



The Frontline Supervisor

Helping You Manage Your Company's Most Valuable Resource – Employees

Solutions Employee Assistance Program 1-800-526-3485

Q - *Several of my employees plan to meet with a coworker to encourage him to refer himself to the EAP. I've been asked to participate. I am concerned about his performance, but feel uncertain whether I should excuse myself from this group.*

A - Your employees are apparently planning an intervention, but you should not participate because you are a supervisor with a formal relationship established by your organization to provide supervision and performance evaluation. This distinction separates you from the purpose of this intervention and the discussion that may follow. Your own concerns regarding the employee's performance should be reserved for a private meeting between you and the employee. You can then make an EAP referral. Coworkers sometimes refer employees to the EAP. This is an unofficial and informal process that does not involve management participation.

Q - *Should supervisors avoid making even the slightest reference to their personal concern about a physical or mental health problem when referring employees to the EAP for job performance problems?*

A - Generally accepted EAP practice now holds that it is best for the supervisor to avoid expressing personal concern for an employee's physical or mental health when making a referral for job performance problems. Such statements can be misconstrued as the supervisor believing the employee has a disability. Later, this could adversely affect administrative decisions about the employee's job situation. It is tempting when referring an employee to the EAP to express a genuine concern about the employee's physical or mental health. Such statements are often made with the intent of reducing the employee's defensiveness and helping him or her believe the supervisor's intentions are good in making the referral. As an alternative, express personal concern for the employee's performance, job security, or future with the company. You can thus be supportive and avoid the pitfalls associated with statements about the employee's potential personal problems.

Call Solutions EAP for free, confidential consultation regarding an employee you may want to refer to the EAP: 1-800-526-3485.

Solutions EAP is a program of MidState Medical Center, Middlesex Hospital & and Behavioral Health Connecticut, LLC

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Q - *Some supervisors don't refer to the EAP until they reach the point of wanting to fire an employee. They tend to view an EAP referral as a quick, pre-termination step. Why does this happen, and what problems does it cause?*

A - Unfortunately, some supervisors don't refer to the EAP until a severe job problem or crisis looms with an employee. Common reasons for delaying include: 1) not recognizing that the EAP deals with a wide range of personal problems, large and small; 2) the supervisor's own personal problems that create resistance to referral and avoidance of the EAP staff; 3) fear that management will criticize or not support the supervisor's desire to terminate the employee unless an EAP referral has been tried; and, 4) a desire to keep problems within the work unit out of a sense of personal failure that they can't solve their problems "in house." But when supervisors use the EAP only as a last resort, the work organization comes to believe that only the most troubled employees, or those being considered for termination, get referred. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Q *My employee has fears about her telephone being tapped, employees being jealous of her beauty, and hearing others' thoughts. Sometimes other peculiar behavior occurs. I know this isn't normal and it's getting worse. How should I respond?*

A - Your employee may be having trouble with her thoughts in ways that she cannot control. If her speech or behavior is having an adverse impact on coworkers or negatively affecting her performance, you should meet with her and make an EAP referral. Base your referral on the effects of her behavior, not on your belief that she has a possible mental illness. Certainly her beliefs indicate the possibility of a thought disorder (psychosis), but only a qualified clinician can make this determination and examine its cause. The EAP is likely to arrange such an evaluation. If your employee refuses the referral and her behavior continues to affect her performance or get worse, consult with your EA professional about other steps to take. The organization may wish to require her to visit a medical expert for an evaluation. This is also called a "fitness for duty" evaluation.