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EAP EMPLOYEE ENHANCEMENT NEWSLETTER



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DEER OAKS EAP PRESENTS:

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Back-to-School Tips for Parents

Starting a new school year is a time of adjustment for everyone in the family—children and parents alike. Your child may be excited or anxious, possibly both at the same time. They'll be shifting from what is probably a relaxed summer schedule to a more rigid schedule for the school year. They'll be seeing friends again, learning new things, and perhaps facing new challenges. As a parent, you will also be adjusting to the school schedule and will be responsible for ensuring that your child has what they need to succeed. Here are some tips to help make the transition as smooth as possible for everyone.

Planning Ahead

- **Organize information and documents.** Save important information being sent to you from your child's school. Collect messages, forms, and documents in a folder or notebook. Organize this into sections, such as actions you need to take, supplies your child will need, the calendar of school vacations and closures, contact information for questions during the school year, and procedures in the event of an emergency.
- **Prepare a family calendar:**
 - Fill in key dates, such as the first day of school, vacations, holidays, and other planned school-closure days. Include more details for the first days of school—wake-up time, when your child needs to leave for school, the timing of afterschool activities, and when they'll return home. Think about the daily routine at the end of the day, too—when to have dinner; when to allow for downtime, family time, and homework; and what bedtime will give your child the sleep they need.
 - Post the calendar where everyone can see it. This will help you and your child prepare for the new schedule. If it's helpful, you might post an evening and morning to-do list next to it (maybe one for you and one for your child), with items like "prepare lunch," "pack backpack," "lay out clothes," "check that breakfast foods are on hand," and "set alarm clock."
- **Schedule required vaccinations.** Some schools require immunization records before a child can start school.
- **Confirm plans for any needed before- or after-school care.** Make sure plans are in place so your young child isn't home alone.
- **Talk with your child about what to expect.** Share what you know about what will be different this year from the previous year. If your child will be attending a new school, visit ahead of time to walk around the grounds and use the playground. Attend a tour or orientation if offered. Find information about your child's new teacher, and show your child a picture. Emphasize the positives to help your child look forward to the start of school.
- **Plan and practice how to get to school.** If your child will be walking, biking, or riding in a car to school, do a practice run with them. Along the way, remind your child of basic safety rules—for crossing streets, wearing a bike helmet, and using seatbelts, for example. If your child will be taking a school bus, do a practice walk to the bus stop. You might find another child in the neighborhood who can walk or ride the bus to school with your child.
- **Ease into the new sleep/wake schedule.** A good night of sleep is key to your child's success in school. Help your child get the sleep they need starting on the first day of school by gradually shifting sleep schedules in the week or two before school starts.
- **Set up space for homework and study.** Children old enough for homework should have a quiet space, a comfortable seat, and a clear surface where they study and do their assignments with minimal distraction. Agree on quiet times when others aren't watching TV and your child won't use electronic devices (unless required for homework).
- **Shop for needed supplies.** Find out what school supplies your child will need, and shop for them ahead of time. As your budget allows, include some fun extras, like colored pens and a notebook or backpack that has special appeal for your child.
- **Set up "launching pads."** This is an area, preferably near the door, where you and your child will place what your child needs to bring to school. Put the necessary items there the night before.



When School Starts

- **Prepare a nourishing breakfast, and pack a healthy lunch.** Fruit, protein, and whole grains in the morning will give your child a longer-lasting energy boost than sugary cereal. A balanced, nourishing breakfast will also help your child think more clearly at school—and it's better for their health. Give the same thought to packing your child's lunch and choosing the snacks your child brings to school.
- **Meet your child's teacher.** If you can, bring your child into their classroom on the first day of school and meet their teacher. If that's not an option, find another way to meet your child's teacher. Introduce yourself as a parent who wants to support your child's learning at home. Then check in with the teacher throughout the school year to find out what's going on in the classroom, and share observations of how your child is doing.

- **Help your child learn time-management and study skills.** Agree on a daily schedule with time for both relaxation and homework. Help your child manage longer-term assignments. Some children benefit from tools like checklists and timers. Older children may need an assignment notebook. Be available to answer questions, but never help so much that you are doing assignments for your child.
- **Listen to your child.** Ask how your child is doing in school. Encourage them to tell you if anything is bothering or worrying them. If your child is struggling with an aspect of their learning, you might let the teacher know. The teacher might be able to offer a bit of extra help, or they might suggest another source of help for your child. The social dynamics of school can also affect learning and your child's enthusiasm for school. You want to know, for example, if your child has observed or is the object of bullying. By talking with and listening to your child, you can identify learning and social problems and help find solutions.

Source: Morgan, H. (2022, June 28). *Back-to-school tips for parents* (E. Morton & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Doomscrolling: What It Is and How to Break the Habit

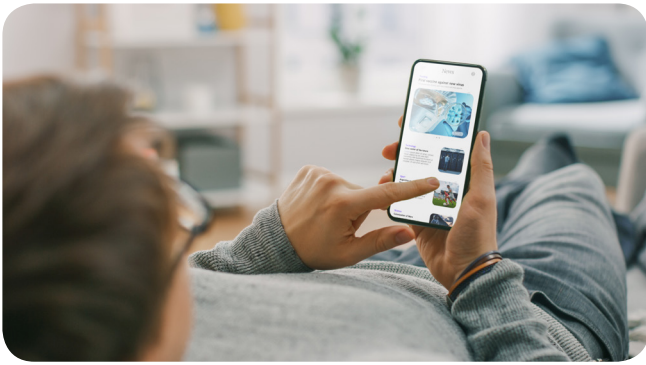
With news and opinion always at your fingertips on your smartphone and computer, do you ever find yourself overdoing your media intake to the point where you feel anxious and unhappy? That's doomscrolling, a relatively new word for an old behavior—one that has become easier with modern technology and more common with what can seem like a never-ending series of worrisome world events.

Doomscrolling is fueled by a natural human need to stay informed when there are signs of danger. That alertness and curiosity can be helpful—at times even life-saving—when you're threatened by war or other violence, disease, or natural disaster. But when your search for information leads you from one alarming story to another—when it becomes such a frequent habit that it undermines your

wellbeing—it's no longer protecting you from harm. It's causing you harm.

How Doomscrolling Can Be Bad for You

A habit of searching for bad news can become a self-reinforcing cycle. The more you look the more you find, the more you find the more anxious you become, and the more anxious you become the more you look for information that will help you feel more in control in the face of danger. The problem is that continued searching doesn't always bring you more helpful information. There's only so much of that available. As you keep digging, you find more of the same, more speculation, more misinformation, and more that makes you anxious.



Overconsumption of news and the anxiety it triggers can also interfere with your sleep, your ability to think clearly, your relationships, and your work. If you're prone to sadness, depression, or anxiety, doomscrolling can be especially tempting and especially dangerous. It can pull you down and intensify your fears.

How to Break the Doomscrolling Habit

Doomscrolling is a habit, a repeated pattern of behavior. Like any habit, it can be hard to break. But there are ways you can bring it under control and substitute new behaviors in its place:

- **Notice the effect it has on you.** Pay attention to how you feel when you are reading, watching, or listening to the news. Which news stories and opinion pieces make you feel anxious, scared, frustrated, or unhappy, and which help you feel more confident and relaxed?
- **Notice when you're scrolling for news.** How many times a day are you checking? How many alerts do you get that interrupt what you're doing and cause you to look at more news?
- **Understand your triggers.** What triggers you to go to a news site or look at social media? What urges cause you to look for news stories? Do you doomscroll when you're bored? When you're anxious? Whenever you have your phone in your hand?

With that awareness of your doomscrolling habit, you can begin to manage it by reducing your triggers, substituting new responses, and building new patterns of media consumption:

- **Turn off push notifications.** These alerts not only interrupt you in your work and your time with other people, but they're designed to draw you in to consume more news. Turn off as many notifications as you can live without.
- **Choose specific times for news and information.** You don't need to read every news story the minute it's posted. Decide when during the day you'll catch up on the news, and set a limit on how much time you'll spend. Decide on times when you won't look at the news, too: at mealtimes, for example, when you're with other people, or while you're working or engaged in another activity.
- **Keep technology out of the bedroom.** To improve your sleep, make the wind-down time before you go to bed one of your screen-free times. Read a book or magazine for a few minutes instead. If you want to look at your phone in the morning, or if you use it as an alarm clock, keep it on the other side of the bedroom.
- **Substitute new behaviors.** When you get the urge to look at news outside of the times you've set, do something else. Get up from your chair and stretch, drink a glass of water, or go for a short walk.
- **Focus on the positive.** Balance your diet of worrisome news with positive stories and supportive social connections. Reconsider who you follow on social media to include more posts that distract you from your worries or help you deal with them, rather than making them worse. Drop or block anyone whose posts upset you. Use your phone and social media to connect with friends.
- **Take action.** Consider what you can do to help make things better in the face of events that worry you. That might be by paying attention to your health or taking steps to keep your family safer. It might be by helping others in your community or around the world, even if it's only in small ways. Taking action is a better way to feel in control than consuming more news and information.

Source: Morgan, H. (2022, April 8). *Doomscrolling: What it is and how to break the habit* (E. Morton & B. Schuette, Eds.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Saving Money on Gas

Whether driving cross-town or cross-country, everybody wants to save money at the pump. Regardless of the make and model, your car's estimated gas mileage is just that—an estimate. An important variable is how you fuel, drive, and maintain your car. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, offers these bumper-to-bumper tips to help you get the most mileage out of your gas purchases.

At the Pump

- **Check your owner's manual for the most effective octane level for your car.** For most cars, the recommended gasoline is regular octane. In most cases, using a higher octane gas than the manufacturer recommends offers no benefit—and costs you at the pump. Some cars do require premium fuel, so before you fill up, check your owner's manual to find out if the higher-priced gas is required or just recommended.
- **Shop around.** Specialized phone apps (like Gas Buddy or Gas Guru) and websites can help you find the cheapest gas prices in your area.¹ Also, many gas stations advertise regular weekly specials at their locations.
- **Charge it.** Consider a credit card that offers cash back for gas purchases. Some offer two to five percent rebates, but it's wise to read the fine print. Fees, charges, interest rates, and benefits can vary among credit card issuers.

On the Road

- **Start driving as soon as the engine is started.** Modern engines don't need much time to warm up. The engine actually warms up more quickly once the car is operating and will stay warm after stopping.
- **Don't speed.** Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 50 miles per hour (mph). According to FuelEconomy.gov, each 5 mph you drive over 50 mph is like paying an additional 15 cents per gallon for gas.^{2,3}
- **Avoid unnecessary idling.** It wastes fuel, costs you money, and pollutes the air. Turn off the engine if you anticipate a wait.
- **Use overdrive gears and cruise control when appropriate.** They improve fuel economy when you're driving on the highway.

- **Minimize the need to brake by anticipating traffic conditions.** Be alert for slow-downs and red lights. Anticipate bends and turns on familiar roads. Letting up on the gas often eliminates the need for braking.
- **Avoid jackrabbit starts and stops.** Avoiding these can increase your mpg and prolong the life of your brakes.
- **Use the air conditioner only when you absolutely need it.** Air conditioning dramatically reduces fuel economy. Most air conditioners have an "economy" setting that allows the circulation of unchilled air. Many also have a "maximum" or "recirculation" setting that reduces the amount of hot outside air that must be chilled. Both settings can reduce the air conditioning load—and save gas.
- **Combine errands.** Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as one trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.
- **Remove excess weight from the trunk.** An extra 100 pounds in the trunk can reduce a typical car's fuel economy by one percent.^{2,4}
- **Avoid packing items on top of your car.** A loaded roof rack or carrier creates wind resistance and can decrease fuel economy by up to 25 percent.^{2,5}

At the Garage

- **Keep your engine tuned.** Tuning your engine according to your owner's manual can increase gas mileage by an average of four percent.⁶
- **Keep your tires properly inflated and aligned.** It can increase gas mileage up to three percent, improve handling, and prolong the life of your tires.^{6,7,8} Check your owner's manual or the door jamb for the proper level of inflation (not the tire itself, which shows the maximum tire inflation pressure); check the tire pressure when the tires are cold, because internal pressure increases when the car has been on the road for a while and the tires heat up.
- **Change your oil.** According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), you can improve your gas mileage by using the manufacturer's recommended grade of motor oil. Motor oil that says "Energy Conserving" on the performance symbol of the American Petroleum Institute contains friction-reducing additives that can improve fuel economy.^{6,9}

When Shopping

Be skeptical about any gizmo that promises to improve your gas mileage. The EPA has tested supposed gas-saving devices—including “mixture enhancers” and fuel line magnets—and found that very few provided any fuel economy benefits. Those devices that did work provided only a slight improvement in gas mileage. In fact, some products may even damage your car’s engine or cause a substantial increase in exhaust emissions.^{6,10}

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