



**“Family & Children Services taught me coping mechanisms that made a huge difference in my ability to handle work stress.”**

On the outside, Kevin looked like he had it all together.

Corporate job. Loving family. Solid friends.

But on the inside, it felt like he was carrying the weight of an invisible world on his shoulders. He was overwhelmed by work to the point of exhaustion.

The COVID-19 pandemic created an avalanche of to-dos like never before. While others were instructed to work from home, Kevin was one of the few that was still in the office. He did not have a team to share the workload. The tasks kept piling up.

On top of it all, his wife had been placed on temporary leave from her job. They had three children. Kevin felt like it was up to him and him alone to provide for his family.

He felt pressure from all sides. It was all crashing down on him, both personally and professionally.

“Work is where we spend the majority of our time,” Kevin said. “We work hard to get a degree and think about what we want to be when we grow up. Once you are in the career you worked so hard for, it’s pretty important. But when you feel you’re failing to meet the expectations you have for yourself, it is hard to live with that reality.”

### **THE MENTAL BECOMES PHYSICAL**

Work overtook all areas of Kevin’s life.

“I didn’t eat,” he said. “I couldn’t sleep. I was haunted by everything I had to get done the next day. I’d go to bed and experience a continuous loop of stress and worry. I was crippled by anxiety. I didn’t know how to cope.”

As a result, Kevin did the only thing he knew he could control: he worked. And worked. And worked.

“I was always working,” he said. “I had no time for self-care. I’d work through lunch and dinner. When I did come home, I was absolutely exhausted, so I barely had any energy to focus on my family. I didn’t want to see anyone or do anything.”

Kevin said his friends suggested he simply stopped working so hard. That didn’t help.

“It’s easier said than done, to say, ‘Hey, just don’t work so much,’” he said. “I was the only one in the building... I was the only one in the department. You can’t just NOT do the work. It has to get done. People were counting on me. My family was counting on me.”

## **FINDING COPING STRATEGIES**

Kevin continued to fall down the stress spiral. He forgot to eat and stayed up all hours of the night. Finally, the stress became too much. He decided to call Family & Children's Services to utilize their counseling services.

In talk therapy, Kevin began to loosen the choke hold of work stress. He started to breathe easier.

"Family & Children Services taught me coping mechanisms that made a huge difference in my ability to handle the work stress," Kevin said. "They empowered me with tools that I can use on a daily basis."

Through therapy, Kevin learned how taking five minutes to practice deep breathing can help minimize stress. He also learned about progressive muscle relaxation: a breathing method that helps release muscle tension.

"Progressive muscle relaxation has been a life-saver," he said. "I can go to sleep now. My mind is clearer, I'm able to fall asleep more quickly and get the rest that my body and mind need. I couldn't have kept going down the path I was on. I was a shell of myself."

Kevin said without the coping tools he learned by focusing on his mental health, he would have continued to be overwhelmed and suffer the impact, both physically and mentally. He also would not be present with his family, losing out on the opportunity to make memories and keep those relationships strong.

"Talk therapy is extremely beneficial," he said. "I'm so grateful Family & Children's Services exists; I'm so glad counseling services are available in this community so I could get the help I need. I'm not as stressed. I have coping strategies now that I can use for the rest of my life."