



Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

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Frontline Supervisor

Kentucky Employee Assistance Program

(502) 564-5788 or (800) 445-5327

■ **What role can supervisors play in helping prevent sexual harassment? Please address modeling and work culture.**

Supervisors represent employers and possess authority, so what you say and do is viewed as a standard of behavior, and may be directly modeled by workers under your supervision. In this sense, your actions are “amplified.” Given this dynamic, failure to address inappropriate behavior when you witness it indirectly gives permission for it to be repeated. Your employees will take notice of what you say and what you don’t say, and what you do and what you don’t do, in determining how they should behave at work. Think back about past employers during your career. Was sexual harassment more likely to occur with some rather than others? Where harassment was less like to occur, it is likely that a mindset existed to help communicate the unacceptability of such behavior. This is part of your job — creating and nurturing a mindset for a psychologically safe workplace and an environment less predisposed to behavior that could be considered sexual harassment. When you correct someone’s behavior, be sure to say to employees that this type of behavior is not acceptable in this workplace.

■ **Can you discuss what supervisors accidentally or unwittingly do when referring employees to the EAP that undermines employee participation, or inhibits employees from actually taking advantage of the program?**

Common mistakes supervisors make when referring employees to the EAP that may undermine the EAP’s ability to help employees include: 1) Not communicating to the employee that the EAP is confidential and that the supervisor will not receive personal information about the employee from the EAP. 2) Not displaying a positive attitude about the EAP and its capabilities at the time of referral that “market” its benefits. 3) Failing to provide information in writing to the EAP about performance issues discussed with the employee. (Absent this documentation, the employee commonly brings a different agenda to the EAP, or disagrees with performance issues paraphrased by the EAP as he or she understands them.) You can attend training on how to recognize when to refer, as well as how to maximize the effectiveness of an employee referral to EAP.

■ **My employee was referred to the EAP, and has had multiple visits. I thought EAPs provide**

The EAP may continue to connect with employees to help motivate them to take the next step in treatment or counseling, or to evaluate how well they are following through with other recommendations. Recovery from certain illnesses, like alcoholism takes work, lots of dedication,

initial assessments, not long-term counseling?

and support to overcome challenges, stressors, and life events that can precipitate relapse. Periodic contact with EAP clients are typically on an as-needed basis, increasing with those who may be considered more at-risk for recurring problems related to job performance or issues originally addressed in the first appointment. Contact with EAP is not meant to be a way to get out of work. If you have concerns about an employee saying that they are at an EAP appointment, but are using it as a way to get out of work, simply require them to provide verification of their appointment.

I am feeling guilty because we dismissed an employee for performance issues. I did not refer him to the EAP. Assuming he had no personal problems, what else could I have done to help him resolve his performance issues?

When you work with an employee's performance issues, have several short meetings, perhaps 20 minutes or so, during the year, in which you discuss the standards of performance you require. Share notes and examine parameters such as quality of work, quantity of work, attendance and availability, responsibility and dependability, use of time, cooperation, initiative, personal appearance, and ability to accept feedback (constructive criticism). Agree on what constitutes outstanding performance (what it actually looks like on each essential element chosen). Also, determine what constitutes above average, standard, below standard, and unsatisfactory. At each meeting, discuss where the employee believes he or she falls within these ranges for each item. Discuss what is needed to reach the next level. This engagement supplies urgency and motivation for most employees to make performance improvement a priority. Without short-term, periodic discussions that are quantifiable, as described, the likelihood of performance deteriorating further is higher. Refer the employee to the EAP at any point, but encourage a self-referral at the very beginning. You do not have to be aware of what an employee's personal problem is in order to refer.

A key manager was dismissed for attendance problems, but historically had a stellar record for 31 years. I heard he was addicted to heroin. He's retired now, and collecting a pension, the result being the loss of a valuable employee. What could I have done differently?

Despite stereotypes of heroin addicts being disheveled street people, users of this drug present a wide variety of appearances and use patterns. Many are stable addicts as long as their supply is "predictable." Some smoke heroin, some shoot it up, and others snort it, but all are dependent and gripped by the drug. Heroin fluctuates in its purity, the contaminants mixed with it, and the unpredictability of its effects. Heroin use for some employees is like managing insulin. As long as they know what they need and when they need it, and have a place to use it, such employees can work virtually undetected. Intermittent crises and close calls, along with risk of illness, infection, or death are always possible. Absences from work may be sudden and inexplicable. Addressing attendance problems and referring to EAP might open a door, which could lead to treatment, but there is no guarantee.

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