Lessons from the Counselor’s Couch

Life is Messy…A Letter to all the Moms

With Mother’s Day approaching, I felt the need to write a special letter to all the moms out there. Being a mother is one of the most challenging jobs and guilt-ridden jobs. When I became a new mom, I read all “the books” and was going to do everything perfect. I was determined to be the best mom there ever was- I wasn’t going to screw it up! With that kind of mentality, I ran into so many guilt-ridden articles of what I should or shouldn’t be doing: breastfeed, sleep train, sleep with your baby, babywearing, organic vs. nonorganic, etc. Let’s not forget the Facebook life! The message was clear- no matter what I did, I was doing it wrong in someone’s eyes and there are plenty of people ready to tell you that every day. Add postpartum depression and anxiety to this mix and you are headed for disaster. One of the best things I did for myself as a new mom was surround myself with supportive people including some wonderful moms and dads, good friends and a good counselor. These supports helped me weed through all the mess of being “the perfect mom.” These wonderful women and men taught me to use my instincts and go with what gifts I have been given. At this time, I decided to transform my reading from being perfect to being perfectly imperfect. I want to share what I have learned through this journey so that we can all stop the cycle of shame and judgment we have as mothers.

Life is messy…get over it. We have all probably watched the Frozen movie a few hundred times. Elsa knew something when she sang “Let it Go.” We all need to learn to let go of the messiness of life and you can define what messy means to you. We all live in “mess” in some shape or form and then we have messages all over social media, regular media and other moms reminding us of how much we aren’t put together. As moms we need to band together and allow us all to live perfectly imperfect lives. We need to stop judging and comparing what we are or aren’t doing as moms. When we judge and compare we typically think of what other people have that we don’t. What I learned from my time being a counselor is that NO ONE HAS IT ALL! The best way to have it all is to be grateful and content with what you have. I don’t know why all the moms I meet think everyone else is doing a better job than them- you are doing great. We will also be the first to jump all over the mom who doesn’t have it together and judge her. Remember this, “be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle,” by John Watson. All of us are fighting something and some of us are just better at hiding it than others. So next time you see a mom who is struggling with her four children at Target, go up to her and tell her she is doing a good job.

What to do this Mother’s Day and frankly, every day after, is take care of you. Moms are the last to take care of them. They feel guilt, selfish and undeserving. All those emotions take away from being our best selves. What our children and partners need is love and attention and for you to be okay. Take time each day even for a few moments to do something just for you- just you! Let things go and let life be messy once and awhile. Call up another mom and take her out for coffee. Go have fun with your family. Laughter is truly the best medicine. Go for a walk with a friend. Maybe take a nap! When I think of being a mom something I think of is my yellow lab. All he wants to do is love and play (and eat of course, but who doesn’t). He doesn’t care about what the books say, what is on Facebook or Pinterest, all he cares about is love and attention. I wish we all could love like labs do.

Being a parent is hard, it’s a thankless job you don’t have to love every minute of it, but parenting can be one of the most meaningful thing you do in your life. So be kind and remember you are loved and you are doing a great job! Dads this includes you too!

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Supervisory Update

North Dakota’s Legal Medical Marijuana Law
The Challenge of Workplace Compliance

In a somewhat surprising turn of events for some North Dakota citizens, voters approved Measure 5, the North Dakota Compassionate Care Act in the November 2016 election, with nearly 65% voting in favor of the use of marijuana for medical purposes. With the North Dakota legislature now taking steps to establish rules related to medical marijuana use, employers need to determine how they’ll respond to these new requirements.

Because of the law, people who live in North Dakota might think it’s okay to show up to work stoned because they have a prescription from their doctor for the use of medical marijuana. For employers who want to assure a safer and more productive workplace, here are some things to consider when establishing a policy related to medical marijuana and the workplace:

Make Safety a Priority
When creating a medical marijuana policy, focus on safety. Employees who are under the influence of any substance at work can pose a danger to themselves, to co workers and to customers and the public. If an employee’s safety or the safety of others would be detrimentally affected if the employee is high, then marijuana use should not be tolerated.

Establish Clear Consequences When Marijuana is Used at Work
Create a policy addressing the consequences of an employee’s marijuana use, just like the policy for the prohibition of alcohol in the workplace. Employees are not permitted to work drunk, drink alcohol at work, or arrive for work in an inebriated state. So, employees should not be permitted to work while high due to the use of medical marijuana. Review your drug use and drug testing policies to ensure that they clearly explain your expectations regarding impairment or use on the job, marijuana use outside of company time and your drug testing procedures.

Establish Evidence of Impairment
Keep in mind that a positive drug test result alone may not provide the employer with sufficient grounds for disciplinary action. The employer must have additional evidence that an employee was under the influence of marijuana while at work. When an employee has a valid prescription for medical marijuana, determining impairment on a performance basis, as in effectiveness in completing assigned duties, rather than by drug testing will be essential.

Don’t Prohibit the Use of Marijuana at All Times
Employers should be aware that the presence of THC (the active ingredient in marijuana) in the body may not indicate someone who is presently impaired. While an employee may only feel the effects of marijuana for a matter of hours, THC can be detected for several days – or even weeks – if the employee is a frequent user. In other words, don’t create a policy that prohibits employees from using marijuana when they’re off the clock. Instead, focus on regulating on the job conduct and employee performance.
**Supervisory Update continued**

**Review Both State & Federal Laws**
Keep in mind, despite state laws, the possession and use of any amount of marijuana is illegal under the federal Controlled Substances Act. Federal law applies everywhere in the U.S., including in those states that permit recreational or medical use of marijuana under state law. If you choose to have a zero-tolerance policy, you should be prepared to answer additional questions. How will you handle employee medical use that is permitted by law? Will you look to federal law to justify a true zero-tolerance policy? Are you an organization that is required to abide by federal law? In such cases, you will be compelled to comply with federal regulations or risk sanction.

**Provide Effective Training**
Train your supervisors and managers about your policy and its prohibitions, the importance of confidentiality relating to drug-test results and any accommodations for medical conditions for which marijuana is prescribed. Also make sure you have communicated your policy to all employees and have clearly stated what is expected of them.

**Seek the Guidance of Qualified Legal Counsel**
If an employee arrives to work under the influence of marijuana or his or her work suffers because of its use, the employer must reserve the right to take disciplinary action against the employee. In such cases, employers will be best advised to seek the advice and guidance of legal counsel before implementing any form of disciplinary action. The law may prohibit discharging or penalizing lawful medical marijuana users based upon a positive drug test for marijuana unless the employee used, possessed or was impaired by marijuana while on the employer’s premises or during work hours.

As more states pass laws about medical and recreational marijuana use, this area will only become more complicated. Make sure you are prepared to consistently follow your stated procedures. Employers should closely monitor developments related to the legalization of marijuana and be prepared to periodically inform employees of their expectations and requirements.
Professional Update

Is Recreational Marijuana Use Really a Problem?

Many marijuana users would like to convince themselves and others that pot is a harmless drug and not really a problem. Clear away the haze of myth and misinformation and you can see the facts about marijuana.

MYTH: Marijuana is a safe drug.

FACT: Pot has been linked to lung cancer, loss of short term memory and slowed reaction times while experiencing crisis. The use of marijuana is also known to cause distorted perceptions while driving an automobile and while engaging in other safety related activities, thereby increasing the risk of accidents and loss of life.

MYTH: Marijuana isn’t addictive.

FACT: People can become psychologically dependent on pot and have physical withdrawal symptoms after stopping heavy use. Marijuana has also been known to be a gateway drug, leading some users toward the use of cocaine, methamphetamine, phencyclidine, LSD, narcotics and the excessive use of alcohol. The use of marijuana has also led some users to engage in the practice of inhaling various toxic substances leading to severe brain dysfunction and loss of life.

MYTH: Marijuana makes people more creative and sociable.

FACT: Pot blunts emotions and limits the user’s ability to think creatively. Even infrequent marijuana users have been known to isolate themselves from social contact. Pot users may also display patterns of irritability, accusation and blame directed toward close family members, co workers and friends who are undeserving of such treatment. With continued use, marijuana has been shown to lead to serious psychiatric problems such as major depression, suicidal preoccupation and schizophrenia.

MYTH: Marijuana dependency is an individual problem.

FACT: Marijuana use has been directly linked to lost friendships, failure to meet financial obligations, disrupted family relationships and broken marriages. In the workplace, the use of marijuana has been identified as a cause of poor work performance, lost productivity and threats to safety. Family members, supervisors and friends also get trapped in – enabling – patterns that may prevent the marijuana user from experiencing the consequences of the drug induced behavior.