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*Kentucky Psychological Foundation Offers Tips to Help Kentuckians During Mental Health Awareness Month*

**Florence, KY, May 02, 2018** – Anyone who has held a job has felt the pressure of work-related stress. Any job can have stressful elements, even if people love what they do. Maintaining well-being at work is not always easy, but the Kentucky Psychological Foundation (KPF) and the American Psychological Association (APA) offer tips to manage stress at work.

Work-related stress can take many forms, whether it's pressure to meet deadlines and obligations, challenging relationships or the commute to work. But when work stress becomes chronic, it can be overwhelming and harmful to both physical and emotional health.

Unfortunately, such long-term stress is all too common. In the 2016 APA annual [Stress in America Survey](#), 58% of Americans cited work as a source of stress.

According to Dr. Courtney Keim, industrial-organizational psychologist and KPF board member, "Organizations and employees should take work stress seriously and should recognize that stress from jobs is a serious mental health issue."

It's not always possible (or desirable) to avoid tensions that occur on the job. Yet people can take steps to manage work-related stress.

**Track stressors.** Keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress. Record thoughts, feelings, and information about the environment, including the people and circumstances involved, the physical setting, and reactions. Taking notes can help people find patterns among stressors and reactions.

**Figure out what you can change.** Once you determine if there are any patterns to when you feel stressed at or about work, you might be able to identify areas that you can change. Perhaps you can change your immediate work environment to be less distracting or adjust your commute so

that you aren't hitting the peak of rush hour. Maybe your reaction to particular stressors tends to escalate your distress about that stressor, but your notes suggest you might be able to generate a more balanced response instead.

**Talk to management.** Healthy employees are typically more productive, so bosses have an incentive to create a work environment that promotes employee well-being. Employees should start by having an open conversation with their supervisor. The purpose of this isn't to lay out a list of complaints, but rather to come up with an effective plan for managing the work stressors, so employees can perform at their best on the job. While some parts of the plan may be designed to help employees improve skills in areas such as time management, other elements might include identifying employer-sponsored wellness resources, such as clarifying expectations, getting necessary resources or support from colleagues, enriching the job to include more challenging or meaningful tasks, or making changes to the physical workspace to reduce strain.

**Develop healthy responses.** Instead of attempting to fight stress with fast food or alcohol, try to make healthy choices when tensions rise. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Yoga can be an excellent choice, but any form of physical activity is beneficial. Also make time for hobbies and favorite activities. Whether it's reading a novel, going to concerts, or playing games with the family, make sure to set aside time for pleasurable activities. Getting enough good-quality sleep is also important for effective stress management. Build healthy sleep habits by limiting caffeine intake late in the day and minimizing stimulating activities, such as computer and television use right before bed.

**Take time to recharge.** To avoid negative effects of chronic stress and burnout, people need time to replenish and return to pre-stress levels of functioning. This recovery process requires "switching off" from work by having periods of time when people are neither engaging in work-related activities, nor thinking about work. On non-work days, even try to step back and avoid checking work emails. The 2016 Stress in America survey found a higher self-reported stress level among employed Americans who check their work email constantly on non-workdays compared to those who don't check or check less frequently. It's critical to disconnect from time to time and not let vacation days go to waste. When possible, people should take time off to relax and unwind, so they can come back to work feeling reinvigorated and ready to do their best.

**Seek support.** Accepting help from trusted friends and family members can improve the ability to manage stress. Employers may also have stress management resources available through an employee assistance program (EAP), which might include online resources and referrals to mental health professionals, if needed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist. Psychologists are trained to help people better manage stress and change unhealthy behaviors.

"It is important to remember that stress is not an event, but rather a reaction to an event," says Keim. "Changing the way you think about and cope with potentially stressful events at work, such as those mentioned above, can really make a difference."

To learn more about emotional wellness, visit the American Psychological Association at [www.apa.org/helpcenter](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter) and follow @APAHelpCenter. Visit [www.apaexcellence.org](http://www.apaexcellence.org) to find

resources to make work a healthier place to be and follow @APA\_excellence. To find out more about the Kentucky Psychological Foundation visit [www.kentuckypsychologicalfoundation.com](http://www.kentuckypsychologicalfoundation.com) and follow @KYPsychFnd.

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*The Kentucky Psychological Foundation's (KPF) mission is to build a psychologically healthy Kentucky through public education, work place health, diversity awareness, disaster resources, and psychology leadership development. More information and a link to support KPF can be found at <https://www.kpa.org/about2>.*

*The American Psychological Association, in Washington, D.C., is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. APA's membership includes more than 115,700 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people's lives.*