

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

January 2025

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 company has a reasonable suspicion policy, but I don't know of any supervisors who have acted on it. If employees test positive, they are referred to EAP. This is a good thing, so why would supervisors resist acting on the policy?
- A.** Common reasons supervisors or managers resist acting on an organization's reasonable suspicion policy include fear of harming an employee's reputation; denial that the smell of alcohol is real; fear of confronting the employee; fear of damaging their relationship with the employee; fear of personal liability if the test is negative; and concern that the process will not be kept confidential. Education and training help supervisors overcome resistance associated with these myths and misconceptions. Reviewing your organization's policy is a good idea. It is easy to overlook behavioral symptoms that can justify a reasonable suspicion test but have no apparent connection with drug or alcohol use. These may include belligerent behavior, problems with coordination, physical appearance, speech problems, confusion, disorientation and marked swings in mood or emotions. Supervisors often dismiss these symptoms and miss opportunities to arrange reasonable suspicion tests that can help employees and protect the organization.
- Q.** My employee is a workaholic. I think she needs EAP to help her with her compulsive personality and work addiction. I am worried about the negative effect of her behavior on others, but I don't want to kill her spirit by confronting her. How do I proceed?
- A.** You can intervene with your employee's problematic work style without dampening her enthusiasm by focusing on the effects of specific behaviors that affect others. If your corrective interviews with her are unproductive, consider a referral to EAP. You appear to be focused on her diagnosis and mental health needs rather than behavior and work issues. Such an approach will undermine correcting her performance. Consider whether any of the following performance issues exist that are often associated with compulsive workers: procrastination; disorganization; inability to compromise with others; inefficient work behaviors; disrupted coworker relationships; rigid thinking; increased errors; impulsive decision making, or problems with boundaries in the office (intrusions, interruptions, emotional outbursts, respecting others' personal property and private space).

Q. An employee I supervise is a tremendous gossip. The negative effect of his private conversations on morale concerns me. Is it appropriate to refer him to EAP? How do I document the behavior if I don't witness it?

A. Malicious gossip, rumors and hearsay can be a destructive force within a work unit or organization. It is natural for supervisors to be concerned about it and its effect on morale. If you do not overhear the gossip, you must rely upon the complaints of others before intervening. The evidence that gossip contributes to morale problems within your workplace may be difficult to measure because its effects may not be clearly or readily seen. However, if employees complain and are offended, corrective action becomes your responsibility. Direct your attention to behavior you would like changed, but do not label an employee a gossip. Since two people must engage in gossip for it to exist, make it known to employees what standards of civility you expect in the workplace. After correcting your employee, consider an EAP referral if change is not forthcoming. EAP may discover other issues or needs that give rise to his behavior.

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