

# The Forecaster

Newsletter of Your Employee Assistance Program  
Volume 39 Issue 3, Spring 2018

Far West  
Family Services

*The information provided in The Forecaster is to be used for educational purposes only. It should not be used as a substitute for seeking professional care for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition.*

“One of life's most fulfilling moments occurs in the split-second when the familiar is suddenly transformed into the dazzling aura of the profoundly new.”

Edward B. Lindaman

## Inside this issue:

(click on page # for link to page)

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| The Power of Boredom .....          | 1 |
| Bored at Work? .....                | 2 |
| The New Gender Spectrum .....       | 3 |
| The Language of Gender.....         | 4 |
| Get Ready Now for Next Fall .....   | 6 |
| Summer Activism & Service.....      | 7 |
| Work, Life, Wellness Resources..... | 8 |



## The Power of Boredom

**“I’m so bored!”** That is the one phrase that drives most parents completely crazy—especially in the summer. Boredom. What is a parent to do?

According to Mark A. Hawkins, counselor and educator, boredom is a good thing! Yes, it’s a good thing, but today’s children don’t know how to deal with it. So, they pick up their smart phone, iPad, or laptop and start mindlessly searching YouTube, playing games or hanging out on social media. They “numb out.”

When Hawkins was teaching high school, he “realized then and there that my students’ diminishing tolerance for boredom was not only preventing them from learning effectively in class . . . but it was also preventing them from taking precious moments in their day to enjoy and learn about life.”

Boredom is the foundation for creativity. Just the sheer discomfort of boredom drives us to do something. It’s a natural human instinct. Before

cellphones, kids made up games or spent time exploring the woods or parks near home. They did artwork, made up stories, or played a musical instrument. They found things to do. Today, children—and many adults—pick up the nearest electronic device and get lost in mind-numbing activity.

“TV, Internet, and social media now offer a constant flow of passive engagement that fills all of our down time and distracts us from life,” writes Hawkins in his book

*The Power of Boredom: Why Boredom is Essential for Creating a Meaningful Life.* “The ease of finding entertainment at our fingertips over the last two decades has almost imperceptibly been eroding our tolerance for sitting and doing nothing. We’ve all been sitting in a pot of hot water, slowly increasing the distractions and diversions in our lives, and we haven’t realized that we’re beginning to burn.”

“Boredom makes us realize what we actually want to do,” Hawkins writes. Thinking and daydreaming can spur creativity, which teaches kids to be inventive, resourceful, and self-reliant. Most children and adults would prefer to engage in

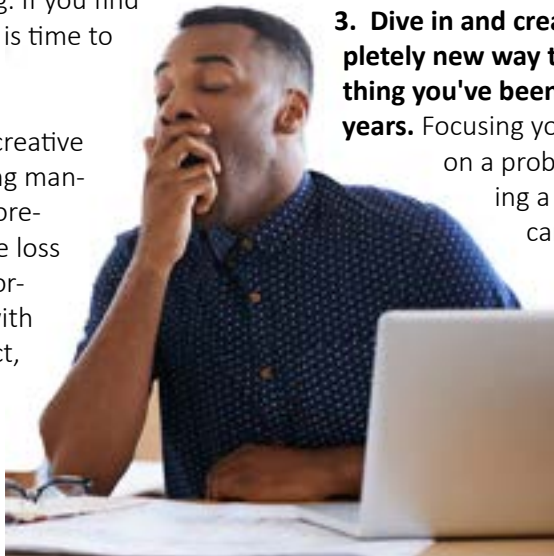
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## Bored at work?

Just like kids, adults get bored. That's especially true at work when the same old routine becomes frustrating and boring. If you find yourself bored, it is time to get creative.

Steve Gordon, a creative arts and marketing manager, says, "My boredom is usually the loss of curiosity." If Gordon gets bored with his current project, he searches for something vastly different to inspire him. Or he looks at the creative choices of others to inspire him to view his work with fresh eyes.



Maybe you've been riding the wave of your last creative endeavor and now it's getting old and stale. Challenge is the key to staying engaged. So it might be time to challenge yourself.

### Choose your challenge.

**1. Do something completely different that stimulates your creative energy.** You might take up rock climbing as a way to give yourself a completely new outlook on facing challenges. Or join in the new mindfulness movement and go on a two-week retreat. Or push the edges of your comfort zone by participating in an [Outward Bound](#) program for adults.

**2. Study a different approach to the work that you do.** Find the innovators in your field and read their books, set up a meeting, or attend

a training. Nothing gets the juices flowing as much as seeing a creative solution to a work situation you find frustrating.

**3. Dive in and create a completely new way to do something you've been doing for years.** Focusing your attention on a problem and finding a new solution can be very invigorating. If you have a co-worker feeling the same way, team up and work on the solution together.

### Take responsibility.

Career coach Chrissy Scivicque writes "You might not like to hear this but you have more power than you think. Don't wait for someone or something outside of you to fix this problem. Get creative if you must. You're in the driver's seat here."

### Seek new challenges.

**"Challenge is the key to staying engaged.** Your brain wants to be used," writes Scivicque. "Ask for new responsibilities. Take on projects and tasks that push you outside your comfort zone. Look for growth opportunities, even when you're busy. Don't wait for boredom to set in. When it does, the opportunities may no longer be available."

So trade that boredom in for curiosity and challenge. You'll find a fresh new outlook on your work and gain new energy. ■

... Power of Boredom cont'd  
 meaningful and fulfilling activities. Teens who spend time in the wilderness away from electronic media find many creative things to do with their time. Programs like [Outward Bound](#) can be a great way to get kids off media in the summer.

It might take some time to convince your kids that life without numbing out is really a lot more fun and interesting. Kids can learn to handle boredom creatively, and if they begin at an early age, they're likely to continue doing so in adolescence. By the way, parents who manage their boredom by staying off their smart phones will set a better example—and maybe they'll enjoy life more, too! ■



**"BE HAPPY, IT DRIVES PEOPLE CRAZY."**

## The New Gender Spectrum

If you are over 30 you probably don't get the new language kids are using to describe their gender these days. To use an old phrase, "This isn't your father's or mother's binary gender language." Things have changed. In fact things have changed so dramatically in the last five years, you may be totally lost.



In the world inhabited by millennials and the iGen, gender is not binary. There are more than just two options, male or female. There is a range of options on the gender spectrum between male and female. Some kids are also choosing to identify as no gender (agender) or all genders (pangender). And if you think that is confusing, Facebook now has 54 gender markers one can choose from. You may also not be familiar with terms like "agender" or "cisgender" or "gender fluid." Go to page 4 for a glossary of the new gender language.

You may have noticed kids using the pronouns "they" and "them" when referring to a friend—**one** friend, not a group—instead of "he"

or "she." It doesn't help to argue that this might not be grammatically correct—because the use of them/they for personal pronouns is now in the dictionary. In today's social interactions, it is not uncommon for young people to introduce themselves and state their preferred pronouns.

The millennials will make your head spin at the ways in which they are expanding and redefining how we look at gender. Some of this is based on science. Intersexuals (previously known as hermaphrodites) are people born with genetic or physical traits of both sexes. At least one percent of the population is born intersexual. At the baby's birth, a doctor makes a decision as to which gender to assign the infant. However, the assigned gender may not be the gender the individual identifies with. Within the first four years of life, most children express the identity they feel they are, or spend years trying to come to terms with the internal conflict they feel with their assigned gender.

There are definitely some cultural issues at play here, too. Many young

people today are choosing not to identify with typical gender behavior or societal stereotypes. Simply put, they don't want to be put in a box. "Genderqueer" is the term for people "whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders." (From *The Teaching Transgender Toolkit for Educators*.) Others use the terms "agender," "pangender," or "gender-nonconforming" to describe themselves.

If you think this might just be another fad that will fade away, you are wrong. In a recent National Geographic<sup>1</sup> article on "the gender revolution" by Robin Marantz Henig, there is good science backing up the idea that gender is more spectrum than binary. Henig interviews therapist Jean Malpas of the Ackerman Institute for the Family, where he directs the Gender and Family Project. Malpas said, "If more young people are coming out as nonbinary, that's partly because the new awareness of the nonbinary option offers a language to name the source of their experience."

The National Geographic article goes on to cite a "recent survey of a thousand millennials ages 18 to 34 [which] found that half of them think 'gender is a spectrum, and some people fall outside conventional categories.' And a healthy subset of that half would consider themselves to be nonbinary, according to the Human Rights Campaign. In 2012, the advocacy group polled 10,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender teens ages 13 to 17 and found that six percent categorized themselves as 'genderfluid,' 'androgynous,' or some other term outside the binary box."

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# The Language of Gender

The power of language to shape our perceptions of other people is immense. Precise use of terms in regard to gender can have a significant impact on demystifying many of the misperceptions associated with gender. However, the vocabulary of gender continues to evolve and there is not universal agreement about the definitions of many terms. Nonetheless, here is some working language and examples of frequently used (and misused) terms. We offer them as a starting place for dialogue and understanding, which begins by clarifying how we are using various terms, rather than asserting that they represent the final or only definition of the various terms.

**Affirmed gender** An individual's gender self-identification, rather than the gender that was assumed based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Agender** A person who sees themselves as not having a gender. Some agender-identified people see themselves as being gender neutral, rather than not having any gender, but in any case do not identify with a gender.

**Cisgender** Refers to people whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth (cis- from Latin, meaning, "on this side [of]." In contrast to trans, from the Latin root meaning "across", "beyond", or "on the opposite side [of]").

**Dimensions of gender** Our body, expression, and identity are three distinct but interrelated components that compose a person's gender. Each of these dimensions can vary greatly across a range of possibilities. A person's comfort in their gender is related to the degree to which these

three dimensions feel in harmony.

**FtM** A person who was assigned a female sex at birth and whose gender identity is boy/man.

**Gender binary** A system that constructs gender according to two discrete and opposite categories: boy/man and girl/woman. It is important to recognize that both cisgender and transgender people can have a gender identity that is binary.

**Gender expression** This is our "public" gender. How we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Gender expression is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

**Gender fluid** People who have a gender or genders that change. Gender fluid people move between genders, experiencing their gender as something dynamic and changing, rather than static.

**Gender identity** A person's innermost core concept of self which can include boy/man, girl/woman, a blend of both, neither, and many more. Gender identity is how each person perceives themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be consistent with, or different from, their sex assigned at birth. The language a person uses to communicate their gender identity can evolve and shift over time, especially as someone gets older and has access to a broader gender vocabulary.

**Gender role** The set of functions, activities, and behaviors commonly expected of boys/men and girls/women by society.

**Gender-expansive** An umbrella term used for individuals who broaden their own culture's commonly held definitions of gender, including expectations for its expression, identities, roles, and/or other perceived gender norms. Gender-expansive individuals include those with transgender and non-binary identities, as well as those whose gender in some way is seen to be stretching society's notions of gender.

**Genderqueer** An umbrella term to describe someone who doesn't identify with conventional gender identities, roles, expression, and/or expectations. For some, genderqueer is a non-binary identification, and for others it is not.

**Intersex** Also referred to as Disorders/Differences of Sexual Development. About 1% of children are born with chromosomes, hormones, genitalia, and/or other sex characteristics that are not exclusively male or female as defined by the medical establishment in our society. In most cases, these children are at no medical risk, but most are assigned a binary sex identity (male or female) by their doctors and/or families.

**MtF** A person who was assigned a male sex at birth and whose gender identity is girl/woman.

**Non-binary** An umbrella term for gender identities that are not exclusively either boy/man or girl/woman.

**Sex** Used to label a person as "male" or "female" at birth, this term refers to a person's external genitalia and internal reproductive organs. When a person is assigned a particular sex at birth, it is often mistakenly assumed that this will equate with their gender; it might, but it might not.

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... The Language of Gender cont'd

**Sexual orientation** Our sexual orientation and our gender are separate though related parts of our overall identity. Gender is personal (how we each see ourselves), while sexual orientation is interpersonal (which people we are physically, emotionally and/or romantically attracted to).

**Transboy** A child who was assigned a female sex at birth and has a boy gender identity.

**Transgender** Sometimes this term is used broadly as an umbrella term to describe anyone whose gender identity differs from their assigned birth sex. It is also used more narrowly as a gender identity that reflects a binary gender identity that is "opposite" or "across from" the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transgirl** A child who was assigned a male sex at birth and has a girl gender identity.

**Transition** A term commonly used to include the steps a transgender, agender, or non-binary person takes in order to align aspects of their life to be consistent with their gender identity. This term can be misleading, however, as it implies the person's gender is changing from one gender to another; in actuality the person's gender remains relatively stable. It is others' understanding of that gender that shifts. What people see as a "transition" is actually an alignment in one or more dimensions of the individual's gender as they seek congruence across those dimensions. A transition is taking place,

but it is often those associated with the person (parents and other family members, support professionals, employers, etc.) who are transitioning in how they see the individual's gender, and not the person themselves. Thus we prefer the term "seeking congruence" or "congruence measures". A person can seek congruence in any or all of the following ways: social congruence—through changes of social identifiers such as clothing, hairstyle, gender identity, name, and/or pronouns; hormonal congruence—through the use of medicines such as hormone "blockers" or cross hormones to promote gender-based body changes; surgical congruence—in which an individual's body is modified through the addition or removal of gender-related physical traits; and legal congruence—through changing identification documents such as one's birth certificate, driver's license, and passport.

**Transphobia** Fear, dislike of, and/or prejudice against transgender people.

**Transsexuals** An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some people who have permanently changed, or seek to change, their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender.

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... The New Gender Spectrum cont'd

Research at Cornell Medical College, Netherlands Institute for Neuroscience in Amsterdam, the Gender and Sexuality Development Program at Children's National Health System in Washington, D.C., and the UCLA Center for Gender-Based Biology backs up the idea that some people do fall outside of the usual two categories of male and female.

As society continues to reel from the radical changes in how we view same-sex relationships and marriage in this country, millennials and the iGen are going to continue to shake up how we view gender, sex, and identity. ■

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>"How Science Is Helping Us Understand Gender:" Freed from the binary of boy and girl, gender identity is a shifting landscape. Can science help us navigate? By Robin Marantz Henig, [National Geographic 12/16/2017](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2017/12/16/12-16-2017-how-science-is-helping-us-understand-gender/)

#### Resources:

##### Gender Spectrum

Provides an array of services to help youth, families, organizations, and institutions understand and address concepts of Gender identity and Gender expression. Conferences, meetings, online groups.

[www.genderspectrum.org](http://www.genderspectrum.org)

##### The Teaching Transgender Toolkit

A Facilitator's Guide to Increasing Knowledge, Decreasing Prejudice, and Building Skills.

<http://www.teachingtransgender.org/>

##### Ingersoll Gender Center

Seattle, WA

Provides peer support, training, social events, and education.

<https://ingersollgendercenter.org/>

## Get Ready Now for Next Fall!

Ah, the first days of summer are just around the corner. Summer vacation with time to relax and get away from the pressures of school. But wait! That means next fall is also right around the corner. For some people, the approach of September causes episodes of anxiety and panic. Some people experience symptoms so severe that they require a visit to the emergency room.

### So why are we bringing this up now?

If either you or your child dreads September, and you know you will struggle with anxiety in the fall, now is the time to get help. Just as your doctor tells you what you can do to prevent health problems, we can recommend some simple preventive mental health strategies. Working with one of our counselors can help you learn to manage anxiety, panic, and stress.

Far West counseling services are available all summer, and it's a good time to prepare yourself or your child for the start of school next fall. A counselor can help you establish good mental health habits for dealing with stress, anxiety, or depression. Learning stress-reduction techniques now will help diminish school-related anxiety and make the start of school something you can look forward to.

### Teacher Anxiety

"It is not uncommon for us to get calls just before the start of school from teachers who start feeling sick on Sunday night or get sick to their stomach on Monday morning," says Katie Frisbie, executive director of Far West and licensed mental health

counselor. "There is something going on there that needs attention. A counselor can help deal with those underlying questions and concerns, and prepare the teacher in advance for the issues that typically come up at the beginning of the school year."

### Student Anxiety

Students who struggle with anxiety at



the beginning of the school year can also benefit from a few counseling sessions during the summer. Talking about their doubts and fears can help diminish those feelings. And learning relaxation techniques can help kids manage the physical responses to stress. Parents and guardians can help kids prepare in positive ways. Role-playing and drawing often help. A walk around or through the new school building can ease a child's anxiety and stress. Most schools are happy to arrange a tour for you and your child. At the end of this article, you'll find links to helpful information about coping with back-to-school anxiety.

### College Freshman Anxiety

Is your teenager looking forward to college but nervous about leaving

home? Consider scheduling a few counseling sessions this summer. Getting concerns out in the open and knowing what to expect can ease the tension. Your son or daughter can work with the counselor to create healthy strategies and prepare for the challenges that may arise during the big transition to college life.

### Schedule Early

If you decide to come to Far West for counseling, don't wait until the week before school starts. Call us in June or July so you can get started right away. Then you can enjoy the rest of your summer! ■

### RESOURCES:

#### Children and anxiety:

<https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/helping-your-child-cope-back-school-anxiety>

#### For teenagers with school anxiety:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/teen-angst/201408/back-school-anxiety>

#### Why College Freshmen Need to take Emotions 101:

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/28/why-college-freshmen-need-to-take-emotions-101/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.085e8d44ca3c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/09/28/why-college-freshmen-need-to-take-emotions-101/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.085e8d44ca3c)

#### Depression and College Students

<http://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/top-5-mental-health-problems-facing-college-students/>

*Reprinted from Summer 2015 edition of The Forecaster.*



## Summer Activism & Service

No time for political or community involvement during the school year? Become a summer activist!

Don't know where to start? Start by picking just one issue and one organization to work with. Put names in a hat and draw one, or you will spend all summer fussing over which one to choose. You might want to include your spouse and children in the decision so you can work on it over the summer. Model for your children how to be civic minded.

**KISS** - we all know what that stands for ("Keep it simple, stupid!") So pick one project that you can get involved with and stick with it. You're not going to change the world over the summer, but you can make a difference about one thing.

It might be easier to start with a

local or state-wide issue, something you can do close to home. If you like work parties, you can help clear invasive plants from a local



park, or foster kittens and puppies through [PAWS](#) or pack food at [Food LifeLine](#). In Snohomish and Skagit Counties, go to the [VOA](#) volunteer site for activities and agencies needing help.

Or maybe you'd prefer working on letter writing campaigns or meeting with your local and state politicians. Check your local paper to see what rallies are scheduled for the summer, and plan to attend one.

Action helps us diminish our stress. Doing something for the benefit of others helps us feel more a part of our community and part of the solution. It helps us feel better about ourselves too. ■

*"Not everything that can be faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed that is not faced."*

**James Baldwin**



## Counseling Over the Summer

Many people wonder whether counseling would help them deal with a personal, family, or work problem. Here are some things to consider:

Counseling can help people deal with grief and loss, relationship or marital issues, parenting, communication, anger, depression, anxiety, stress, chemical dependency, family of origin issues, past abuse, trauma, job satisfaction, and much more.

A professional counselor is a facilitator and guide who will offer suggestions about helpful directions and possible actions. The counselor is not there to provide answers, but rather to assist the client in growing, learning new things, and taking action that can lead to a more satisfying life.

The counselors at Far West have gone through rigorous master's degree programs, internships, and many hours of supervision in order to become either Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) or Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT). When you contact us for counseling, you will be matched with a highly educated, well-trained, and experienced professional.

Our counselors are available throughout the summer. If this would be a good time for you to get some help, call our scheduling office to get started, 206-682-8149 or 1-800-398-3440.

## Far West Family Services

*The Forecaster* is published quarterly by Far West Family Services, your Employee Assistance Program. Copies of this newsletter are also on our website.

We appreciate your feedback and comments about our newsletter.

P.O. Box 811  
Langley, WA 98260

206-682-8149 • 360-221-1202  
or toll free 800-398-3440  
[diana.nielsen@comcast.net](mailto:diana.nielsen@comcast.net)

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Far West Family Services, now in its fourth decade, is a professional behavioral health care service business providing Employee Assistance Programs in Washington state. If you would like more information about our customized programs, please call 206-682-8149 or 1-800-398-3440, or visit our website at [www.farwestfamilyservices.com](http://www.farwestfamilyservices.com).

To learn more about your benefits through Far West, or to schedule an appointment with one of our therapists, call our office during business hours, 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Sessions are available from 12:00 pm to 8:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**Far West . . . help when you need it.**

**206-682-8149 • 360-221-1202 • 800-398-3440**

**After-hours emergencies:  
Press option 1 to speak to a crisis counselor  
or for TTY call  
206-461-3219 (TTY)**

[www.farwestfamilyservices.com](http://www.farwestfamilyservices.com)

## Need additional resources?



### HELPGUIDE.ORG

The best mental health resources on the web, in collaboration with Harvard Medical School Health Publications. Answers to your questions about depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, eating disorders, insomnia, parenting, etc. Excellent self-evaluation guides and step-by-step programs for dealing with life's challenges.

### Community Resources

Links to organizations in Washington state for information on adoption, gay and lesbian issues, financial and legal resources, county resources, drug and alcohol treatment centers, youth violence, domestic violence, and more.