

# THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

*Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees*

**August 2024**

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at (608) 775-4780 or (800) 327-9991.

**Q.** Our department's director has subtly discouraged employees from using EAP because he does not want employees to "air the laundry" of our department along with personal problems. This information is also confidential, correct?

**A.** Confidentiality of EAP records pertain not only to the identities of those who use the program and the personal information they share with employee assistance professionals, but also other information, such as sensitive issues and problems of work units, rumors, morale concerns and more. This information is held in confidence in accordance with EAP policies and is not shared with other parts of the work organization. It is not unusual for a manager to be concerned about what is reported outside the work unit by employees, but managers have nothing to fear from EAP. Employee assistance professionals frequently learn about many issues of the work organization, concerns of employee work groups, trends in morale, and more. But this is what makes employee assistance professionals so valuable when they are invited to help plan programs and services that benefit employees, consult on policies that address employee issues, and make other contributions to the health of the organization.

**Q.** I made a supervisor referral of an employee to EAP, but I also decided to give her a written reprimand a couple of days later because there have been so many warnings. She then canceled her EAP appointment. This clearly shows there was no personal problem, correct?

**A.** A disciplinary action that immediately follows a supervisor referral can predictably undermine the referral. Your employee probably believed there was no longer a benefit to be gained from going to the EAP appointment after receiving the action. This does not mean that the disciplinary action was unwarranted. But it may have been more effectively employed as a backup alternative to the supervisor referral. Most employees accept supervisor referrals to prevent a disciplinary action for continued performance problems, to please the supervisor, or get help with a difficult personal problem they would rather manage on their own. Ironically, any of these reasons can lead to the successful resolution of a personal problem, even if associated with denial. A disciplinary action dispensed at the time of a referral removes the incentive for visiting EAP. Consider making EAP referrals earlier to avoid feeling compelled to both refer the employee and dispense overdue disciplinary action.

**Q.** My employee has a restraining order against a boyfriend. If he shows up at work, I am supposed to call the police. Management and HR have been informed. Should I refer her to EAP because her personal problems are interfering with the workplace?

**A.** Your employee cannot be held responsible for the behavior of another person and the decision of a court to protect her from that person with a restraining order. If your employee's performance (i.e., her conduct, quality of work, or attendance) is not an issue, a supervisor referral would not be appropriate. However, EAP can still be helpful. A restraining order, particularly one that has a "no contact" provision in it, often indicates that violence or a threat of harm has been perpetrated against the person who sought the order. Such employees may experience much anxiety, which could certainly affect performance. It is appropriate to mention EAP to your employee and encourage her to take advantage of its services.

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