

WorkingWell

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Princeton HealthCare System

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Build Strong Relationships in Blended Families

Building and maintaining healthy relationships can be difficult for any family, but in blended families the challenges may be even greater. The key is recognizing that the dynamics of a blended family, or step-family, are not the same as a primary family.

“Couples in blended families are often blindsided by the pressures and dynamics of a step-family,” says Christina Reeg, LCSW, EAP Specialist, Princeton HealthCare System Employee Assistance Program. “They enter the relationship thinking their first marriage prepared them — either by positive experience or negative — to recognize how to build a happy marriage and raise children. The fact is, step-parenting is not the same as parenting.”

Open Lines of Communication

It is important for spouses in a blended family to have a frank conversation about discipline, childcare, money and other aspects of day-to-day living before conflicts arise. Understanding each other's expectations and concerns provides a foundation for building a healthy relationship between spouses and with children.

Discussions should be held privately rather than in front of the children. This will help avoid added stress and allow for

total honesty. It is also essential that couples keep the lines of communication open for further discussions as issues arise.

A Unique Relationship

“In a first family, parents and children grow together and their relationships evolve slowly to accommodate subtle changes. When a step-parent enters the picture, he or she has to establish a place within the existing family structure and work to build healthy relationships within that structure,” says Reeg. “This takes time, and it takes support from your spouse.”

Being available and supportive is important; being overly enthusiastic may alienate step-children. When it comes to childrearing, spouses should work hand-in-hand, with the step-parent offering input and support while allowing the parent to assume the lead until a stable relationship exists between the step-parent and child. Every child and household is unique, so step-parents should allow children to set their own pace when it comes to building a relationship.

For help with blended family issues, call the Princeton HealthCare System Employee Assistance Program at 800.527.0035.

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Christina Reeg, LCSW

EAP Specialist, Princeton HealthCare System Employee Assistance Program



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Many people need assistance at some time in life. The Employee Assistance Program is a free, confidential counseling service offered by your employer to assist you, and those living with you, in resolving personal difficulties.

Manage Chronic Pain without Prescription Addiction

The rising abuse of prescription drugs — particularly pain medications — has been in the headlines for years. While pharmaceutical intervention can help alleviate pain for many individuals, the possibility of drug dependence is worth watching. Working closely with a physician will help ensure pain is being properly managed and will help identify any medication-related issues early.

Physical Dependency is Not Uncommon

“For people dealing with chronic pain, developing a physical dependency on prescription medication is not all that uncommon,” says Barbra Martin, LCSW, CEAP, SAP, an EAP Specialist at Princeton HealthCare System’s Employee Assistance Program. “Over time, the body can become accustomed to getting regular doses of a medication.”

As a result, patients may develop a tolerance for their medication, which reduces its effectiveness and can lead to a need for higher doses or a change in prescriptions to control pain. Patients may also experience “pseudo-addiction.” This may be evident when a person watches the clock until they can take another dose, takes medications not prescribed for them or deviates from dosage instructions. Some take illegal drugs or use deception to obtain medications.

Behaviors that may suggest possible opioid addiction include:

- Taking medication more frequently
- Taking higher doses than prescribed
- Regularly reporting prescriptions as lost or stolen
- Doctor shopping
- Using multiple pharmacies



“The difference between pseudo-addiction and addiction is that with pseudo-addiction the person will stop seeking drugs when his or her pain is effectively treated,” says Martin. “But this behavior can lead to true addiction, particularly if the patient has a personal or family history of substance abuse or has an underlying psychiatric disorder.”

Support is Available

While opioids are the most commonly prescribed treatments for chronic pain, non-opioid medications — including anti-epileptic drugs, antidepressants and antiarrhythmic drugs — may also effectively reduce pain for some patients. Physical or occupational therapy may help as well.

Dealing with chronic pain can be a challenge for both patients and their loved ones. Individual or group counseling can provide needed support when it comes to chronic health conditions and prescription drug-related concerns.

For help dealing with chronic pain and prescription pain medication issues, or to find a support group, call the Princeton HealthCare System Employee Assistance Program at 800.527.0035.

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EAP Specialist, PHCS Employee Assistance Program**

EAP addresses a wide range of concerns, including:

• Marital or Financial Issues • Alcohol or Drug Abuse • Depression or Anxiety • Work-related Stress

A professional counselor will work with you to provide an **absolutely confidential** assessment of the problem, as well as a suggested plan of action. If appropriate, we will coordinate a referral to a qualified resource in your community and provide ongoing support and follow-up.

For a free consultation or additional information, please contact the **Employee Assistance Program**.

Regain Control Over Urinary Frequency and Other Pelvic Issues



One of the most common medical conditions, especially for women, is the weakening of pelvic floor muscles. This weaker muscle tone can greatly affect quality of life by causing a frequent need to urinate, urinary leakage and other conditions. Fortunately, in most cases, these problems can be reversed.

“For women, the primary causes for pelvic floor muscle problems are pregnancy, childbirth, age and obesity,” says Heather van Raalte, MD, Chair of University Medical Center of Princeton’s Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. “For men, prostate cancer surgery, bladder or bowel problems, and heavy lifting or high-impact exercising may weaken pelvic muscles.”

While the most common problems relate to weakening muscles, there are also cases where the pelvic floor muscles fail to relax properly. This can prevent the bladder and bowel from properly emptying and may make intercourse painful.

A Delicate Subject

“Women and men who are coping with pelvic floor issues are often hesitant to acknowledge the problem to anyone, including their doctor, because they feel embarrassed,” says Dr. van Raalte, who is board certified in obstetrics, gynecology, female pelvic medicine and reconstructive

See Your Doctor If You Experience:

- Frequent urination
- Leakage when sneezing, coughing, laughing or exercising
- Painful urination
- Difficulty urinating
- Recurring bladder infections

surgery. “But it’s important to keep in mind that your doctor has heard it all before, and the condition will likely continue to worsen unless it is diagnosed and treated.”

Seeking medical attention is important, since a proper diagnosis will determine what should be done to resolve the problem. If an infection, inflammation or

underlying disease is identified, it can be properly treated with medication or medical intervention, including surgery if needed.

If the problem is purely muscular, a healthcare professional can teach specific exercises that can strengthen pelvic floor muscles. “Although people often think their exercise regime addresses the pelvic floor muscles, these muscles are difficult to isolate without guidance”, says Dr. van Raalte. The Pelvic Health Rehabilitation program at UMCP provides individualized evaluation and treatment for pelvic floor dysfunction.

To find a physician affiliated with Princeton HealthCare System, visit princetonhcs.org or call 1.888.PHCS4YOU (1.888.742.7496).

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Heather van Raalte, MD
Chair, UMCP Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology



Keep Kids Healthy This Winter

Children get an estimated six to 10 colds per year, mostly during winter. Fortunately, there are simple steps to help prevent these common illnesses, so families can spend more time sledding and ice skating and less time sniffing and sneezing.

“It can be challenging to keep children healthy any time of year, but during the cold weather months it can be particularly difficult,” says Bert Mandelbaum, MD, Chairman of University Medical Center of Princeton’s Department of Pediatrics. “Everyone is cooped up in closer quarters, and that makes it easier for germs to spread, so when one person in the family comes down with something everyone else has a good chance of getting it too.”

The most common illnesses facing kids in the winter include:

- **colds**, which generally run from seven to 10 days
- **bronchiolitis**, a viral respiratory infection causing nasal congestion, coughing, low-grade fever and wheezing
- **flu**, which generally comes on quicker than a cold and usually involves a high fever
- **pneumonia**, which sometimes begins as a cold and then worsens to include a high fever and worsening cough
- **strep throat**, which can cause high fever, severe throat pain and white, yellow or red dots in mouth

Tips for Healthy Kids

- Wash hands regularly
- Don’t share food or drinks
- Cover mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing
- Eat well
- Get plenty of sleep
- Stay active

The Best Advice

“Make sure your child gets a flu shot before the flu season begins,” says Dr. Mandelbaum, who is board certified in pediatrics. “Beyond that, make sure kids wash their hands frequently and cough or sneeze into the crook of their elbows rather than into their hands, which will only transfer the germs to another surface.”

Maintaining a healthy diet, getting plenty of sleep and getting enough physical activity are also important to keep everyone healthy not only during winter, but throughout the year.

For help finding a PHCS-affiliated pediatrician, call 1.888.PHCS4YOU (1.888.742.7496) or visit www.princetonhcs.org.

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