or specialized counseling is indicated, clients may be referred to providers in the community that accept their insurance. There is no “EAP covered counseling” that extends to providers outside of the City EAP staff. Coverage for external providers is reimbursed through employee’s medical insurance and/or behavioral health benefit.

The City EAP is staffed by Master’s level, mental health clinicians and are available for scheduling M-F from 9:00 AM -3:00 PM. While most employees can be scheduled within a couple of business days, every effort will be made to meet sooner with an employee who is in crisis, or in response to a critical incident. EAP staff can be contacted by calling the main line at 608-266-6561 or by email at eap@cityofmadison.com. There is not afterhours crisis call availability.

Afterhours Crisis Contacts

- FEI/AllOne Health – 1-800-236-7905 (code is Madison)
- Journey Mental Health Crisis Line – 608-280-2600
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline – 988
- Emergency Assistance (law enforcement/EMT) – 911

Overcoming Gridlock This Holiday Season

By Sanaa Hyder, M.S.Ed., **Gottman**

Gridlock. The word itself conjures up the image of sitting in your car for hours while traffic around you barely inches forward. The sound of incessant honking surrounds you as the frustration of being stuck when you have somewhere to be builds.

That’s not the kind of gridlock I’m talking about. What I’m talking about is the emotional traffic jam that happens in a relationship which has all the same accompanying emotions and more – feeling stuck, frustrated, or powerless. The holiday season is as good a time as any to reconsider how to approach gridlocked problems that arise in your relationship.

In Dr. Gottman’s New York Times bestselling book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, he points out that 69% of conflicts in relationships are about unresolvable issues. You’d still have them even if you married someone else, they’d just be a different set of perpetual problems.

Relationship gridlock is a state in which your argument with your partner has come to a standstill because you both disagree on how to move forward. A couple can experience gridlock on any issue, and often the more gridlocked they are, the more gridlocked they become on other things as well.

Gridlock is difficult because it is often caused by our deepest dreams, desires and feelings being blocked. I’ve seen couples come to a standstill on topics such as how to raise kids, practicing a certain faith, or taking a new job. Overcoming gridlock this holiday season is the best gift you can give your relationship.

What To Do When You Feel Stuck

Ironically, gridlock is an opportunity. I know it feels terrible in the moment, but it actually can create an opportunity for you to better understand your partner and become closer to them. Here are some exercises you can do to help move you out of a complete standstill.

1. Empathize with your partner.

As difficult as it might be, try to ask them details about their point of view. Chances are there is a story behind their desires. Find out their story, listen carefully, and empathize.

2. Be respectful.

You don’t have to understand or agree with your partner’s perspective, but it’s important to accept it. Saying “Well, your way of celebrating Christmas is crazy” will alienate your partner and possibly prevent further discussion. Being respectful is a choice and helps define the kind of partner you want to be.

3. Make temporary compromises.

Dr. Gottman’s research shows that you don’t need to and probably won’t solve your problem. Chances are you will keep talking about these issues for decades. The trick is to get accustomed to talking to each other in a particular way that allows you to find common ground and to make temporary compromises.



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4. Recall the honeymoon phase.

Remember when you first met and traded stories over dinner? You laughed together and shared personal details. You weren't trying to change one another; you were celebrating the new person that you just met. Get back into that mindset this season. When your partner suggests an idea, recall what you may have said during the first few dates and try saying something similar. Be open to suggestions!

Finding a Middle Ground

Unresolvable issues are inevitable since we are growing and changing as people. As uncomfortable as it is to disagree with your partner, it is part of the deal when you decide to be with another person. Psychologist Dan Wile says it best in his book *After the Honeymoon*: "When choosing a long-term partner, you will inevitably be choosing a particular set of unresolvable problems." They will change over the years, and while it might sound scary, it is also a chance to deepen your connection and to continue to get to know one another better over time.

A good compromise does require two people to have self-respect and respect for their partner. Everyone has values and dreams, but you can still find some common ground. Dr. Gottman calls this the "flexible area." Perhaps you don't want your kids to practice your partner's faith as children, but maybe you are OK with them celebrating the holidays, with the caveat that they will choose for themselves when they're old enough. Perhaps you want a dog and your partner doesn't, so you might agree to cover the costs of taking care of the dog.

You don't need to change your mind for your partner or act in ways that don't make sense for you, but you do have to be nice to one another and to allow each other to grow. The alternative is akin to being stuck in traffic for a long, long time.

Yielding to Win

One of the most powerful ideas related to relationship gridlock is the concept of yielding. To yield is to summon your best self and offer your partner grace and acceptance. Yielding requires emotional intelligence and love for your partner, but it works because your partner is more likely to see your kindness and return the favor. Saying "yes" is an act of faith and a decision to move forward in your relationship instead of staying stuck.

Overcoming Gridlock This Holiday Season

Remember, it is by your side that your partner wants to grow. You are co-creators of your lives together. Allowing room for both partners to be happy during the holidays will breathe new life into every part of your bond, your friendship, and your romance throughout the year.



LEADERSHIP *Matters*

From Stuck to Thriving: Key Actions to Unlock Your Potential

By Melanie McNally, Psy.D., *Psychology Today*

Discover mindset shifts and actions that can transform your life for the better.

I had a client recently ask me the difference between flourishing and being stuck. Not in definitions but in actions. He wanted to know how someone who's flourishing behaves versus how someone who's stuck behaves. He wanted insights on visible traits and actions. It was obvious why he was asking this question: he was feeling stuck and couldn't identify why. He didn't know what he was doing that was keeping himself so stagnant and was searching for clues. He'd been trying to change things in his life for weeks and kept running into the same barriers.

Flourishing Behaviors

Flourishing individuals actively seek growth and new challenges. They embrace change and are not afraid to step out of their comfort zones. And while they aren't usually comfortable with the discomfort that goes along with growth and challenges, they've developed self-regulation strategies that keep their nervous system aligned. They set clear goals and persistently work towards them. When they run into the boredom that comes from the daily to-do lists that goal achievement requires, they know it won't last forever. And when they come across an obstacle, they work on finding a solution. Flourishing individuals also have a support network of friends, family, mentors, or colleagues who push them past their limits, inspire them to dream, and motivate them with their own personal growth.

Flourishing people tend to have more of a growth mindset where they view failures as learning experiences. They tend to be resilient and can bounce back from mistakes or when events don't go as planned. They're proactive and don't wait around for good things to fall in their laps; they're constantly searching and seeking what they can do to create positive change in their own lives. They're flexible because they must constantly adapt to what they're learning and how they're growing.

Stuck Behaviors

On the other hand, those who feel stuck often resist change. They may be fearful or anxious of it, or they may not see the need. They may procrastinate and easily find excuses as to why key tasks can't be completed. They avoid risks and when presented

with a choice, take the path of least resistance no matter where it may lead. Stuck people hold onto routines even when they no longer serve them. They might dwell on past successes, thinking that these prove how unfair life is now since they can no longer achieve the things they desire. Their focus is on obstacles and why they can't take action and they're masters at convincing themselves (and sometimes those around them) of why they need to remain stuck, no matter how much they complain about hating where they are right now.

Stuck people tend to have a more negative mindset and view things in a fixed way: "I'm not good at that" or "This is how things are." When things don't work out for them or when they experience a setback or failure, they view it as a sign that they should stop or that they're not ready. They take so long to recover from these setbacks that they end up losing momentum altogether, either quitting or completely changing course (again!). They usually wait for things to happen rather than going after what they want and can be extremely inflexible in how they think about themselves, others, and the world.



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Dealing With Stagnation

It can be really challenging when you or someone you care about is stuck. I've seen stagnation ruin marriages and create depression. And it can be hard to recognize when you're the one who's stuck. But if you identify with any of the stuck behaviors above, it's likely time to change. The key difference between flourishing and being stuck lies in mindset and action. Here are some things you can do to move from stuck to flourishing.

- **Reassess your goals.** Oftentimes, people are stuck because their goals no longer fit them. Take time to get clear on what you want out of life and what your purpose is. Break goals down into smaller and more manageable steps so they're not overwhelming. And if you don't know how to do any of this, I have lots of posts on the subjects.
- **Embrace new challenges.** Practice going outside your comfort zone and trying new things. They don't have to be aligned with your goals or serve any purpose other than you doing something difficult and new. Take a class in a foreign language, sign up for the dance contest, or volunteer for the local politician who inspires you. Make "embrace new challenges" your daily mantra and see how it pushes you into flourishing.
- **Work to change your mindset.** Start reframing mistakes, setbacks, and failures as learning opportunities. Look at obstacles and barriers as a chance to think creatively to find new solutions. If you catch yourself thinking negatively or in a fixed way, ask yourself what you have control over in the situation and find one small thing you can do immediately to create positive change.
- **Surround yourself with inspiring and motivating people.** Humans are social creatures, and we tend to be like the people we spend the most time around. Choose wisely. Find people who not only dream big but take action. Seek out those who make you want to be the best version of yourself and spend as much time as possible with them.

If you want to get from stuck to flourishing, try the steps above. And if you still can't get there, get support. A coach or a therapist could be just what you need.



IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Outdoor Winter Play for the Whole Family

By Robyne Hanley-Dafoe, Ed.D., [Psychology Today](#)

Outdoor play promotes healthy child development and family connection.

Play is an expected part of childhood. In fact, play is an essential part of childhood. The importance of play, particularly unstructured, free play, has been well documented. We witness this not only in humans but in animals as well. Play is how our young explore the world, build relationships, and learn about risk.

Importance of Taking Risks

Risk-taking is when a child engages in any activity without a clear outcome and holds the potential for experiencing an adverse effect. It is an important skill that children need to develop in age-appropriate ways. It is paramount to differentiate risk-taking from danger, which is a threatening event or encounter that requires a grown-up to protect the child. As parents and supporters, we can strive to teach children the difference between risk and danger. And we can protect our children from danger while allowing them to take risks.

The world has changed in important ways since most of us, as adults now, were kids: Population density and urban sprawl looked different, we had fewer restrictions on where we could explore, and our sense of community trust was higher. It feels safer to keep children indoors, but studies have found that in order to grow up healthy and resilient, children need the freedom to explore and experience bumps and bruises. For example, in a systematic review of risky play, Brussoni and colleagues (2015) found positive effects of risky outdoor play with respect to physical activity, social health, social behaviours, injuries, and aggression.

Despite the endless possibilities the winter season brings for outdoor play, wintertime is sometimes misconstrued as a time to remain indoors. It's easy to stay inside where we feel warm and cozy, but when we choose to shy away from the cold, we restrict our children's learning environment. If we bundle up and teach our children to dress appropriately, playing outside and breathing the fresh, crisp air is healthy.



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The goal of play and risky play is not for children to get hurt, but to allow our children to experience the thrill and excitement of testing their limits and abilities. Giving children the opportunity to see what they can do and to experiment and take risks develops their ability to perceive danger. It also increases self-regulation and provides potent stress relief. According to a recent Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, more adventure-based and “risky” opportunities for outdoor play amongst our children can lead to better-developed motor skills, social behaviour, independence, and conflict resolution skills. Outdoor play encourages healthy risk-taking, which is critical to teaching children how to navigate life’s challenges, manage the anxieties that accompany them, and become resilient.

In his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv discusses how outdoor play is essential for physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being. It is a canvas for mindfulness. It builds self-efficacy, and it instills a sense of appreciation and awareness of interconnected systems. Research has also shown that in children, outdoor play ignites the imagination, instilling a sense of curiosity, wonder, amazement, and creativity (Gurholt & Sanderud, 2016; Tremblay et al., 2015). In a systematic review of the impact of access to green space on children, McCormick (2017) found that outdoor space promotes attention, memory, and self-discipline. It also promotes supportive social groups and moderates stress and behaviours associated with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Think of all the new challenges that are presented by the winter weather. Almost everything about the environment challenges us—walking on icy sidewalks, walking through the snow with heavy snow boots and bulky snow gear, shoveling snow, and learning how to pick things up while wearing mittens. We can consider how even the simplest act of playing in the snow encourages creativity, imagination, experimenting, problem-solving, and collaboration. Through playing outdoors this winter, children will learn to assess risk, problem solve and adapt while also building their self-confidence in navigating challenging situations and everything this season has to offer.

We know that play is not just essential for kids; it can be an important source of relaxation and stimulation for adults as well. It fuels our imagination, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Play is also a gateway to empathy, communication, and relationships.

It is commonly understood that at some critical point in our lives, adult systems take over and consume us, leaving little room for the curiosity, wonder, and magic that is childhood. In these new, somewhat more enterprising systems, we become overwhelmed with the need to be productive, accountable, and efficient. We simply do not have the time for childhood freedoms, even if we long for them. We understand and,

perhaps reluctantly, accept this as a rite of passage into adulthood. It is the cost of being a grown-up. This does not have to be the way. What happened to the innocence of making snow angels and catching snowflakes on our tongues? As adults, we can choose to lighten up, un-goal, be unproductive without guilt, and take back some freedom.

Ways to Encourage Family Outdoor Play

Here are just a few ways to encourage outdoor play for the whole family this winter:

- Use the outdoors as a gateway to adventure and storytelling.
- Go for a nature walk. Talk about what you see, smell, hear, and feel.
- Create a family bucket list of things to do outdoors this winter.
- Introduce loose parts play. Do something with rocks, twigs, pinecones, pine needles, leaves, grass, dirt, and other things you find in the yard or in parks.
- Go tobogganing down the biggest hill you can find.
- Spend a day at the ski hill or at the rink.
- Mix food colouring and water in a spray bottle and use the snow as your canvas.
- Build snow forts, snowmen, or other snow sculptures. Once you have all these defenses constructed, have a family snowball fight!

It is important to note that there can be barriers to outdoor experiences. Some urban life does not always lend itself to outdoor play. Blacktop and grey space are the antithesis of green space. If this is the case, the following are ways to engage with nature in urban settings, or bring nature in:

- Instead of walking by, next time you are out, take notice of a tree on your street. Take pleasure in watching it change with the seasons. Take pictures or videos to capture the beauty of nature.
- Reconfigure your work or home space to include a plant and a window with a view outdoors.
- Incorporate nature breaks into your routine by bringing nature to you.
- Create nature-themed art or create a nature-themed playlist.

Play reinforces the ties that bind us together and can heal minor relationship stress. When we play together, our moods improve, we feel less stressed, we drop our grudges, and we get back into sync. Play is essential to maintaining happy, healthy, and productive families.

Don’t let your days melt away this winter. Take time to get outside and play, because families who play together make memories together.

Find more resources from Dr. Robyne on her website, drrobyne.ca



FIRST RESPONDER FOCUS

The wake-up call that changed a responder's health post-retirement

By Todd Fletcher, [Police1.com](https://www.police1.com)

Firearms instructor Todd Fletcher went from a competitive power lifter to a retiree managing pre-diabetes and high blood pressure, showing the impact of shift work on wellness

The best development we've made in emergency services isn't improved radio equipment, advanced body cameras, cutting-edge tools or high-tech vehicles. The best development in the past 50 years is an industry-wide focus on first responder health and wellness. It's true that on-the-job injuries and dangerous incidents continue to take their toll on our professions, but those numbers pale in comparison to the health issues that plague first responders. All first responders are at elevated risk for hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, sleep issues, cancer and immune system disorders.

To make matters worse, researchers have found that first responders have a shorter life expectancy than the average person in the United States. A study published in the *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience* found that first responders have a life expectancy that is significantly shorter than other professions, with many dying within a few years of retirement. When I retired in March 2020, I was determined not to contribute to these numbers. I wanted to enjoy my retirement long into old age.

The toll of shift work

During my career, I worked a variety of different shifts. The departments I served in used a rotating patrol schedule, where all patrol officers cycled through each shift over the year. Uniformed officers and supervisors rotated from day shift, to swing shift, to night shift every few months. There were exceptions, including my years spent on day shift in the Training Division and Criminal Investigations Division, but I spent over 20 years doing shift work.

Over this time, I went from a rookie police officer weighing 198 pounds to a retiree weighing 235 pounds. I transitioned from being a competitive power lifter to a retired police officer with two bad knees, two bad shoulders and a fused lower spine. My doctor diagnosed me as pre-diabetic, and I was taking prescription medication to manage an underactive thyroid and high blood pressure. While some of these issues are due to genetics or injuries outside of work, most are a result of the shift work lifestyle.

Sitting for hours in a patrol vehicle, the weight of a loaded duty belt and body armor, restrictive uniforms and going from zero to 100% effort without a warm up take their toll over time. This is common for first responders, no matter what shift you work, but when you add in the challenges of working night shifts, it becomes a ticking time bomb.

Working nights presents a unique set of challenges. Court appearances, training and other professional obligations are scheduled during the day because it's most convenient for command staff, judges, juries and instructors. This means that even if you sleep well during the day, your sleep gets interrupted by these events.

On my days off, my sleep schedule changed again so I could spend time with friends and family who didn't work nights. This helped me maintain my marriage and I thought I handled it well. I was wrong.

Sleep deprivation contributes to the negative medical issues I mentioned. It's also a factor in the medical problems I was having at the end of my career: being overweight, thyroid problems, hypertension and diabetes. Short sleep cycles or overall sleep deprivation led to excessive eating and cravings for high-caloric, high-carbohydrate foods.

Think about this: How often do people bring fresh fruit and vegetables to the station for everyone? It's mostly cookies, cake, pizza, candy and other junk food. We used to joke that if you wanted to get rid of something from home, leave it on a table for the night shift. The result was a net gain of more than 35 pounds and a reduction in muscle mass.



Lifestyle change

A year after retiring, I had dropped 10 pounds without making any changes other than keeping a regular sleep cycle, focusing on my eating habits and maintaining a workout program. No more snacking at 0300 hours or grazing the tables in the break room. No more call-outs or midday court appearances after working all night.

Then I reached a plateau. I was traveling more as a firearms instructor across the United States and Canada, which meant I was eating in restaurants more often. I wasn't ordering healthy food. Instead, I wanted to sample the unique foods of different regions. I was also consuming more beer and whiskey after classes. My doctor told me I had to get serious about my diet and losing weight.

This was the wake-up call I needed.

The first thing I did was reduce my overall caloric intake. Instead of eating until I was full, I tried to stop eating when I was satisfied. This sounds easy, but it was the most difficult change for me to make. I like food and enjoy intense flavors. Stopping when my hunger was satisfied instead of when I was stuffed full was a major challenge and required self-discipline.

I also hate wasting food, but the amount of food served in a restaurant is more than I should eat. Moreover, I don't like wasting food or paying too much for too little food. So, I would eat everything on the plate instead of wasting it or taking it as leftovers. Besides, leftovers don't work as well when you're living out of a hotel room for the week. Now, I choose smaller plates or something good as a leftover for lunch the next day.

My food choices also changed.

Now, I look for lean proteins and fresh vegetables as my primary choices. I have limited my consumption of breads, sweets and other high-carbohydrate foods. I haven't gone Keto, nor do I plan to, but I eat more lean protein and vegetables than before.

I wouldn't consider myself a heavy drinker, but I enjoy good beer and whiskey in the same way I enjoy good food. Beer and pizza are a match made in heaven. The intense flavors found in a good whiskey are a pleasure to be savored. The problem is ... beer and whiskey might taste great, but they are empty calories. When I traveled, having drinks with our instructors and students was a time-honored tradition. Waiting at the airport? Might as well kill some time in an airport bar. Now, my alcohol consumption is very restricted.

When it comes to workouts, I haven't changed much. I have committed to getting 40 minutes of aerobic exercise at least five days per week. I don't go to the gym and push heavy weights anymore due to back, shoulder and knee issues. However, I do body-weight, high-intensity interval training exercises three days per week. These have helped me maintain muscle mass and strength — even while I've lost weight.

The result

The result of these changes over the past seven months is that I'm down to 190 pounds. That's 45 pounds lost since retirement and 35 pounds lost since January 2024. My knees and back feel better, and I have more energy. Most importantly, my blood pressure and blood sugar are under control.

My goal isn't necessarily to lose more weight. My goal is to make the most of retirement. I had a good career and my family made a lot of sacrifices when I was doing shift work. Now, it's time to enjoy a healthy retirement, enjoy my range time and cherish the time I have with my beautiful bride.

*Thanks for reading,
we hope you found the information useful!*

**You can reach any of us by calling the
EAP Office at (608) 266-6561**

**External Available 24/7:
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To learn more about your external EAP services, please contact FEI at 1-800-236-7905 or sign in to [FEI/AllOneHealth member portal](#) (for instructions on how to create your account, please visit the [EAP website](#)).