

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



UConn Health Center EAP 860-679-2877 or 800-852-4392

■ **I know employees with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act, but is there an idea source on accommodations?**

PTSD includes a range of symptoms that affect memory, concentration, emotions, and the senses, so it's possible your employee will request some accommodations so he or she can adequately perform essential functions. Not all employees exhibit symptoms at work. If your employee shares his or her diagnosis of PTSD with you, consider options for making accommodations. Also, talk to your human resources advisor or appropriate management advisor. The EAP is also available to assist you in a consultative capacity, as it would be with any employee. Check out the very useful resource offered by the federal government, www.askjan.org, for great ideas on accommodating almost any disability.

■ **What is fear of success? Is this problem something a supervisor should help an employee overcome or would this be strictly an EAP issue?**

Fear of success has been discussed in psychology journals for decades. You also will find many references to it in contemporary literature. Fear of success is created by anxiety associated with the anticipation of reaching a goal. The phenomenon usually is outside the awareness of the person experiencing it. Like most achievements, positive and negative consequences and the need for change usually result. If challenging enough, these factors may produce anxiety resulting in procrastination, the inability to complete assignments, failure to anticipate problems that undermine the goal, distractions, beliefs about the unattainable nature of the goal, or behaviors that undermine action steps to the goal's timely completion. Would-be goal achievers are usually not aware of how they sabotage their own success and often are baffled by the inability to get what they desire. You can't be a psychologist of course, but you can help by insisting on timely achievements, results, accountability, and voluntarily accepting help from the EAP. Each can play a helpful role.

■ **I am sure many employees experience financial problems, but I don't hear much talk about it. Besides stress and worry, how can employees suffer from financial problems?**

A recent MetLife Study of Employee Benefits Trends discovered that about 44% of employees live paycheck to paycheck, and nearly 60% are very concerned about having enough money to make ends meet. Most people would agree that financial stress is difficult with its accompanying worry and distraction, but this is only part of the story. Many people endure financial stress alone because of stigma, fear of being judged by others, or feeling guilty because of overspending. These issues can keep employees

from seeking help, even from a trusted EAP. Financial stress can contribute to headaches, backaches, ulcers, increased blood pressure, depression, anxiety, and panic. Many employees will cope with financial stress using denial, “magical” thinking, and/or coping strategies that relieve fear but don’t solve their problems. As problems worsen, risk increases for falling prey to payday loans, Internet schemes, gambling, or other high-risk “remedies.” Financial problems diminish one’s sense of autonomy, feelings of security, and self-control. So with financial problems come increased workplace absenteeism, diminished workplace performance, and depression. All these things can adversely affect productivity.

■ I am in favor of employees using the EAP to help them manage stress, and I am happy to encourage them to do so, especially during these stressful times. What can I say to increase their motivation to consider the program?

When encouraging use of the employee assistance program, go beyond merely mentioning the program as a helpful resource. Increase motivation to use the program by reinforcing important aspects of the EAP’s unique approach, particularly its confidential nature. Also disavow and renounce the stigma of seeking professional help for a personal problem. State that you will not allow harm to come to the employee’s job or career situation simply for using the EAP. This position is consistent with any organization’s policy establishing the EAP. It can be helpful to mention specific types of problems many employees experience and that are appropriate for taking to the EAP. These include family problems, struggles with teenagers, or communication conflicts in couples’ relationships. Repetition of a positive EAP message is one key to improve utilization, but nothing is more powerful than a supervisor who encourages use of the program.

■ I think awareness of the symptoms of burnout is important for employees so they can consider getting help early. Are there measurable and documentable symptoms of burnout that supervisors should know so they can document this condition and refer employees to the EAP?

There are job performance issues associated with burnout, but using them to determine if your employee faces burnout is not a good idea. This is because these behavioral signs and symptoms are mostly secondary to the mental health issues of burnout underlying them. Also, other problems may contribute to what appear to be burnout symptoms. Avoid this diagnostic examination and pondering because you will make more efficient referrals to the EAP. For example, one symptom of burnout may be dread at getting up in the morning to go to work. You can’t document “dread,” but you can document tardiness. Another symptom of burnout may be resentment toward other employees who love their jobs and are bright-eyed about their careers. You can’t document resentment, but you can document conflict. It is hard to document “lack of motivation,” but it is easy to document incomplete assignments, lack of initiative, or work delays.

NOTES