



Well@Work Podcast

Episode 9: Using Accountability Partners to Build Resilience at Work

Welcome to the Well@Work podcast from the University of Kentucky Center on Trauma and Children. This podcast is being funded by a grant from SAMHSA. On this episode of the podcast, licensed marriage and family therapist Alex Clark discusses how using accountability partners can increase resilient support. And now, Alex Clark.

Hello, I'm Alex Clark, a licensed marriage and family therapist and project coordinator for the Secondary Traumatic Stress Innovations and Solutions Center at the University of Kentucky's Center on Trauma and Children. I've worked with diverse clientele, therapists, and other mental health professionals in a variety of settings. During that time, I have utilized multiple supports including supervisors, friends, family, exercise, faith, and my professional colleagues, to navigate the stressors of working directly and indirectly with a variety of traumas. In this Well@Work podcast, we will discuss how to promote and maintain resiliency by using accountability partners.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, stress, anxiety, and uneasiness have pervaded our everyday lives. Pre-existing difficulties have been amplified into adversities, while other new opportunities have provided unexpected but welcome relief. One challenging aspect of social distancing is experiencing less support from others. We are spending less time face to face with those we care about and who care about us in return. Previous pathways of appreciation and joy have been rerouted through screens and we often find ourselves increasingly isolated. Today we're going to focus on the use of accountability partners to increase resiliency.

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "The process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences." An accountability partnership represents a conscious effort to move forward in a positive and insightful manner, harnessing resources within and around us to overcome hardship and sustain well-being. An accountability partnership includes both persons collaborating to set and achieve goals. The partnership is a source of support and inspiration. Both partners encourage ongoing self-monitoring and self-directed care. It is important that this relationship is entered into voluntarily. And confidentiality should be maintained to preserve trust and increase efficacy. Often selecting a partner and getting started can be the hardest part, but be encouraged! As accountability partners have been shown to increase effectiveness in a wide variety of fields, including healthcare, education, business, health and wellness, spirituality, and finance, just to name a few. Many professionals have knowledge of self-care practices but often struggle to translate that knowledge into personal practice. Accountability-focused partnerships can be a structured conduit for translating intent into action.

A friend of mine is a social worker who has been working during the COVID-19 crisis, I will call my friend Michael. Michael recently began telling me about his work-related stressors, including feeling ineffective, experiencing moral distress, and difficulty making meaning of upsetting situations. Social distancing and increased use of telehealth practices have left Michael experiencing increased isolation and feeling alone at home or at the office. Recently, one of Michael's clients began discussing the challenges of working during a pandemic. The client reported losing a sense of meaning and purpose in her work, Michael saw his own struggles reflected in this client. He felt powerless to know how to respond when he was facing the same challenges in his own life. Michael consulted with supervisors and

colleagues. Despite his best intentions, Michael struggled to positively impact these feelings of hopelessness on his own.

So, what can you do if you're experiencing challenges like Michael? Here is how having an accountability partner can help. Tip number one, make this process a priority, take time to identify a potential partner. This will be someone around your same level of professional development that you can trust and respect. This person will provide honest feedback as you navigate your professional lives. Additionally, an accountability partner helps affirm your work, while keeping things in perspective. Talk to your new accountability partner about your goals. Your partner will support you as you discuss your challenges at work and your desires to act. Be specific about the actions you will want to take to meet your goals, your partner will help you take the steps needed to reach them. Schedule a time to meet with your partner weekly that cannot be easily interrupted. This time together will become a source of connection that builds resiliency. Additionally, resilience increases when we turn towards someone else instead of turning away from challenges.

Tip number two, be honest with yourself and your accountability partner. Build in a grace period to get to know each other and then lean into the process. Setbacks will happen and when they do, lean into the process again. Also speak truth, don't be afraid to accurately appraise situations together. Vulnerability even in small doses draws us together, and helps us get unstuck as we successfully navigate the world around us. Next, write down your goals and share them with your partner.

Tip number three, put the partnership into action at work. There are a variety of ways to do it, here are just a few ideas. Take a walk outside or engage in mindful mindfulness activities together. Remind each other to self-reflect during the work day and then share these check-ins with your partner, make time for both people to check in. Process your feelings about the difficult aspects of your work using low-impact processing techniques, focus on how you feel as opposed to blaming your colleague with graphic details that can weigh them down. Build competence by participating in professional development activities, increased self-efficacy builds resilience, and professional development is always more pleasant with an enjoyable co-worker. Lastly, have lunch or take breaks together and have time for normal conversations too. These strategies are just a starting place for more tips to manage stress and build resiliency visit our website. And remember, stay well at work.

Thank you for listening to this episode of the podcast, follow the link in the video description for more resources on our Well@Work website. And of course, stay tuned for more episodes on topics that will keep you well at work.