ASSESS YOUR DISTRESS: In addition to life situations and events, behavioral mental health concerns like depression, anxiety or substance use may impact our well-being. In fact, nearly half of us will experience such a condition at some point in our lives. Although these conditions are treatable, only about 40% of people who need help ask for it. Fear of being perceived negatively, lack of information, privacy concerns or access to resources are common obstacles. As part of Refresh From Stress, we encourage you to take the courageous step to reach out for assistance or request coaching on how to support a loved one or colleague who is struggling. As an Emory employee, you have access to free, anonymous self-assessment tools @ https://screening.mentalhealthscreening.org/EMORY. In addition, FSAP or ComPsych offers free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, and referral services. Call FSAP @ 404-727-9355 (WELL) or ComPsych @ 844-449-6541 (please note: ComPsych services are for Emory Decatur, Hillandale and LTAC staff only).

SAY YES TO LESS: Taking good care of you, means the people in your life will receive the best of you, rather than what's left of you. - Carl Bryan

Although our work, ambitions and relationships are often major sources of purpose, fun and connection, we can sometimes feel drained by them. We may automatically agree to requests out of guilt, habit or to avoid conflict, and often take on too much, becoming tired and resentful. Yet, ‘saying yes’ is often rewarded by achievements, pleasing others, and/or financial gain. The act of setting boundaries is not about being selfish...it IS about communicating our needs and sustaining our health and well-being. Give yourself permission to pause and breathe before automatically reacting to a request or saying yes. Ask yourself:

A. When am I prone to saying yes automatically and how does it affect me?
B. What tasks are necessary for my self-care, work-life and relationships?
C. What priorities contribute to my well-being?
D. What responsibilities from Question A can I delegate, limit or negotiate to allow more time for what’s most important?

If you learn to “Say Yes to LESS,” you may just find MORE for yourself and others!

PRACTICE POSITIVE SELF-TALK: Our minds naturally create streams of ideas, feelings and sensations. While we don’t always notice, these streams produce “self-talk,” which consist of thoughts, reactions and beliefs. We may not say these out loud, yet they often drive how we feel or act. Examples range from “This dessert is delicious!” to “I wish my kids would hurry up,” to “I’m the unluckiest person.” If you get to know your “self-talk,” you’ll be more aware of your mind’s flow and where it takes you. Plus, you can create a more helpful flow of thoughts with patience and practice. Try this:

• Set aside 15 minutes of uninterrupted time in a place where you can focus on yourself.
• For the first 5 minutes, sit quietly and without judging or editing yourself, jot down thoughts that come to mind. Notice urges to push away or hold onto thoughts, while still allowing them. Pay attention to any sense of relief that comes while writing.
• For the next 5 minutes, be curious and write your observations about your list. Is your mind busy with planning, worrying, enjoying, criticizing, blaming, etc.?
• For the final 5 minutes, imagine words that help you create an encouraging flow of self-talk. Start a list of things to “say” to yourself throughout the rest of the day, such as “I’ll take one moment at a time.” Add to your list over time.
EMBRACE CHANGE: When experiencing changes that are beyond our control, we may experience waves of shock, worry, sadness, anger and/or bargaining. Even changes we seek like promotions may come with worries about less time for other things. Consider these tips to help you embrace change:

- Breathe. Notice your feelings and thoughts as if they were waves in the ocean OR passing cars ("I’m feeling anxious and noticing thoughts that I can’t handle this."). Allow the feelings and thoughts to come and go and decide what you want to do in response (e.g., you cannot change the ocean wave or passing cars, but you may decide to body surf or change lanes).
- Change and loss beyond our control can challenge us emotionally, yet still offer choices. “I’m having sad feelings right now, however, I can choose to reach out vs. isolate myself.”
- Remember that even ‘positive’ changes have a flipside. Allow different feelings to co-exist.
- When life is consistent, practice flexibility with your comfort zone. Take a new route to work or try a new hobby. Consider a different point of view.

The best news is that, in the long run, our response to change matters more than the circumstances surrounding it. If you are feeling overwhelmed or stuck, don’t hesitate to reach out for assistance.

ENHANCE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: How often do you wonder “Why would he/she do that?” Or, “How do I handle this?” Emotional intelligence (EI) tries to answer these questions. EI is about becoming increasingly aware of feelings and how to channel them, plus understanding and responding to others more effectively.

High EI is a key factor in resilience AND better relationships, job performance, teamwork and creativity. Good news - EI can improve with practice. Here are tips to boost your EI:

1. Write five feelings you experience daily for a week. Refer to this feelings inventory. Which ones are you more or less likely to notice and express or attempt to hide? How?
2. Watch a favorite TV program or movie with the sound muted. What feelings do you notice based on body language and facial expressions? Ask someone trusted what they notice about your non-verbal communication in different situations.
3. If someone upsets you, choose to pause and breathe vs. reacting harshly. Do your feelings of hurt or anger lead you to form conclusions or judgments?
4. Learn more about EI here, or view Whil’s EI videos on Healthy Emory Connect under Programs (earn 200 points).

EXPAND YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM: Improving the quality of your support system is key to increasing resilience. Benefits include lowering stress hormones and blood pressure, enhancing mood and sleep, and progressing towards goals. Here are a few ways to strengthen your network:

- Switch your social mode. If you usually wait for others to approach you, initiate conversation. If you are typically more talkative, ask open-ended questions and listen.
- Join an online group or connect with someone with common interests (e.g., book club, hiking, etc.)
- Speak to someone every day who is outside of your immediate circle at work and home.
- Get to know one thing that is important to your coworkers, friends and family members.

PRACTICE LETTING GO: “Can’t you just let it go?” your brother says to you after listening to you talk about how disappointed you are with your friend again. In response, you feel defensive, sad and frustrated. Contrary to how “let it go” is often used, it is not a decision to simply “get over” whatever is troubling you. Letting go does involve discovering how and why you respond to emotional experiences AND choose where to expend your energy. Here are some ways to practice “letting go.”

1. **Notice, Hold & Release.** Try with smaller irritations like traffic. Note feelings and thoughts; locate body tension. “At this moment, I notice frustration and feel tightness in my shoulders.” Hold your breath and tense up even more for a few seconds until its slightly uncomfortable. Then, relax and shake out your muscles and take a deep breath. Repeat as needed.

2. **Write & Reflect.** If an old hurt or grudge comes up, write down a word or phrase about it and ask yourself, “How has my response to the hurt OR grudge affected me? How has it protected me or held me back? What have I learned from it? How have I successfully let go of hurts/grudges in the past?”

3. **Let’s Go With It (new take on “let it go”).** If the painful feeling (“it”) suddenly disappeared, what might you feel or think? Is there one thing you would do differently or more? Even with “it” present, could you still do that one thing?

Reach out if you need more assistance with “letting go” or “going with it.”

Sources:

BOUNCE BACK BETTER: It turns out that people who identify goals, divide them into small steps, write them down and share them with someone are MUCH more likely to recover from distress and stick to healthy habits. The “**Bounce Back Better**” action plan can help you apply and refresh the skills, activities and support you found most beneficial during *Refresh From Stress*. Take advantage of some of the great resources on page 2. **Complete it, share it and review your plan and progress regularly!**

Source: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200307/the-goals-guide-us