

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) GUIDE

An employee assistance program (EAP) is a work-based intervention program designed to assist employees in resolving personal problems that may be adversely affecting the employee's performance. Programs are delivered at no cost to employees by stand-alone EAP vendors or providers who are part of comprehensive health insurance plans.

EAP BEST PRACTICES:

- 24 hour, 365 day per year direct access to counseling and referrals by masters and doctoral level professional counselors via a toll-free telephonic service.
- A countrywide network of professional counselors who are readily accessible within minutes of your employees' homes and job sites.
- Offer between three and six cost-free outpatient visits per distinct presenting problem.
- Cost-free coverage that extends to members of the immediate family, life partners, and dependent children up to 26 years of age.
- Drug-free workplace programs that include components for both supervisors and employees, and that include awareness programs, consultation, and supervisor training.
- Legal consultations for any legal issues unrelated to work.
- Financial counseling including debt restructuring, credit problems, and financial and retirement planning.
- A work-life component that addresses childcare, eldercare, and other family challenges that can affect job performance and productivity.
- Supervisory trainings in compliance issues such as EEOC rules, workplace sexual harassment, workplace violence prevention, etc.
- On-line trainings and compliance information for supervisors.
- On-line information and help for employee members.
- Crisis management programs that include workplace violence awareness and prevention training.
- On-site post-traumatic stress assistance and debriefings.
- Monthly statistical utilization reports.
- Employee awareness materials, including initial orientation materials, website access, and monthly EAP newsletters.
- An administrative referral process for effectively correcting job-related behaviors.
- Supervisory consultations to discuss the best practice approaches to employee behaviors and group dynamics.
- A "hold harmless" clause that completely shields the employer from any and all charges stemming from EAP actions or referrals.
- A comprehensive quality assurance program.
- Privacy and confidentiality standards, including compliance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

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When considering prospective EAP firms, it's important to:

- Check the credentials and experience of principals and professional staff. Are the counselors trained and credentialed? Do they hold advanced degrees?
- Make sure that experienced counselors will be staffing the phone line and are accessible.
- Check their knowledge and experience specifically related to workers compensation and disability issues.
- Learn the scope of the program's network – what services will be provided directly by staff (internal) versus services contracted to outside firms?
- Ask for references from current clients and check for any satisfaction surveys. Ask about client retention rates.

FIVE STEPS TO INCREASING UTILIZATION OF YOUR EAP:

1. Develop a distinct brand and logo that easily identifies the program

Market the EAP through sending annual letters home with an EAP wallet card, placing posters throughout facilities, and advertising webinars and EAP topics on electronic message boards, the in-house webpage, and in wellness offices.

2. Provide program education and reinforcement

Train managers how to: access EAP services, recognize signs that services are needed, start a dialogue with associates, and the importance of having a subsequent conversation with the associate to ensure they have engaged with EAP services and are working toward resolution of their problem.

3. Ensure confidentiality

It is vital that employees know that individual cases are never discussed within the company without employee consent. On-site offices should be located away from Human Resources or management areas.

4. Increase usage opportunities

Provide an 800 number with 24-hour services, telephonic counseling, 24-hour EAP website access from home or electronic devices (i.e., tablets or smartphones) and on-site counseling when able.

5. Conduct annual reviews

Hold annual meetings with EAP account managers and Human Resources staff to identify trends, usage, and general program needs. It is also important to meet quarterly or as needed to promptly address new or trending issues and coordinate presentation topics.