

FRONTLINE

A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



I've not referred an employee to the EAP before. What's the most important thing I can do to convince the employee to go when there are no serious performance issues? There are a few workplace concerns, but they haven't risen to the level of "serious" yet.



Our organization is in an area of the country where there appears to be quite a few illegal methamphetamine labs. I know some employees are probably using the stuff. What are the signs and symptoms of meth use or withdrawal?

Answers



The most common reasons employees hesitate to visit an EAP are fear of the unknown, being asked personal questions, and confidentiality concerns. Reassure your employee that EAPs have strict guidelines around confidentiality. Supporting confidentiality is a vital role for you. Let your employee know that you are referring them to EAP because you care and want them to be successful. Remind them that going to the EAP is voluntary, but it's important to know this resource is available to them. You can also encourage the employee to call the EAP (which they can do anonymously if they choose) to ask questions about the concerns that they have. EAP staff are caring and concerned and often can make a caller feel more at ease about accessing services.



Withdrawal from meth can include symptoms of anxiety, irritability, paranoia, hand tremors, talkativeness, nervousness, and violent or erratic behavior. Delusions and hallucinations are also possible. The longer a person has been addicted, the more intolerable their withdrawal symptoms become. As a word of caution, refer employees to the EAP when they have conduct or irresolvable performance issues. Don't wait to "figure out" what is wrong with them. You'll rarely be completely right. There are signs and symptoms common to all substances of abuse. Depending on the workplace, or the flexibility afforded to employees regarding duties, you may not recognize symptoms of methamphetamine use other than absenteeism. This is true with other substances of abuse as well. Methamphetamine use could cause an employee to appear energetic, focused, and productive for a short period. This won't raise much suspicion. The bottom line is: don't diagnose, or even try. Simply refer the employee to the EAP for performance issues. Early consultation with Human Resources and your WA State EAP can make a difference in the outcome.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



I want to improve my communication with employees and interact more socially with them in the office. I am worried that they see me as “all business.” I don’t want to intrude on their social gatherings, but how can I begin to engage more casually with them?



How can supervisors help ensure that employees will demonstrate high levels of productivity on the job and the least amount of counterproductive work behaviors?



Many employees are concerned about the economy, but it isn't practical to recommend everyone to the EAP. My concern is risk of accidents or injury from distractions and stress. Are these valid concerns?

Answers



Remember that a professional supervisory relationship doesn't mean an unfriendly supervisory relationship. When employees are relaxed and socializing at work, entering into their conversation isn't an intrusion: they're at work!

Look for opportunities to join a casual conversation. When you see several employees talking and laughing in a small group, approach the group and, in a friendly way, greet the group and ask what everyone is talking about. “Hi, what’s everyone laughing about?” Attempt to participate in the conversation, not take over or dominate it. Notice how your presence affects your employees. Do they greet and welcome you, or does the group start breaking apart? How do you want employees to respond to your presence? This is an important question to consider. Don’t hesitate to use the EAP as a confidential coach to improve your engagement with employees. The EAP will help.



Managers positively influence employee behaviors in many ways, but the fundamentals are being sure employees know what they are supposed to be doing and how they'll be held accountable. Counterproductive workplace behaviors are significant among employees who experience ambiguity about these things. A study by Florida State University's College of Business found only 20% of employees knew what they were supposed to accomplish each day at work and how they would be held accountable. The other 80% experienced the most behavioral problems, such as conflicts, absenteeism, trust issues, job neglect, personality conflicts, and morale problems. It isn't uncommon for EAPs to hear employee complaints about ambiguity associated with duties and accountability. Rare or nonexistent performance reviews will make these problems worse. When difficult employee problems arise, always consider whether ambiguity about duties and accountability are compounding the issues you face.

Source: [What Happens When Employees are Left in the Dark](#)



Some evidence exists that during economic downturns, stress, job reassignments, and layoffs can increase risk of injuries and accidents. Remind employees to keep in mind that safety is always important, probably more so during these periods. Of course, there's a lot more to helping employees think about safety. During stressful periods, rather than counseling employees, be a good listener, show empathy, and be willing to refer them to the EAP. Using patience and recognizing their stress isn't a solution, but it will demonstrate welcomed support. Most organizations periodically face morale and internal conflicts that make it difficult for employees to feel excited, cooperate, or “buy in” to what management wants them to do. During economic downturns, however, these struggles are exacerbated, and safety programs can falter under such circumstances. Accidents and injuries can follow. Source: [Leading Safety in a Downturn](#)