



Mental Health and the Workplace

The way employees, think, feel and behave can impact everything from productivity and communication to their ability to maintain a safe work environment.

The Center for Prevention and Health Services estimates that mental illness and substance abuse issues cost employers between \$79 and \$105 billion annually in indirect costs. Absenteeism, decreased productivity, and increased healthcare expenses are just a few of the ways mental health problems cost employers money.

Promoting good mental health goes beyond a company's bottom line. Supporting employees so they feel their best reduces an employee's suffering and is a win-win for everyone.

Spotting potential problems

It will be important for managers and supervisor to spot behaviors that may indicate mental health issues with their employees. Such signs may include:

- Working slowly
- Missing deadlines
- Calling in sick frequently
- Arriving late to work on many days
- Leaving work early without explanation
- Exhibiting a short temper and irritability
- Poor concentration/inability to make decisions
- Appearing numb or emotionless
- Avoiding interaction with coworkers
- Making mistakes frequently and being disorganized

There are a number of ways an employer can promote good mental health in the workplace:

Create a Mentally Healthy Environment

Management needs to establish open lines of communication and an atmosphere in which employees feel comfortable talking about difficulties they may be having or stressors they may be experiencing, either at work or at home. When a supportive environment exists, employees in need of mental health assistance are much more likely to seek help.



Promote Mental Health/EAP Benefits

Let employees know about the resources that are available to them through their EAP. Display EAP materials, get the word out about upcoming tele-classes, remind employees of the availability of face-to-face counseling and encourage employees to use the interactive website. The Alternatives interactive website provides videos on a variety of topics and online assessment tools which may help employees identify mental health risks. Promoting these benefits is one of the simplest yet most effective ways for employers to help employees access the help they may need.

Assist Employees in Addressing Mental Health Issues

Mental health issues are very treatable. If employees utilize the resources that are available through the EAP it may prevent them from developing serious problems that could affect their ability to do their jobs. By creating policies that support mental wellness and treatment employers can help ensure that employees are able to perform at optimal levels which benefit everyone.

Morin, Amy. "How To Foster Good Mental Health In The Workplace" *Forbes Online Entrepreneurs*, n.p. April 9, 2015, Web
Collins, Susan. "Mental Health And The Workplace". *Health Net/Business Pulse*, n.p. May 7, 2015, Web

EAP: A Tool For Supervisors/Managers

It can be difficult and uncomfortable for many managers to start a conversation about performance issues. There are many obstacles to confronting workplace problems:

- Unwillingness to accept that there is a problem
- Feeling that things will get better if left alone
- Concern for the employee's job security or career
- Supervisors need to be liked
- Feeling that everyone should handle his or her own problems
- Concern that others will perceive you as a poor supervisor
- Supervisor's embarrassment over previous inaction
- Lack of faith in the counseling process
- Concerns about confidentiality
- Personal relationships that conflict with the supervisor's actions
- Ego involvement – supervisor sees employee's successes and failures as his/her own

Management Consultation

If you are having a difficult situation with an employee, you can call the EAP for consultation. The EAP is available to provide support for managers and leaders to address concerns regarding an employee and can provide guidance through the EAP referral process.

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Types of Referrals

- **Self-Referral** - Most employees will access the EAP on their own by calling the EAP directly. You will not be aware that the employee has contacted the EAP and you will not be involved in the counseling process. You do, however, have an important role in the self-referral process. You can help ensure that your staff understands the EAP and how to access services.
- **Supervisor/Manager Recommendation** - As a supervisor/manager you may be asked by an employee for help in solving a problem or you may observe an employee who seems to be experiencing emotional difficulties in the workplace. You will play a key role in helping the employee get immediate assistance for personal concerns by suggesting that he or she use the EAP. Remember to make your recommendations in a private, constructive manner. The EAP can help if you need assistance with how to talk to an employee about utilizing the EAP.
- **Formal Management Referral (FMR)** - An FMR is made when an employee's workplace performance has shown a pattern of decline and has reached a point where he or she can no longer perform their job adequately. Make sure to coordinate with whoever in your company is designated to handle formal management referrals. It may be someone in Human Resources, Employee Relations, or your Risk Management Department.

When to Suggest a Referral

- Excessive absences
- Sporadic work performance
- Difficulty working with others
- Lack of interest or participation
- Edgy irritable
- Withdrawn
- Blaming others
- Accidents while working
- Evidence of drug or alcohol use at work

How to make a Referral

- Keep EAP materials (wallet cards, brochures, newsletters etc.) readily available for employees
- When an employee comes to you with personal problems, listen, be empathetic, do not diagnose or attempt to fix the problem. Your focus is on work performance. Give them a card or brochure with the EAP phone number.
- Anytime you have a discussion with an employee about performance, it is always appropriate to offer the EAP as a resource.
- Contact the EAP clinical director to start the process for a formal management referral.