# Mind Matters



#### BALL STATE UNIVERSITY COUNSELING PRACTICUM CLINIC

### Positive Psychology- Finding the Positives in your Daily Life

By: Elisabeth Nickels, M.A., Ed.M.

Positive psychology is a field that focuses on human strengths and creating happiness through meaning.

Winter and the holiday season are on the way. While the holidays can mean family, fun, food and joy, it can also be a time of stress, chaos and loneliness for some. Whether you are looking forward to the season or not, using some of these tools from the field of positive psychology can help make the season a little brighter and more meaningful for you and your family.



Be Social – Studies have shown that social contact increases our well-being. Holidays can often mean more family time but can also mean getting together with friends or reconnecting by phone or computer with far away loved ones. Make an effort to connect with others, even for a short visit or a quick "hello, I'm thinking about you."

**Savor** – The holidays can feel fast-paced, with so much going on it can be difficult to take a moment and truly appreciate the good in life Try to slow down and savor your favorite experiences. Of course it can be a delicious food or treat, but you can also savor a moment, a smell, a song, or even a person's company. Help kids learn to savor experiences, too, by talking about their favorite parts of a place or activity.

**Strengths** – While the holidays can be all about giving and receiving things, focusing on our "inner gifts" such as bravery, curiosity or humor can help bring meaning and happiness to ourselves and others. Take a moment to focus on something you like about yourself. Consider a New Year's resolution to use a strength in a new way in the coming year, such as using your creativity to craft fun activities with your children.

Gratitude – It is easy to be thankful for gifts we are given, but gratitude for simple, everyday things, such as a warm hug, can increase happiness with no need for gifts. At the end of each day, try to think about three things you were thankful for that day. They can be anything from a smile or kind word given, to your pet, your family or your work. This easy exercise has been shown to

increase overall happiness when practiced daily.

**Do for Others** – We like to give gifts, not only to receive gifts back, but also because it makes us feel good to make someone else happy. It can be easy to fall into traps at the holidays of thinking about what we have or don't have in terms of money, things, love, or our health. Turning your focus toward others and helping them makes you feel good, purposeful, and often more grateful for what you have. You can shift the focus from what you don't have onto what you do have to offer others, which can take many forms.

Most importantly, be kind to yourself this holiday season. The holidays can bring on a range of feelings and stresses, and these strategies can offer some relief from the winter hustle and bustle.

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For more information on Positive Psychology, see <a href="http://www.positivepsychology.org">http://www.positivepsychology.org</a>.

### Featured Wellness Issue: Stress and Your Immune System

By: Kevin T Cannon, M.A.

With all the demands of the holiday season -- parties, shopping, cooking, cleaning, and, of course, the McGalliard traffic, it is no surprise that this is a really stressful time of the year. Stress during the cold winter months can be even more harmful than stress throughout the rest of the year.

First of all, it is important to know feeling stressed isn't always as bad as it sounds. Stress can give us that push to get things done that we Keep some comedy in your life! need to get done, such as studying for a test or getting started on that project at work. In small doses, stress can be helpful. However, when you feel too stressed, it can also make it difficult to accomplish anything. When we feel anxious, we have different kinds of "stress hormones" released in our body that increases our heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing. When we

are under a lot of stress for a long period of time, it can increase our risk for physical health problems, such as hypertension, obesity, infections, colds, and the flu.

#### **Tips for Managing Holiday Stress:**

Spend time outdoors when the sun is out. Sunlight aides in the production of chemicals important to maintaining a good mood!

Keep active. As little as a 30 minute brisk walk everyday decreases anxiety and improves sleep.

Laughing releases hormones that improve mood and prevent other, more stress inducing hormones from being released.

Go tech-free during holiday gettogethers. Cell phones and other gadgets constantly pull our attention away from the present, causing more stress. Instead turn the phone off for a few hours and enjoy family and friends!

Cut down the to-do list and allow your family, spouse, and friends help when they can. Instead of sending cards that gather dust on the mantle and eventually find their way to the trash, call everyone on your list and have a chat!

With cold season just around the corner, be sure to find time to de-stress and reach out to your family and friends. Be flexible and understanding. Don't completely abandon healthy habits like exercising and healthy eating. Stop and enjoy the sights and sounds of the season and the company of others, and of course, consider reaching out for professional counseling if you need it!



### **Monthly Guidance**

Dear MG.

Three months ago, I ended my relationship with my girlfriend of four years, and I am having a tough time getting over her. Most of my friends tell me I need to move on and "put myself out there," but I'm having a difficult time doing this. I've thought about online dating, but I just don't think I'm ready. Is this normal, or am I moving too slow? With the holidays coming up, I find myself thinking of my past relationship more and wishing we were still together.

Sincerely, Single and Not Ready to Mingle Dear Single and Not Ready to Mingle,

Going through a break-up is always difficult, and you were dating this person for awhile. It sounds like you really cared for her, and after only three months, this break-up is still a relatively recent one. It is okay to give yourself some time if you are not ready to "put yourself out there." Your friends want to see you happy, and I'm guessing that is why they are pressuring you to start dating again. Know it comes from a good place, but also know when to set boundaries and simply explain to your friends you are not ready.

This can also be a good time to look at your personal growth as well. Take time to think about your values, where you stand on certain relationship issues, and what kind of person you see yourself with in your next relationship.

The holidays can feel like a lonely time, especially if you feel broken-hearted, but there are ways to keep yourself preoccupied and enjoy the time with friends and family. Make a point to be alone when you need to be alone, and call a friend or family member when you need to talk to someone. Do activities you enjoy, from walking your dog to going to the movies. Just remember to be kind to yourself and take care of yourself in the process.

Monthly Guidance [MG] is here to answer questions about relationships and personal issues. If you would like to ask MG a question, you may call the Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic and leave an anonymous message for MG. Or, you may send your question in writing to the address on the back page of this newsletter. If you choose to ask MG a question, the identity of the person submitting the question will remain completely anonymous. Please keep in mind when writing your questions that space is limited. Due to time constraints, MG cannot answer all questions, but will try to choose questions that are representative of a broad range of issues. If your question does not get answered and you would like to discuss it, please call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047.

Please be advised that MG is neither a crisis/emergency service nor a correspondence therapy service. If you need either immediate attention or ongoing therapy, call Ball State Counseling Practicum Clinic at (765) 285-8047.

#### Featured Mental Health Issue:

#### The Winter Blues: Seasonal Depression and Things You Can Do

By: Craig Deken, M.A.

Winter can be a time to play in the snow, drink hot chocolate, and take vacations from work and school. While some people enjoy this time of year, others may dread the change in season. During these winter months, you, or someone you are close to, may feel really sad, tired, have low energy, cravings for foods like breads and pastas, and you may even have trouble enjoying doing things you typically like to do for fun.

We all experience some of those things at one point or another, especially during the busy holiday months. However, for some people these feelings of sadness can become problematic and get in the way of our ability to live life, impacting our work, school, and personal life. You may notice you are more cranky or tired than normal when the season changes, and you may just not feel like yourself.

Feeling this way every year at the same time is often called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), or Seasonal Depression. Changes in the environment that occur around this time every year may be what leads to people feeling this way. Examples of things that may cause SAD include: not seeing enough

sunlight, not being as physically active as you are during warmer months, and increased stress that may be related to holidays. Other things can impact this as well. For example, women and younger people, along with people who have a family or personal history of depression or another mood disorder, have a greater chance of feeling depressed during the cold winter months.

Luckily, there are some things everyone can do to beat the winter blues. Even if you do not feel depressed during the winter you may benefit from the 5 tips below for helping you feel your best:

- Try to get outside as much as possible while it is sunny, even if it is cold. Because lack of sunlight may be a factor in SAD, getting sunlight may prevent or reduce symptoms.
- Get plenty of exercise. Regular exercise increases the production of good chemicals in the body and increases energy levels overall.
- Spend time with people you care about. Being isolated can cause you to feel worse and think too much about feeling unhappy.
- Do things you enjoy. Having

- activities you are good at or simply make you happy can help prevent depression.
- Make sure you are eating healthy and getting enough Vitamin D. Our bodies need certain nutrients to be their best, and you are more likely to feel physically and mentally worse if you are not getting enough vitamins.



If you are not feeling better, start feeling worse, you are experiencing these things all year, or have thoughts of harming yourself, please talk to a mental health professional and get support immediately. Counseling and medications are shown to help people feel better and overcome Seasonal Affective Disorder.

#### Stress Buster Word Search



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BOUNDARIES
BUDGET
COUNSELING
DELEGATE
EXERCISE
LAUGH
MEDITATE
MODERATION

PLAN PREPARE PRIORITIZE RELAX ROUTINE SELFCARE SIMPLIFY

#### **Featured Profile**

#### Katie Rice, M.A.

### How did you decide to pursue your PhD in Counseling Psychology?

At the very beginning of undergrad, I was determined to become a medical doctor. Through the convincing of a few friends, I agreed to join our local volunteer fire department in order to gain medical experience by earning certification as an Emergency Medical Technician – Basic (EMT-B). As I became more involved in my fire department, I started to realize I found more interest in the conversations with the patients we treated than providing the actual medical care. After completing much of the pre-medical coursework, I eventually realized medical school was not for me, and I had more interest in the world of psychology. I took more psychology courses, decided my values matched best with Counseling Psychology, applied to graduate school, and the rest started to fall in place! In general though, I am continually impressed by the amount of psychological resilience and strength in the human connection, which I think is the fuel for what we do in counseling.

# Are there any populations that you especially enjoy working with in counseling?

I love counseling children and families. Personally, I think providing counseling services to children gives another boost to help them get on the right path. I hope to be at least one positive influence in all of the lives of the children I work with. By providing early intervention, I also hope to assist in reducing later psychological distress.



### What has been your most influential work experience at Ball State?

So far, I would have to say Camp Achieve, which is a summer camp here on Ball State's campus for children diagnosed with autism. There are very few summer camp opportunities in this area for children diagnosed with autism, so this camp provides a very pivotal role for our surrounding community. Our Social Skills group worked on general social skills development and feeling identification. The results we saw in just 5.5 weeks were amazing! By the end of camp, practically every single camper was able to verbalize his or her current feelings. Some parents were almost in tears when explaining how their kids had never before been able to engage in this kind of communication, especially not spontaneously. This shows that what we do really matters!



#### How does Camp Achieve help children?

This year, we used a "Green Lantern" theme for our group. Every morning, we would ask the campers how they were feeling. Each camper then would pick a ring that was color-coded for different emotions (red as angry, blue as sad, etc.). This allowed the campers to recognize their feeling states, practice verbalizing their feelings, and engage in interpersonal dialogue about why they were experiencing this particular feeling. With practice, we eventually started having the campers ask each other how they were feeling. Children with

autism often struggle with very basic social skills so this work was a huge development. We also used a lot of yoga to help the campers transition between activities, which was another hit this year.

### What do you hope to do after you graduate?

I want to enter clinical practice counseling children and families, likely in the outpatient setting. I've also started to really enjoy assessment so I may want to provide evaluation services in some capacity as well. And since it led me toward my career, I hope to some day be able to get back into the volunteer firefighting world! Perhaps this time adding some disaster mental health work, too.



Katie Rice, current doctoral student in the Department of Counseling Psychology

### Featured Youth Issue: Play Therapy

### What is Play Therapy?

By: Katie Rice, M.A.

Have you ever wondered how therapy works for young children? Play therapy is one approach that serves children (typically between the ages of 3-12) who have not yet developed the verbal abilities that adults typically use in therapy. Since very young children cannot sit down and tell you all about the complexities of their troubles, play therapy allows the child to instead play out his or her concerns and use play to resolve problems. In play of communication, or how the child shows his or her troubles since he or she cannot always fully explain those troubles verbally. The child typically will repeat themes in his or her play until mastery is achieved, or the child feels the concerning issue is resolved. Over the course of therapy, the counselor pays attention to themes that the child demonstrates in his or her play, and assists the child in resolving his or her troubles.



#### So how does it work?

As with any therapy, it is important that the child, adult, and therapist all agree on an approach. So, at the start of therapy, the play therapist usually will explain to the child's parents how therapy will be conducted. The therapist will explain that been achieved? play therapy allows the child to use his or her therapy time to resolve their current difficulties at his or her own pace, while the therapist pays attention to and reflects the themes that periodically resurface. Together, the child, his or her parents, and the therapist will agree on goals to accomplish during therapy.

Before any work can be done, there has to

be a trusting relationship built between the child and therapist. So, at the beginning of play therapy, the therapist will introduce the playroom to the child and his or her parents. The child is given time to explore the room, checking out each of the available toys. He or she is then given the freedom to choose whatever toys seem the most interesting.

Gradually, the child will enter the working stage, where the majority of the progress is made in play therapy. Here, the therapist will heighten and clarify major themes that the therapy, the child's play is the mechanism child has demonstrated. The therapist might reflect these themes back to the child to draw out the child's attention and problem solving skills. The play therapist often will use interpretation to gradually challenge the child the major cues include: rapidly changing in resolving their struggles. Interpretations typically are presented in this order, from most basic to more complex:

> Reflections - expand the child's vocabulary, map the therapeutic progress

Present Pattern - identify repetitions in play, help the child label their experiences, allow the child to realize their behavior is meaningful

Simple Dynamic – connecting the child's thoughts/feelings/motives within therapy

Generalized Dynamic – connecting the child's therapy behavior to his or her behavior outside of therapy (generalizes contexts, apply therapy lessons)

Genetic – providing direct insight to the child about problematic behavior (solidifying lessons)

### So how do I know when all goals have

It is important for the play therapist to work with the child and his or her parents to understand when the child is ready to "graduate" from therapy. Usually children will start to show "termination cues" when they are feeling their major conflicts are resolved. The play therapist should be sensitive to when these cues start to surface.



are a variety of possible cues, but some of themes (less repetition of the same themes), verbally stating he or she is bored or unsure what to do next (signaling they have resolved most of their initial troubles), and an increase in positive behavior outside of therapy (such as better grade reports and/or less conflict at home). Most importantly, the child will have accomplished all of his or her therapy goals, and the child (as well as his or her parents) is feeling much better!





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### **Mind Matters**

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We're on the Web! http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/ CollegesandDepartments/Teachers/ Departments/CounselingPsych/ Practicum.aspx

## Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic: Serving the Community Since 1969

#### Mission

- The clinic is a training and research facility for the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services.
- The clinic provides highquality, low-cost psychological services to the Delaware County community and beyond.

#### **Service Providers**

- Over 50 graduate student counselors under the supervision of faculty.
- Faculty supervisors are licensed psychologists and counselors.

#### Services Offered

- Individual Counseling
- Couple Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Child/Adolescent Counseling
- Group Counseling with a focus on:
  - Parenting
    Social skills
    Anger control
    Issues of concern to
    children and adolescents

#### **Hours of Operation**

- August-May (Spring & Fall)
   9 AM to 9 PM M-Th
   9 AM to 12 PM Fri
- May-August (Summer)
   9 AM to 8 PM M-Th
   Closed on Friday
- The clinic is closed during university vacations and holidays.

All clients have the right to receive timely, competent counseling services consistent with the ethical principles and guidelines established by professional organizations. All counseling services provided at the Counseling Practicum Clinic are guided by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association, the American School Counseling Association, the American Rehab Counselina Association, the General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services, and the Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Counseling Psychologists.