


EAP

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SUPERVISORY Training Manual



BUSINESS HEALTH SERVICES

A service of Mercy Medical Center-Sioux City

THE NEED FOR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

It is frequently estimated that in a typical employee population:

- 6 - 10% suffer from alcoholism or an alcohol-related problem
- 2 - 3% have difficulty with drugs
- 6 - 7% experience emotional problems related to a wide variety of issues such as death of a loved one, depression, parenting, etc.
- 1 - 2% have problems related to financial or legal issues

Businesses, industries and government organizations have recognized that it is naive to believe that employees can “leave their problems at home.” Management professionals are increasingly acknowledging that their employees are a **significant, valued resource** and deserve the same degree of attention as that given to the management of other resources, such as capital and technology.

An employee’s personal problem(s) and how it affects the workplace can be very frustrating for a supervisor. Frequently, the response by the supervisor is to try to “fix” the problem through informal counseling, “ignore” the problem or hope the problem “goes away.” This can result in ongoing work performance issues which can last weeks, months, or sometimes years.

The formal adoption of an **EAP policy** and the implementation of a system for handling personal problems in the workplace is an **efficient, effective and caring** alternative to the approaches just described.

OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The EAP is a system designed to provide confidential, professional care to employees and their immediate family members, who may be struggling with such personal problems as:

- Alcoholism
- Emotional difficulties
- Stress
- Drug dependence
- Financial
- Family discord
- Gambling
- Eating disorders
- Marital discord

Many of these problems are progressive, even life-threatening conditions; others are less serious, but nevertheless can have a negative impact on an individual’s job performance.

The EAP offers short-term counseling, assessment and referral services, which are employer paid and provided at no cost to employees and/or immediate family members. Should a referral be necessary, the EAP will assist the person in gathering insurance information to aid in a referral that will meet all of their personal, as well as financial needs. Follow-up contacts are made with the employee/family member, the supervisor (formal referral), and the treatment provider if applicable. Follow-up is extremely important in enhancing the chances of a successful outcome.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REFERRALS

There are three ways in which an employee can use the EAP: self-referral, informal referral, and a formal referral, which is a supervisory or management referral.

1. **Self Referral:** The employee or family member contacts the EAP to seek professional assistance. The individual presents a problem or a request for service. The EAP staff conducts a preliminary assessment of the employee's problem and then recommends a course of action, which may include a referral to community resources designed to meet the employee's specific issues. The entire transaction is confidential, and management is informed of the visit only at the employee's specific written permission.
2. **Informal Referral:** Referral made as the result of a suggestion by a friend, co-worker, HR representative, employee health representative, supervisor, etc. Procedurally, this type of referral is no different from a self-referral. It is the employee's choice whether or not to contact the EAP. Confidentiality issues are treated the same as in a self-referral; that is, there is no reason for management to know of the visit. Even the person who suggested the referral will not know from the EAP staff whether the employee used the EAP, without the employee's specific written permission.
3. **Formal Referral:** This type of referral is made by the supervisor or management and is related to declining job performance. It is utilized when the supervisor's normal attempts to correct the situation, such as restating performance expectations, offering job training, changing the work situation, improving communication, and making similar managerial interventions, do not result in improved performance. It is possible that in such a case an unresolved personal problem may be impeding the employee's ability to perform at the required level. If an unresolved personal problem is at the root of the performance difficulty, no amount of persuasion on the part of the supervisor or willpower on the part of the employee will correct the situation.

This is the only time any information will be shared with the supervisor, without a signed consent. The following information will be shared:

- Whether or not the employee kept the appointment.
- Whether or not the employee is willing to follow the recommendations of the EAP. Periodic follow-up with the supervisor will also be made by the EAP to monitor for continued compliance with recommendations and to discuss realistic time frames for the employee's work performance improvement.

TO MAKE FORMAL REFERRALS

When it appears that an employee's work performance is remaining substandard and normal management actions have impacted declining work performance, a **formal referral** to the EAP is in order. The supervisor should:

- Consult with the EAP, prior to the referral, preferably, regarding the appropriateness of the referral.
- If a formal referral is necessary, contact the EAP with the referral and related information regarding work performance issues.
- Hold a private session with the employee. Express genuine concern to the worker about the lack of noticeable improvement.
- Identify and explain the specifics of the substandard work performance e.g., when, how often, where, etc. Tell the employee you are making a referral to the EAP.
- Make it clear to the worker that if the problem is personal, it is the worker's responsibility to take care of it.
- Let the employee know that participation in the EAP is voluntary.
- Emphasize that lack of improvement in job performance could lead to further corrective action which might result in suspension or termination.
- When setting up an appointment:
 1. The supervisor may make an appointment for employee.
 2. Have the employee make the appointment at the close of the meeting.
 3. Give the employee the number to the EAP and suggest they make an appointment, at their convenience.
- EAP will contact the supervisor to address whether or not the employee kept the appointment, and if they are willing to follow treatment recommendations.
- EAP will follow-up with supervisor and employee.
- EAP will follow-up with treatment provider, if applicable.

REMEMBER

1. Although this process is for a formal referral, you should feel free to contact the EAP at any stage of an employee's deteriorating performance.
2. Further corrective action cannot be based on participation, or lack of, in the EAP. Any

further action must be based on job performance.

ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR IN DEALING WITH AN IMPAIRED EMPLOYEE

1. Set appropriate limits and boundaries for yourself.
2. Stay focused on the overall performance and productivity of your employees. DO NOT DIAGNOSE EMPLOYEE PERSONAL PROBLEMS.
3. Identify and confront substandard performance.
4. Follow your organization's corrective actions policies and refer to the EAP as necessary.

INDICATORS OF DECLINING JOB PERFORMANCE

The following indicators may be indicative of problems employees may be experiencing personally. Keep in mind that all of us have our "off days" which can temporarily affect our work performance and attitude. However, if these indicators become a **PATTERN** or **CLUSTERED** you should initiate a series of **CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**.

- **ABSENTEEISM** - Frequent unauthorized leave; excessive sick leave; being late or absent frequently on Fridays or Mondays; excessive tardiness; leaving work early; peculiar and increasingly improbable excuses for absences; higher absenteeism rate than other employees for colds, flu, gastritis, etc.
- **"ON THE JOB" ABSENTEEISM** - Continued absence from the work station more than the job requires; long coffee breaks; physical illness on the job.
- **HIGH ACCIDENT RATE** - Accidents on the job; high utilization of work related disability; accidents off the job.
- **DIFFICULTY IN CONCENTRATION** - Jobs take more time.
- **CONFUSION** - Difficulty in recalling instructions, details, etc.; difficulty in recalling mistakes.
- **ERRATIC WORK PATTERNS** - Pronounced changes in work pace, may swing from very high productivity to very low productivity. An impaired employee will not be able to maintain a good performance record. You will see these swings.
- **LOWERED JOB EFFICIENCY** - Missed deadlines; mistakes; increasingly poor judgment.
- **POOR RELATIONSHIPS ON THE JOB** - Complaints from fellow employees, customers, patients, clients, etc.; wide mood swings in morale; overreaction to real or imagined criticism; unreasonable resentments; borrowing money from co-workers.

REMEMBER, THE FIRST STEP IS ACKNOWLEDGING THERE IS A PROBLEM!

Employee Observation Checklist (Strictly Confidential)

Employee

Period of evaluation

Supervisor #1 name and telephone

Supervisor #2 name and telephone

The following indicators may be indicative of problems employees may be experiencing personally. Keep in mind that all of us have our “off days” which can temporarily affect our work performance and attitude. However, if these indicators become a pattern or clustered, you should initiate a series of corrective actions.

A. Quality and Quantity of Work

YES	NO	
___	___	1. Clear refusal to do assigned tasks
___	___	2. Significant increase in errors
___	___	3. Repeated errors in spite of increased guidance
___	___	4. Reduced quantity of work
___	___	5. Inconsistent “up and down” quantity or quality of work
___	___	6. Behavior that disrupts work flow
___	___	7. Procrastination on significant decisions or tasks
___	___	8. More than usual supervision necessary
___	___	9. Frequent, supported explanations for poor work performance
___	___	10. Noticeable change in written or verbal communication
___	___	11. Other (please specify) _____

B. Interpersonal Work Relationships

___	___	1. Significant change in relations with co-workers, supervisors, others
___	___	2. Frequent or intense arguments
___	___	3. Verbal abusiveness
___	___	4. Physical abusiveness
___	___	5. Persistently withdrawn or less involved with people
___	___	6. Intentional avoidance of supervisor
___	___	7. Expressions of frustration and discontent
___	___	8. Change in frequency or nature of complaints
___	___	9. Complaints by co-workers, subordinates
___	___	10. Cynical, “distrustful of human nature” comments
___	___	11. Unusual sensitivity to advice or critique of work
___	___	12. Unpredictable response to supervision
___	___	13. Passive-aggressive attitude or behavior, doing things “behind your back”

C. General Job Performance

YES	NO	
___	___	1. Excessive unauthorized absences/tardiness (___ in last 12 months)
___	___	2. Excessive authorized absences (___ in the last 12 months)
___	___	3. Excessive use of sick leave (___ in the last 12 months)
___	___	4. Frequent Monday/Friday absence or other pattern
___	___	5. Frequent unexplained disappearances (frequent trips to bathroom, etc.)
___	___	6. Excessive “extension” of breaks or lunch
___	___	7. Frequently leaves work early (___ days/week or month)
___	___	8. Increased concern about (or actual incidents) of safety offenses involving the employee
___	___	9. Experiences or causes job accidents
___	___	10. Major changes in duties or responsibilities
___	___	11. Interferes with or ignores established procedures
___	___	12. Inability to follow through on job performance recommendations

D. Personal Matters

___	___	1. Changes in or unusual appearance (dress, hygiene)
___	___	2. Changes in or unusual speech (incoherent, stuttering, rambling, loud, slurred)
___	___	3. Changes in or unusual physical mannerisms (gesture, posture, staggering)
___	___	4. Changes in or unusual facial expressions
___	___	5. Changes in or unusual level of activity (much reduced ___ or increased ___)
___	___	6. Changes in or unusual topics of conversation
___	___	7. Engages in detailed discussions about death, suicide, or harming someone
___	___	8. Increasingly irritable or tearful
___	___	9. Persistently boisterous or rambunctious
___	___	10. Unpredictable or out-of-context displays of emotion
___	___	11. Unusual fears
___	___	12. Lacks appropriate caution
___	___	13. Engages in detailed discussion about obtaining or using drugs and/or alcohol
___	___	14. Has personal relationship problems (spouse, girl/boyfriend, children, in-laws)
___	___	15. Makes unfounded accusations toward others, i.e., has feelings of persecution
___	___	16. Secretive (meets with others, usually in private groups in out of way places)
___	___	17. Memory problems (difficulty recalling instructions, data, past behaviors)
___	___	18. Frequent colds, flu, or other illnesses
___	___	19. Comes to work with alcohol/marijuana odor
___	___	20. Excessive fatigue
___	___	21. Makes unreliable or false statements
___	___	22. Unrealistic self-appraisal or grandiose statements
___	___	23. Temper tantrums or angry outbursts
___	___	24. Demanding, rigid, inflexible
___	___	25. Major change in physical health
___	___	26. Concerns about sexual behavior or sexual harassment
___	___	27. Frequent borrowing of money from co-workers
___	___	28. Discovery or presence of substances in an employee’s possession or near the employee’s workplace

Other information/observations (be specific noting date, time and location):

Signature of Supervisor #1

Date/Time

Signature of Supervisor #2

Date/Time

(Source: Modified Federal Department of Transportation Assessment Schedule.)

TRAPS AND PITFALLS

Don't make value judgments.

It's better to say, "I don't like this" rather than, "I think you're wrong." Be specific! Rely on your own feelings and specific job performance criteria.

Don't moralize.

Avoid "you should" or "you shouldn't" statements. These create hostility and imitate a put-down. It is better to explain what you expect—in a specific and direct manner.

Never ask why.

"Why do you do this?" "Why did you do that?" "Why?" serves as an excuse. Remember, each person is always responsible for his or her own behavior. Never question personal activity!

Don't accept excuses.

If the person claims, "I am sick" or makes other excuses, point out there are no excuses for prolonged impaired job performance. If sick, the employee should be treated for that illness.

Be firm.

Hold fast to your contention that it is his/her responsibility to improve job performance. Insist that help is available but each person must seek whatever help is needed.

Beware of the "game."

Do not permit the person to play you against higher management or the union. Discuss your action with your supervisor. No union ever praised poor performance. If necessary, have the shop steward or employee representative present. The person's job is on the line—not yours.

Do not make idle threats.

Follow through with your warning (demotion, suspension, layoff, or termination) according to administrative policies and procedures.

WHAT TO DO IF THE CONVERSATION GOES OFF TRACK

Employees often become defensive when their supervisor draws attention to a job performance problem. The employee may cry, show anger, or make excuses to take the focus off the real issue—job performance.

When an employee becomes defensive, it is especially helpful to stay focused on job performance and conduct. While it is important to be understanding, it is not your job to counsel the employee about his or her personal problems. The goal of your meeting is to discuss and find solutions to the job performance problem.

BARRIERS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM

Confronting an employee about a performance or a conduct problem is not easy. No one can tell you how an employee will respond. Sometimes an employee may become upset with you, hoping this will make you back down from the confrontation.

Being aware of potential barriers is the best way to decrease the chance of negative reaction. The information below provides guidance in responding to some of the most common barriers.

BARRIERS THAT ARISE WHEN ADDRESSING

- **Denial**

The employee denies that problems exist and insists that supervisor or someone else in the company is out to get him or her.

How to Respond:

Stay calm. Have at hand documentation of the employee's job performance and/or conduct and keep the conversation focused on performance issues.

- **Threats**

The employee threatens you or the organization. "If you push me, I'll go to an attorney... make a scene in the plant...quit here and now..."

How to Respond:

Remind the employee that he or she may do whatever he or she chooses; however, as a supervisor your responsibility is to uphold the organization's policy and find a solution that will help both the organization and the employee. If you think you are losing objectivity or need help to resolve a conflict with a defensive employee, seek the help of another supervisor or manager.

- **Rationalization**

The employee tries to avoid the issue by making excuses. "If this job wasn't so stressful, I wouldn't be making so many mistakes and wouldn't be late so often."

How to Respond:

Stay focused on work performance. Avoid being distracted by excuses; let the employee know that help is available.

- **Angry Outbursts**

The employee becomes angry. He or she may cry, yell, or scream. This emotional outburst is intended to scare off the supervisor and cause him or her to drop the whole affair. *In a shouting voice with arms raised...* "How dare you accuse me of being late to work and not getting my deliveries made on time!"

How to Respond:

Do not react! Wait until the employee has run out of steam and then continue where you left off; keep focus on performance issues. If the employee continues to carry on, reschedule the meeting.

Once you have documented the job performance problem, you should meet with the employee to discuss what you have seen. Make an appointment at a time and place when you think you will be relaxed and able to discuss the problem without distractions. When job performance problems occur, it is especially important to treat the employee with respect. Your job is to address the performance problem and encourage improvement, not to judge the employee.

This will help keep the lines of communication open, solve the problem, and maintain good management-employee relations.

Many supervisors report that starting a conversation with an employee about a performance problem is often the most difficult step. You may feel unsure about what to say or how to say it. Or you may find yourself wanting to avoid the discussion altogether. The information that follows will help you take the first step.

HOW TO BEGIN AND END A CONVERSATION

Supervisor:

“Sarah, I want to talk with you about my observations regarding your work. You have been a good employee in the past, but lately I’ve noticed changes in your work performance. I want to make you aware of my concerns and hear from you as well, because it is important that you correct the problems as soon as possible.”

Employee:

“Well, I’ve just been tired lately... I know I’ve been late a couple of times.”

Supervisor:

(Refer to specific documentation of Sarah’s job performance in the past month.) *“Actually, you have been late 10 times in the last month, your productivity is down 25 percent, and you have called in sick 3 times in the past 3 weeks, always on Monday or Friday. Has anything about your job changed that could explain these problems?”*

Employee:

“What do you mean?”

Supervisor:

“For instance, are you having trouble with a specific job-related task or routine or with a co-worker relationship that would cause you to be late or cause your productivity to be down?”

Employee:

“I don’t think so. I mean there are certain people I don’t really get along with, but that’s not what makes me late. I’ve been having

problems at home. I guess it has been affecting work more than I thought. I get the message. I’ll try to do better.”

Supervisor:

“Sarah, it is important that your work performance improve. I will give you 2 weeks to correct the behaviors I mentioned before taking further disciplinary action. In the meantime, I will remind you that the Employee Assistance Program is available to you if you need help with personal problems that are affecting your job performance.

When we meet again, two weeks from Thursday, we will review your job performance again. Between now and our next meeting I expect you to be present at work and on time every day. If your attendance and tardiness does not improve, we will discuss further disciplinary actions.”

Note for Supervisor:

(Further disciplinary action may include referring the employee to the EAP again, or to some other resource of help in the community. Again, it is important that you follow the guidelines established by your employer as to how you should handle referrals.) It also is essential that you prepare a written summary of this meeting that includes the follow-up plan you made with the employee, then conduct the follow-up as scheduled.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR SUPERVISORS

DO:

- prepare what you are going to say ahead of time. Have a plan and stick to it. Say what you have to say directly and clearly.
- find a place to meet that is private. What is said in the meeting must be kept confidential.
- focus on job performance and conduct—not on suspected alcohol or other drug abuse, mental illness or any other potential reason for performance problems.
- present written documentation of the job performance and/or conduct problems (late reports, absences, lower productivity, accidents, trouble with co-workers).
- treat all employees the same. Don't let age, seniority, friendship, or sympathy affect your evaluation or allow you to make exceptions for some employees and not others.
- use a formal yet considerable attitude. If the interview becomes too casual, it will lessen the impact of your message.
- state your expectations for improved performance and/or conduct and what will happen if the expectations are not met within a specific period of time. Offer suggestions for improving performance and/or conduct.

- offer available resources (EAP, hotlines, etc.) to help employees get back on track if they say they are having personal problems.

- arrange for a second meeting to evaluate progress or to discuss disciplinary actions, if necessary.

DON'T

- try to diagnose the cause of the employee's job performance or conduct problem.

- be distracted by tears, anger, or other outbursts. (Stay focused on job performance and conduct.)

- moralize or judge the employee.

- cover up for the employee or accept repeated unlikely excuses.

- back down. (Get a commitment for improved job performance and conduct.)

- threaten to discipline unless you are willing and able to carry it out.

- argue with an employee. If the employee becomes resistant, reschedule the meeting instead.

CONCLUSION

It is a managerial mistake to avoid the unpleasant task of confronting a problem employee. Silence shows approval. It allows the employee to continue self-destructive behavior and poor work performance. The morale of an entire work area may be lowered.

Establish trust within a department by treating employees respectfully, calmly, without judgment, fairly, consistently, and confidentially. This kind of work environment encourages employees to ask for help on their own, and diminishes the fear of disciplinary action if they do seek help.

**This manual has been updated for your convenience. The policies and procedures outlined here will take precedence over prior training manuals. Revised 10/95*



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