

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

March 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:** My employee made a statement in a discussion that caused me concern over whether he could be violent. He said, “You better keep the pressure off me before I pop.” I wouldn’t be concerned if another employee had made this statement. Should I ignore it?
- A.** You should not ignore the statement but consider how to respond to it. You appear to have concerns about your employee that precede him making this statement. A discussion with your next-level supervisor or asking for an EAP management consult would therefore be appropriate. Such discussions could help provide a safeguard that you will respond properly. Review the policy on workplace violence for guidance. Asking your employee what he means when he says, “before I pop” is important. You should express your concern about his choice of words and their meaning. His answer may indicate the level of stress he is under. Recommending EAP would then be appropriate. Research on violence in the workplace often discusses warning signs as subtle as the statement made by this employee. In the past, coworkers and supervisors dismissed or ignored such statements because they denied that violent acts were possible.
- Q:** My employee informed me she couldn't come to work in the morning because she has a self-referred appointment with EAP. Can I ask EAP to change her appointment? The appointment interferes with a heavy workload that day. Can I ask her to change it?
- A.** You should not call EAP to discuss her appointment time. EAP would not be able to confirm or deny such an appointment. Instead, check the EAP policy or ask EAP about the supervisor’s role in approving self-referred appointments during the workday. At the employee’s request, EAP could adjust her appointment time to accommodate off-duty hours or perhaps see her during a lunch break. EAP appointments are given with the assumption that employees have made proper arrangements if they occur during the workday. Be careful not to become frustrated with EAP, believing it is interfering with your work unit. Typically, supervisor referrals may be on company time. Self-referrals, however, when requested by employees during work hours, are usually with the approval of the supervisor and the leave policy guidelines.
- Q.** Several employees are refusing to work because they believe an injured coworker on light duty is “faking it.” They refuse to do his work, but this is customary in our industry. Obviously, they do not have personal problems, so there is no role for EAP, correct?

- A. Employees may be upset over a coworker's temporary inability to work, particularly if they must perform the duties of the injured coworker. Refusal to work, however, is an administrative concern. This behavior makes the referral to EAP appropriate. EAP may be helpful in several ways: (1) resolving relationship issues that may have preceded and contributed to the negative reaction of the coworkers toward the injured worker, (2) dealing with personal problems of individual employees that contribute to or further explain the refusal-to-work behavior, and (3) helping employees understand that a truly injured worker may not appear obviously impaired. It is not unusual for an injured coworker with a bona fide medical restriction to risk further injury at home or in recreational pursuits. Unfortunately, coworkers who discover this may see it as proof that the employee isn't really injured, adding to the conflicts seen in the workplace.

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