

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

GUNDERSEN
HEALTH SYSTEM.
Where Caring Meets Excellence

July 2023

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: I heard recently that people are getting addicted to the Internet. What does this mean and what is it all about?

A: Access to the Internet and the infinite Web sites available appears to lead to compulsive use for some people. This addict-like use of the computer can be characterized by the inability to consistently predict when the Internet will be used, how much time or money (to access Web pages) will be spent on it and continued use despite adverse consequences for the user's social, financial or occupational functioning. Compulsive surfing to sexually explicit Web pages or other stimulating chat and information sources is common. Such employees are likely to have other personal problems caused by, or made worse by, the Internet compulsion. This behavior at work can obviously have severe financial "time theft" and productivity consequences for the employer. As with any addiction, EAP can help. A complete assessment is necessary in order to better understand the problem and any associated problems before treatment is recommended.

Q: In my experience, too many employees wait until their jobs are on the line before getting help for personal problems. Is this simply the way people with severe personal problems act?

A: Although it may appear that employees wait until the last minute to seek help for personal problems, the opposite is usually true. Many employees self-refer to deal with personal problems, even problems like drug addiction, and you never know it unless they tell you. Also, many of these problems would eventually get worse if intervention did not occur at the time of self-referral. Supervisors can influence these self-referrals without knowing it by being conscientious about following guidelines of observing, documenting and confronting job problems with employees. Structure and predictability send a clear, but helpful message to the troubled employee that inefficiency by the supervisor cannot be counted on to avoid adverse actions if problems continue. This gives the employee a sense of urgency about taking action to resolve his problems. Clearly, the more inconsistent the supervisor's response to job performance problems, the more likely an employee will not self-refer in the early stages of a problem.

Q: My employee is extremely religious. He's an excellent worker and I am proud to have him. He's been depressed since his mother died last winter but won't go to EAP because it does not use a strictly religious approach.

A: Some employees may be hesitant to visit EAP because it is not a religious program or sponsored by their particular religion. Other religious employees may ask the EAP counselor to find a religious source of help. It may be helpful to remind your employee EAP does not provide long term counseling but seeks to identify the best community resource to meet any need. Your employee can expect the EAP counselor to respect his beliefs and find appropriate resources able to help him address his grief issues. This is accomplished with EAP's many links to associations, agencies and service organizations. Private therapists with a religious focus or institutional religious counseling resources are available in most communities. These therapists combine traditional mental health counseling techniques with the religious principles of their sponsor. EAP will help your employee find one that is suitable for him.

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