



Employee Assistance Program: An Overview

By: **Deborah K. Cudworth***

What Is the Employee Assistance Program?

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to provide information, support, and referral to community resources for state employees and their family members who are experiencing a variety of problems including:

- Stress or life crisis
- Family problems
- Financial problems
- Legal problems
- Medical problems
- Alcoholism or alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse (legal or illegal substance)
- Emotional problems

In addition, supervisory or management staff may seek the guidance of an EA Coordinator to determine the appropriateness of referring employees who are exhibiting performance problems and obtain guidance on techniques in working with those employees experiencing difficulties.

The specific core activities of EAPs include:

- Consultation and training to appropriate persons in the identification and resolution of job-performance, issues related to the aforementioned employee personal concerns, and
- Confidential, appropriate and timely problem-assessment services;
- Referrals for diagnosis, treatment and assistance;
- Formation of linkages between workplace and community resources that provide such services and;
- Follow-up services for employees who use those services.

***Deborah Cudworth** has been the agency's EAP Director since 1994. She has been a Client Services Specialist with the State Public Defender's Office for approximately 23 years. She has a Master's Degree in Social Work from UW-Madison (1982). She serves on UW-GreenBay's Bachelor's Degree Social Work Advisory Committee and is the Chairperson of the Collaborative MSW Advisory Committee for UW-Green Bay & UW-Oshkosh. Deb's hobbies include ballroom dancing, hiking, and creative writing.

Program Design

Service Delivery System

Employee Assistance Program services may be provided through a variety of models depending on the size, organizational structure, needs and resources of the agency. These models include the following, either separately or in combination:

- A full or part-time EAP Director
- EAP Staff
- The use of Employee Assistance Coordinators
- Contracting with an external EAP provider
- Cooperative arrangements with community resources, other state or local agencies or the Office of Employment Relations

Statewide Advisory Committee

This committee shall consist of agency EAP Directors and EAP Staff. The role of this committee is to advise the Secretary of the Office of Employment Relations on policy, program development and program maintenance issues.

- The committee shall represent the needs and resources of agencies in order to provide equitable statewide service.
- The committee's goal is to ensure that every state employee and their family members will have access to quality EAP services.
- The committee will provide a forum for discussions of national, state and local EAP issues, the dissemination of information, and the opportunity for case and program consultation.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of EAP contacts shall be maintained except under the following conditions:

- written consent from the employee or family member who is the recipient of services;
- suspected child/elder abuse/neglect;
- potential damage to self or others;
- threatened or actual significant damage to state property or operations;
- subpoena; and
- limits set by state or federal regulations. If information is released under this provision, it shall be released only to appropriate individuals or organizations. An agency may establish additional exceptions to confidentiality limitations, according to operational needs.

Employees and family members shall be informed of the limits of confidentiality prior to receiving EAP services. EAP activities shall be conducted in locations that protect the confidentiality of employees using the program.

Employee Assistance Volunteer Coordinators

Within the State Public Defender's Office, the Employee Assistance Volunteer Coordinator model is utilized. Employee Assistance Coordinators are trained and agree to follow a code of ethics. Volunteer Coordinators offer assistance in problem assessment, providing information, and referral services to State Public Defender employees and their families. Support services are also available for managers on all levels

including attorney manages. Contacts can be made over the phone or in person. The State Public Defender Employee Assistance Coordinators are:

Deborah Cudworth (EAP Director) (Appleton) 920-832-2887
Mary Bose (Milwaukee Juvenile Mental Health) 414-266-1184
Judy Burbach (Milwaukee Trial) 414-227-4032
Vicki Harness (Wausau) 715-842-7548
Marilyn Parks (Milwaukee Appellate) 414-227-1817

For those interested in becoming a volunteer coordinator, training opportunities are still available. For further information contact Deborah Cudworth, Employee Assistance Director at 920-832-2887; cudworthd@opd.wi.gov.

Employee Assistance Coordinator Code of Ethics

Employee Assistance Coordinators and professionals commit themselves to conduct themselves and EAP program related activities and relationship in accordance with the following code of ethics:

- I will adhere to the Employee Assistance Program policy and operating/referral procedures at all times in order to safeguard the integrity of the program.
- I will not discriminate in the provision of EAP services because of race, religion, creed, marital status, age, color, sex, disability, national origin or ancestry, arrest record or conviction record, sexual orientation, political affiliation or any other basis prohibited by local, state or federal law.
- I will do my personal best to provide high quality EAP services to the extent of my responsibilities as an EA Coordinator.
- I will respect the privacy of all people I serve, and maintain the confidential nature of all my EAP contacts regardless of the pressures to the contrary, as prescribed by law and stated in the EAP policy.
- I will use in a responsible manner information gained through EAP contacts.
- I recognize that serving in the EAP does not imply professional certification or licensure.
- I agree to continually assess my own personal and vocational strengths, limitations, biases and effectiveness, and to refer or release an EAP referral to the Director or another Coordinator or outside resource when it is in the Employee's best interest to do so.
- I will have respect for all EAP contacts by maintaining an objective, non-judgmental and helpful relationship at all times.
- I accept the responsibility to help protect the EAP against unethical practices by any individuals or organizations engaged in EAP programs or consultation activities.
- I accept the responsibility for assuring that none of my individual or work related actions or practices will discredit the EAP.

- I will make every attempt to contact EAP contacts at a time least disruptive to my work unit, notify my supervisor when I schedule an EAP contact (if appropriate) and to keep contacts within the time permitted for this activity.
- I agree to share my ideas and experience to further enhance and maintain the EAP.
- I will endorse the principle that adherence to this code of ethics is a fundamental condition of serving in the EAP.

Management Consultation and Your EAP

Your EAP staff is available to consult with managers and supervisors who are dealing with an employee who is experiencing problems. These problems may include a decline in job performance or other difficulties on the job, which the usual supervisory practices have not effectively changed. If you want to sort out your options, talk about strategies, or just blow off some steam (and then problem-solve) give EAP a call.

Contact an EAP staff person if:

- You're not sure how to encourage an employee to use EAP.
- You want to reference EAP in a memo you're writing to an employee on work performance but need help with the wording.
- You feel burned out – the employee has exhausted you emotionally and you don't feel rational any more; you want some fresh ideas or approaches.
- You've gotten too involved with the employee's problem and need help extricating yourself.
- Your employee tells you he/she has a personal problem and wants you to help – and you are not sure what you can do or what you should do.
- You're planning to meet with your employee and talk about behavioral and/or performance problems, but feel uneasy on how to proceed.

Be sure to consult with your own supervisor and the agency's Human Resources staff regarding questions about disciplining an employee.

Remember that the discussion with your EAP is confidential. This is not a substitute for your normal supervisory responsibilities, but is another tool to help you deal with difficult situations. Management consultation can help you resolve employee situations in a respectful manner for the employee and yourself.

A Guide for Supervisors

Don't speculate on what may be causing a problem with an employee's job performance, but watch for "red flags" signaling that there may be more here than meets the eye. By looking for sudden or radical changes in behavior or the development of patterns (e.g., consistent tardiness, long lunch hours or missed deadlines) you can spot problems early – before they get worse.

Alcohol and drug abuse are major problems in most work environments, but there are many other reasons why people begin to mess up on the job. Not being able to find a child care provider, pay bills, or resolve conflicts with a spouse can cause problems – all of these things can cause deteriorating work performance. When people are preoccupied with personal problems, they usually don't perform as well.

Helping an employee improve work performance can be time consuming. Working with an employee whose job performance problem is caused by a personal problem can be frustrating. In these situations, you end up dealing with your own emotions and feelings – as well as those of your employee and his or her co-workers. Things can get very complicated.

It is for all these reasons that we have an EAP. It can help your employee understand and resolve a personal problem and free you from having to take on that role yourself. And remember, you are NOT alone – call EAP! ■