

Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor



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

■ **I haven't referred an employee to the EAP before, but tell me, what is the most important thing I can do to convince the employee to go if there are no serious performance issues? There are a few workplace concerns but they have not risen to the level of "serious" yet.**

■ **Our company is in an area of the country where there appears to be quite a few illegal methamphetamine labs. I know some employees are probably using the stuff. What are the signs and symptoms of meth use or withdrawal?**

■ **I want to improve my communication with employees and act more social with them in the office; however,**

The most common reasons employees hesitate to visit an EAP are fear of the unknown, being asked personal questions, and confidentiality concerns. Support the EAP by reassuring employees that no personal information will be forthcoming to you and that it is company policy and practice to have no EAP participation or attendance records reflected in personnel files. Even an outstanding EAP with solid communication strategies and excellent internal relationships will from time to time need to surmount the fear employees have about confidentiality. Supporting confidentiality is, therefore, a vital role for you. Realize that some employees may never go to the EAP, but the majority will choose an EAP referral in lieu of a disciplinary action for a performance issue. Holding such job actions in abeyance as an accommodation to assist the employee in feeling motivated to accept help is a powerful strategy that has worked to return many employees to a higher level of performance.

Withdrawal from meth can include symptoms of anxiety, irritability, paranoia, hand tremors, talkativeness, nervousness, and violent or erratic behavior. Delusions and hallucinations are also possible. The longer a person has been addicted, the more intolerable their withdrawal symptoms become. As a word of caution, refer employees to the EAP when they have conduct or irresolvable performance issues. Don't wait to "figure out" what is wrong with them. You will rarely be completely right. There are signs and symptoms common to all substances of abuse. Depending on the workplace or industry, or the flexibility afforded to employees regarding duties, you may not recognize symptoms of methamphetamine use other than absenteeism. This is true with other substances of abuse as well. You may never notice a heroin user's symptoms, only their sudden and bewildering absenteeism. Methamphetamine use could cause an employee to appear energetic, focused, and productive for a short period. This won't raise much suspicion. The bottom line is: Don't diagnose, or even try to. Simply refer the employee to the EAP for performance issues.

Remember that a professional supervisory relationship does not mean an unfriendly supervisory relationship. When employees are relaxed and socializing at work, entering into their conversation is not an intrusion: they are at work! Look for opportunities like this one to join a casual

I am worried that they see me as “all business.” I don’t want to intrude on their social gatherings, but how can I begin to engage more casually with them?

■ How can supervisors help ensure that employees will demonstrate high levels of productivity on the job and the least amount of counterproductive work behaviors?

■ Many employees are concerned about the economy, but it is not practical to recommend every one of them to the EAP. My concern is risk of accidents or injury from distractions and stress. Are these valid concerns?

conversation: When you see several employees talking and laughing in a small group, approach the group and in a friendly way, greet the group and ask what everyone is talking about. “Hi, what’s everyone laughing about?” Attempt to participate in the conversation, not take over or dominate it. Notice how your presence affects your employees. Do they greet and welcome you, or does the group start breaking apart? How do you want employees to respond to your presence? This is an important question to consider. Don’t hesitate to use the EAP as a confidential coach to improve your engagement with employees. The EAP will help.

Managers positively influence employee behaviors in many ways, but the fundamentals are being sure employees know what they are supposed to be doing and how they will be held accountable. Counterproductive workplace behaviors are significant among employees who experience ambiguity about these things. A study by Florida State University’s College of Business found only 20% of employees knew what they were supposed to accomplish each day at work and how they would be held accountable. The other 80% experienced the most behavioral problems, such as conflicts, absenteeism, trust issues, job neglect, personality conflicts, and morale problems. It is not uncommon for EAPs to hear employee complaints about ambiguity associated with duties and accountability. Rare or non-existent performance reviews will make these problems worse. When difficult employee problems arise, always consider whether ambiguity about duties and accountability are compounding the issues you face.

<http://news.fsu.edu/More-FSU-News/A-question-of-accountability-What-happens-when-employees-are-left-in-the-dark>

Some evidence exists that during economic downturns, stress, job reassignments, and layoffs can increase risk of injuries and accidents. Remind employees to keep in mind that safety is always important, probably more so during these periods. Of course, there is a lot more to helping employees think about safety. During stressful periods, don’t counsel employees, but rather be a good listener, show empathy, and be willing to refer them to the EAP. Using patience and recognizing their stress is not a solution, but it will demonstrate welcomed support. Most businesses periodically face morale and internal conflicts that can make it difficult for employees to feel excited, cooperate, or “buy in” to what management wants them to do. During economic downturns, however, these struggles are exacerbated, and safety programs can falter under such circumstances. Accidents and injuries can follow.

Source: <http://bstsolutions.com/supervisors-and-managers> (Leading Safety in a Downturn)

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