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This is Eastern Michigan University's *Career Corner*. Here are your hosts, Brad Minton and Logann Dolan.

Welcome back to the *Career Corner* podcast for the surprise bonus episode. And I'm here as always with my co-host Logann Dolan. And as we cover relevant topics related to job search strategies and considerations, we would be remiss if we didn't acknowledge an important X factor. Today's bonus episode is all about mental health and well-being.

As a global society no one is immune and to varying degrees we're all under stress. Many of us are socially isolated, physically sick, financially strapped, and energy drained. And if we're not mindful of our self care it can wreak havoc on our emotional health.

Absolutely, Brad. And if we're not taking care of our mental health and well-being we can't expect to be our best while looking for job opportunities or working on career development. So if we neglect this critical piece of our care then our performance can suffer greatly which has the potential to create some unnecessary setbacks.

So with this thought in mind, it was so important to address this topic with one of our amazing professionals on the frontlines of mental health treatment and advocacy right here at Eastern. Please welcome to the podcast, from EMU's Counseling and Psychological Services department, Lindsey Gerard. Lindsey is a licensed social worker and we're so happy to have her. Welcome, Lindsey.

Thank you. It's good to be here.

Lindsey, thank you so much again for being with us today. And we first wanted to start out by asking how you and your team are doing. And with what's been happening over the last two months with this pandemic, what has life been like for your staff?

Yeah, I think it's difficult to pinpoint a few key points here as the world has felt so much shift in response to COVID-19. As far as client concerns go for us, we've seen an increase in anxiety and grieving in many forms. Specifically, as is true for the entire world right now, our students are struggling more with fear related to their health and their future.

As we've all been living in what can feel like a perpetual stage of uncertainty, this means more worry about finances, food stability, internships, job searching, and next steps in all areas like you were

referencing earlier. And naturally this is taking away from people's ability to stay grounded in the present because they're focusing more on bracing for what's to come.

Of course, grief has been at the forefront of this experience as well because there has been so much loss. I think it's safe to say everyone has lost something as a result of COVID-19. Many people have lost family members due to the virus and many more people have lost the ability to engage in important events and milestones including graduations, weddings, and many others.

An additional layer of loss has been experienced in the loss of rituals and traditions. For those who have lost loved ones during this time, they've been unable to engage in ritualistic ways of grieving that have historically provided some sense of comfort. So not only is grief at the forefront for most people right now, but we're also unable to process it and cope with it as we typically would. This change in dynamic and loss of normalcy has proven to be challenging for all of us.

At CAPS the pandemic has meant shifting to remote work which includes doing tele counseling with our students instead of meeting in person. We're very thankful to be able to continue engaging with our students, but as you can imagine tele counseling comes with a host of adjustments to be made for all involved. As we've transitioned to providing tele counseling it has been important that we emphasize impact on confidentiality.

Since we're no longer doing sessions in our offices and students are receiving counseling in their respective locations, it has become imperative that students understand the importance of protecting their confidentiality as much as we do. This has meant having intentional and informative conversations with our students about why their confidentiality is valued.

So, Lindsey, with all of those things in mind, what are maybe some specific strategies you might suggest for students regarding self care during this time?

Yeah, so at CAPS we love that the conversation around self care has become more common in recent times. If there's ever been an important time for prioritizing self care now is it. It's important for our students to remember that self care does not only mean taking bubble baths or doing face masks or bingeing a Netflix show, rather the type of self care we all need right now is structure.

With all the changes that have resulted from COVID-19, we're experiencing a significantly lower amount of external motivators in our daily lives. What I mean by that is we don't have to be to work or school by a certain time, we don't have as much of a schedule as we're used to, and we're not being exposed to nearly as many people to help hold us accountable.

So in order to make up for this we have to get creative and creating more intrinsic or internal motivation for ourselves. The best way to do this is to create more external structure for ourselves by creating and sticking to routines. Students should try to replicate as best they can what they typically do in the morning, at lunchtime, in the evening, and especially before bed as sleep has become increasingly tricky lately.

So this means set an alarm, wash your face, have your morning coffee, plan your meals, set deadlines for yourself, meditate after lunch, go for a run, light a candle and read before bed, whatever routines you've found most beneficial in the past are more important than ever right now. They will make things feel more predictable and dependable during this time of uncertainty.

And yes, it's important to mention that maintaining routines is difficult. This is very true. But the good thing is that starting is the most difficult part. Once you start and begin receiving the natural rewards and benefits of your decisions you're more likely to continue engaging in desired behaviors. The best way to incorporate structure is to do it gradually, pick one routine to start per week and continue adding more once you get the hang of each one. If you try to incorporate too many goals at once you're more likely to feel overwhelmed and abandon ship.

The other point I want to speak to is balance. When it comes to overall well-being it is important to take a holistic approach by investing in several areas of our lives. One helpful trick is to make sure every day you're doing something to promote your mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social well-being. Of course, this will look different for everyone but balance is equally important for all of us that are enduring a pandemic right now.

And lastly, in regards to self care, I wanted to provide a resource that we've worked on at CAPS during this time to be able to provide our students with some support. What we did is we created a care package, a virtual care package, and this is available on our website, on our Facebook, and on our Instagram. And the care package just has a lot of different ideas for prioritizing holistic well-being like I was talking about before.

So you'll find activities related to physical well-being, emotional well-being, ideas for exercises, virtual coloring, meditation, all sorts of things. So we want students to know that that is there for them as an extra resource because we've all been staying at home for quite a while now and it can be easy to feel like you're running out of ideas to keep things exciting or to keep yourself busy and to keep prioritizing yourself. So that is there for students if they would like to access it.

Yeah, those are really valuable tips and I know there's a lot of individuals out there struggling with practicing self care so thank you for sharing those. And it's obvious that the message today is that we're all human and we're all subject to experiencing varying degrees of psychological stress, us included, and recognizing that it's OK to feel this way and it's OK if things aren't really OK.

So now being a college student already comes with embedded stress and this situation has certainly come with a whole new entire level of stress. So with that being said, what would you suggest students do differently to prioritize their mental health during this time?

Yeah, I think that that question is so important because, you know, like you said, globally we're all enduring this and most things have become significantly more challenging during this time. So it makes sense that tending to mental health would look different right now. We're enduring unprecedented circumstances and it's impacting everyone in some way. The way that I see it, this really highlights and increases the importance of practicing acceptance during this time.

We don't know what is coming next and most things are difficult to predict right now. If we're not intentional about incorporating acceptance, this reality can start to feel unbearable. So what does this mean? Again, it would not make sense given the circumstances for everyone to continue trying to function as optimally as possible, although this is likely what most people are aiming for.

Acceptance is key. It is important to accept what the world is enduring is difficult so our daily lives are going to be more difficult as well. It is important to accept that we don't know how to prepare when we don't know what is coming. So what can we do? We can shift our focus to what we can control which boils down to practicing intentionality in our personal lives.

We can't control the virus as a whole and we can't control our family members or friends' reactions to it, but we can make logical and informed decisions for ourselves, which brings us right back to incorporating structure and routine. The more we focus on this the better off we will be.

If students are looking for a new way to incorporate acceptance in their lives, our team at CAPS uploaded a guided imagery exercise to our Instagram and Facebook about a month ago that could be helpful. The video is titled "Defusing From Your Thoughts." In the video, one of our previous graduate student therapists, Kirstie, guides listeners through an exercise called leaves on a stream.

This exercise provides a framework for accepting thoughts and choosing to let them go. This is a wonderful way to start incorporating a broader lens of accepting the current circumstances, understanding that they are not ideal and they come with increased difficulty in many areas and

choosing to let go of control, because after all like I was saying before, we can only control what we can control, which is how we as individuals choose to react. So I would encourage students to try something new, try reacting with acceptance.

And lastly, I would encourage students to try reacting with more self compassion than usual. When we notice that our internal dialogue is not being very nice to ourselves it can be helpful to pause and ask ourselves, how would I treat a friend in this situation? And then try to shift our thoughts accordingly to be more kind. If students are interested in learning more about self compassion or trying out other self compassion exercises, Dr. Kristin Neff's website, which is [self-compassion.org](http://self-compassion.org) is a great resource.

So yeah, like I said earlier, it just doesn't make sense to keep expectations as high as they would typically be during this time when everything is so challenging. So I just want to remind students to take it a little bit easier on themselves than they may usually.

Absolutely, and I really appreciate you chatting and sharing that piece on self compassion because I think that's super important right now. And to close us out today we just have one more question for you, and that is, what would you like our students to know about CAPS, your services, and what you offer for students right now?

Yeah, so the most important things to know are that at CAPS we are able to provide free counseling for students. The only requirement is that students have to be enrolled at least half time. For undergraduate students that's six credits and for graduate students that's four and a half credits.

This policy does remain the same in the summer, but we're sometimes able to waive it if students met that requirement during the previous semester and are enrolled for the upcoming fall semester. It's also important to know that we use a short term model and provide brief therapy at CAPS. So if students are looking to engage in or are in need of longer term services we would refer them to a provider in the community.

We also provide psychiatry services through CAPS, that is our only service that is not free. However, we do accept some insurances and you can go ahead and give us a call at 734-487-1118 or email us for more information about what insurances are accepted for psychiatry. And our email address is [counseling.services@emich.edu](mailto:counseling.services@emich.edu).

If students are interested in therapy or psychiatry, the best way to get started with that process is to just go ahead and email the email that I just listed, [counseling.services@emich.edu](mailto:counseling.services@emich.edu) and just go ahead and express interest and include your availability in the email and then our front desk staff will

provide you with consent forms and direct you to do the intake paperwork online and then get an appointment scheduled for you, so it's as easy as that.

And then the last thing that it's important for students to know is that we do have an after hours phone line that is there for support that's still functioning during this time. So if you contact CAPS at our regular phone number any time Monday through Friday after 5:00 PM or before 9:00 AM or on the weekends, holidays, the service is available 24/7 after hours.

What you'll do is just like I said, call the CAPS phone number and you'll have to follow some prompts and then you can be directed to speak to a licensed counselor over the phone. So that's a really great service to know about if students are feeling distressed or are just really in need of support.

Well, thank you so much, Lindsey. That was incredibly informative. And I think there's a lot of major takeaways that we can get from this discussion with you. Number one, the importance of trying to establish a form of structure in your life is very, very important, making sure that you're deliberate with prioritizing your mental health and then incorporating that into your daily routine going back to that structure point, really focusing on acceptance and acknowledging that the circumstances going on currently in the world are largely out of your control but really focusing in on what you do have control over is so incredibly important.

So those are all just incredibly helpful and insightful for our students. And we're so happy that you agreed to talk with us today. And the major take home today is that we all have an obligation to take our mental health seriously and that if we don't, it can really wreak havoc on not just ourselves but our families, our employer or schools, and even our economy.

Recent research by the Global Corporate Challenge indicates that there are roughly 45 million Americans with a diagnosable mental health condition, and 60% never get treatment. This drains roughly \$200 billion out of the economy in lost revenue, partly because those 45 million Americans are taking 200 million days off collectively because they're not in a condition to work. This is serious and it really impacts all of us.

So our hope is that you take the time and attention you need for your own self care. It's an investment in yourself and will provide you the best possible platform to be successful in the classroom. If you or someone you know is struggling right now, please seek out services at CAPS, they're here for you. By going to [www.emich.edu/caps](http://www.emich.edu/caps) you can take a free and confidential screening, set up an appointment with a qualified mental health clinician, and access those free resources Lindsey talked about.

So in honor of the message, stay safe, stay healthy, take extra care of yourself and don't forget--

We're here for you, and we support your goals.

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