

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

Relationships

The quality of your relationships with other people influences how emotionally resilient you can be in the face of an emotional or physical crisis. In general, the more quality social support you can draw upon from family and friends, the more flexible and resilient you can be in stressful situations. The people who really know you will care for you during tough times. Having a support system in place will give you a greater sense of confidence in your abilities and will allow you to approach life more optimistically. Because your relationships are your source of quality social support, learning to care for and properly manage your relationships is an essential skill for quickly bouncing back from adversity.

The ability to create and maintain enduring friendships and love appears to be important for maintaining physical and emotional health in addition to resiliency. In general, optimistic people tend to be in better health than pessimistic people. In large part, this health benefit appears to be due to the fact that optimistic people have better social supports (better caring relationships) than pessimistic people. Studies have shown that middle-aged people who have at least one friend they can turn to when they are upset have better overall health than people without such a friend. Similarly, single people are at a greater risk for depression than married people, and people who withdraw from social contact when they become ill tend to become sicker. Seen in this light, having a supportive group of friends and family is a major asset for maintaining good physical health. If you want to maximize your opportunity to stay in good health, find time for close friendships and work hard to maintain them.

Relationships are living and somewhat fragile things that require ongoing attention and cultivation if they are to remain healthy and capable of providing you with support. In order to maintain healthy relationships, it is vital to know:

- How they work and what is expected of you as a partner in a relationship
- To not take them for granted
- To make commitments and put in the time necessary to keep them in good shape

We'll cover these ideas as we continue.

An Inclusive Definition

When you think about relationships you are in, what probably comes to mind first is your significant other (your spouse or romantic partner or lack thereof). You might not think immediately about the many other people in your life such as family members, friends, clients, sales people, bosses, co-workers, fellow worshipers, etc., but you are in relationships with those people too. In fact, every time you communicate any sort of information to anyone else, you are forming a real, if transient relationship with that person. You can receive social support from all sorts of relationship, but there are real differences in the quality of support you can expect to receive from an acquaintance versus from a spouse, family member or old friend.

Quality Over Quantity

It is the quality of your relationships, their depth and degree of mutual commitment and not their number that determines how supportive they can be for you. Only people who genuinely care for you will be willing to put themselves out for you when you find yourself stressed or in a needy place. One or a few committed high-quality relationships are worth far more to you in terms of their supportive potential than dozens of superficial low-quality relationships.

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Your Ability To Ask For Help

The ease and gracefulness with which you are able to ask for and accept help and support from relationships also factors into how your relationships may benefit your emotional resilience. If you have a very difficult time accepting help from others and tend to push help away when it is offered, you are unlikely to benefit from that help. On the other hand, if you are able to ask for help when others might not know you need it, you may benefit from support that would not have otherwise been spontaneously offered.