

News Release

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Can You Learn to Be Optimistic?

Tampa, Fla. (January 2014). Have you ever felt as if pretty much everything in your life wasn't going very good? Have you experienced getting up in the morning with a groan and going to bed at night with a sigh thinking that life that day was just plain difficult? Do you believe that there are really two ways of looking at life? We call these "ways" optimism and pessimism. Believe it or not, but we are not born to follow one or the other path. We actually learn to view the world from a certain perspective and that perspective is often reinforced by others and by our own self talk. Sometimes we learn to be "helpless." Sometimes we learn to "give up." At the same time, others facing the same situation develop a "can do" attitude and use the same event that for us is painful as a tool for growth. It all comes down to paying attention to what we tell ourselves. Am I saying that we can "learn" to be optimistic?

According to what I have learned from Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D. in his book Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life - that is exactly what I am saying! We can start with some simple steps like beginning to recognize our own "explanatory style" or what it is that we say to ourselves when we experience any type of set back or stressful event in our lives. We can begin to catch ourselves using negative phrases (both when said out loud and thought quietly within ourselves), use a thought-stopping technique to stop the automatic self talk, and then challenge and rephrase what we are telling ourselves.

Another helpful book that addresses how our self talk and expectations lead to negative emotions is A Guide to Rational Living by Albert Ellis and Robert Harper. Here the authors

address how, by holding on to a specific set of beliefs and/or expectations, we can “set ourselves up” for either a positive or negative outcome.

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing confidential free professional assistance 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. Remember that you or a dependent may contact the EAP regarding any concern that you might have – you don’t have to wait until a problem becomes big to seek help. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. So, if you are concerned about how you tend to view life and are not sure where to turn or what you should do, help is just a phone call away.

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm’s diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and

nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.