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Employee Assistance Program



Supervisory Training

- *Guidelines for Utilizing the Employee Assistance Program*
- *Five Step Constructive Intervention Model*
- *Supervisory Plan of Action*

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Prologue

CHI St. Alexius Health Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a short-term professional counseling service provided by CHI St. Alexius Health. The counseling provided is confidential and free of charge to all eligible employees and their immediate families. No names or any identifying information can be released unless the individual(s) receiving services sign(s) a written statement authorizing the counselor to do so.

EAP can assist employees with a variety of problems: family issues (marriage counseling, child care, single parenting, divorce); emotional problems (depression, anxiety, grief); medical concerns (smoking cessation, weight reduction, stress); legal problems; and financial problems.

Any employee or immediate family member may call an EAP counselor directly for assistance. Self-referrals are strongly encouraged.

However, in some situations where an employee is performing at an unacceptable performance level, or engaging in unacceptable conduct, and normal supervisory intervention has not improved the performance or conduct, a supervisory referral is appropriate.

This guide contains the information you require in order to utilize the EAP as an effective management resource. The guide will explain in detail the following five steps that supervisors need to complete when making a supervisory referral:

1. observation
2. documentation
3. confrontation
4. referral
5. follow-up

Supervisors are responsible for the effective performance of their employees in the work setting. Consequently, supervisors are in a critical position to observe and intervene in a “preventative” capacity before the employee becomes overwhelmed by his or her problems and the work becomes seriously impaired. Supervisors, by their formal relationship with their employees, are in an excellent position to motivate the employee to acknowledge the existence of a work related problem and to seek help through the EAP when appropriate.



*CHI St. Alexius Health
Employee Assistance Program*

Guidelines For Utilizing The Employee Assistance Program

1. Your organization is concerned with an employee's personal problem when the problem adversely affects job performance.
2. The Employee Assistance Program extends to each eligible employee, regardless of job title or responsibility.
3. Since problems at home can affect job performance, the Employee Assistance Program is also available to each employee's immediate family on a self-referral basis. If an employee or immediate family member has personal problems that may benefit from assistance, the employee or immediate family member is encouraged to use the program. Immediate family is defined as spouse and/or children living in the same household as the employee. Dependent children living outside the home, i.e., college students, will be considered eligible for EAP services.
4. Should a performance problem occur at work, employees may be encouraged to seek assistance to determine if personal problems are causing unsatisfactory job performance. Supervisors will not be able to insist that the employee seek Employee Assistance Program services.
5. When an employee voluntarily comes for assistance, no contact is made with the supervisor. When the employee comes for services at the request or referral of a supervisor, there may be a follow-up contact with the referring supervisor.
6. All records and discussions of the personal problem will be handled in a confidential manner. These records will be considered as EAP records and will be maintained by the EAP at CHI St. Alexius Health. They will not be released without the written consent of the individual(s) receiving services.
7. The employee may request that the supervisor attend counseling sessions with the employee.
8. Further information related to the Employee Assistance Program and constructive supervisory intervention can be obtained by telephoning 530-7195 (Bismarck/Mandan area) or (800) 327-7195 (Nationwide.)

The Five Step Constructive Intervention Model

STEP 1. Identifying An Employee's Job-Related Problem

The key words in relation to the job performance problems noted below are **continuing** and **repeated**. The **pattern** of job performance deficiency should begin to appear. This requires **documentation**.

NOTE: For the most part, the headings listed in this section are categories or types of performance problems as opposed to specific, documentable performance problems. For example, "on-the-job absenteeism" or "difficulty in concentration" are far too general to be documented.

1. **Absenteeism.** The patterns of absenteeism vary from person to person, whatever the cause. The following are some general patterns. Generally, any excess absenteeism and increases in absenteeism should be noted.
 - a. Unauthorized leave. (Absent without call-in, leaving work without supervisor's acknowledgement, coming in late without reporting to supervisor, etc.) The supervisor should always take action in the case of unauthorized leave, even if it is only talking the incident over with the employee. If this should happen more than once in one year, other action and/or referral may be indicated.
 - b. Excessive sick leave or calling in sick.
 - c. Repeated Monday and/or Friday absences.
 - d. Repeated absences (with or without medical explanation.)
 - e. Excessive tardiness, either at the beginning of the day or in returning from lunch.
 - f. Leaving work early.
 - g. Peculiar and increasingly improbable excuses for absences. These generally follow two patterns: 1) using the same excuse over and over again (five grandmothers died in six months, always having a tooth pulled, etc.); 2) inventing more involved stories each time—today's excuse has to be better than last week's (the aunt with one arm and two suitcases.)
 - h. Higher absenteeism rate than other employees for colds, flu, etc. While these are usually legitimate excuses, they are also used as hard-to-document excuses by people that are not really sick. Even if they are legitimate excuses, this program can help such people identify the reasons their resistance to such illnesses is low.

While absenteeism is a strong indicator of a personal problem, it pays to focus on job performance problems beyond absenteeism. Absenteeism is relatively easy to pick up (when the employee isn't there you notice it) and it is normally documented. If all the supervisor is keyed to is absenteeism, he/she may not pick up the performance problems of employees who are aware that absenteeism is sure to spotlight them and create problems for them. There are numerous examples of troubled employees who were smart enough to keep their attendance up but whose performance while on the job was far below acceptable levels.

2. **On-the-job Absenteeism.** (Absences from post, desk, station, or work more than the job requires.)
 - a. Frequent trips to water fountain or bathroom.
 - b. Frequent visits with other employees at other stations. While the supervisor may allow a certain degree of visiting and conversation on the job for the sake of communication or morale, he/she must ensure that it is contributing to and not detracting from work.
 - c. Long coffee and/or lunch breaks.
 - d. Frequent physical discomfort or minor injuries on the job requiring repeated trips for medical help.

3. **High Accident Rate**

- a. Accidents on-the-job result in compensation claims and inflated compensation insurance costs. Inattention and poor judgment are usually the cause of accidents, and personal problems are frequently the cause of inattention and poor judgment. The Employee Assistance Program can be very effective in reducing accidents by providing assistance for the employees' problems.
- b. Frequent accidents off-the-job (but affecting job performance). **THIS DOES NOT APPLY UNLESS ACCIDENT RATE IS HIGHER THAN NORMAL AND PERFORMANCE IS CLEARLY AFFECTED.** Employees who are aware that they are impaired in some way will take greater care in their work in order to avoid an accident (of course, their work will be slower as a result.) However, when these employees are home, they are no longer so careful and are more likely to have accidents. Despite the fact that these happen at home they can still affect performance.



For example, the secretary who continually hurts his/her fingers, the maintenance worker who continually hurts his/her arms or legs can't perform at usual levels, the field worker who constantly hurts his/her arms or hands, can't drive to field assignments, etc. In such cases, the supervisor should document the frequency of such incidents, the degree to which performance was affected, and how long it was affected.

4. **Difficulty in Concentration.** Usually caused by worrying about personal problems and/or daydreaming (often linked to solving one problem or another through fantasizing.)
 - a. Work requires great effort.
 - b. Jobs take more time.
 - c. Staring into space or daydreaming on the job. This requires judgment by the supervisor. For example, an employee responsible for writing may sit and stare at a page for several minutes whereas such behavior among certain other employees may be undesirable. In such cases, the supervisor has to decide whether or not the job is being done properly and in a reasonable amount of time.
5. **Confusion.**
 - a. Difficulty in recalling instructions, details, etc.
 - b. Increasing difficulty in handling simple or complex assignments.
 - c. Difficulty in recalling own mistakes.
6. **Erratic Work Patterns.** Alternate periods of very high and very low productivity. An example is the employee who produces in excess of other workers on some days but produces far less or is absent on other days, always with "good" excuses.
7. **Tenacity to Job–Doesn't Change Easily.** This may present a threat because it allows the employee to hide ineffective job performance. This normally applies only if other performance problems exist.
8. **Generally Lowered Job Efficiency.** Any performance deficiency, regardless of cause. Following are some examples.
 - a. Misses deadlines.
 - b. Makes mistakes due to inattention or poor judgment.
 - c. Poor planning.
 - d. Makes bad decisions.
 - e. Utilizes time inefficiently.
 - f. Improbable excuses for poor job performance.
 - g. Fails to communicate necessary information.



9. **Employee Relations On-the-Job.** Friction in employee relationships, including supervisor – employee relationships, often result in decreased job performance and efficiency. **The difficulty is identifying and documenting how and to what degree such behavior affects individual and/or group performance.** Following are examples of this behavior.
- a. Over-reacts to real or imagined criticism.
 - b. Wide swings in morale.
 - c. Borrows money from co-workers.
 - d. Complaints from co-workers.
 - e. Unreasonable resentments.
 - f. Belligerent attitude toward other employees.

Remember, no one is perfect. Interpersonal problems are bound to arise. You must decide whether a problem is just a “fact of life” or is significantly affecting work.

10. **Supervisors are human, too,** and may show signs of unmanageable personal problems. However, in addition to the above indicators there are other indicators which are largely dependent on the level and type of management position involved. On the first management level, a supervisor may:
- a. begin to let safety standards slip
 - b. begin to issue conflicting instructions to employees
 - c. use employee’s time and skills inefficiently
 - d. submit incomplete reports and data
 - e. become lax on supervisory duties, etc.

On higher management levels, patterns of declining job performance are more subtle:

- f. budgets may begin to be mismanaged
- g. schedules fail to be coordinated
- h. the agency fails to deliver proper service, and so on.

The decision-making aspect of higher management is crucial in this regard. Managers who begin to make decisions on the basis of insufficient data and poor judgment can significantly impair the efficiency of an organization.

Remember, all employees, including yourself, exhibit some of these job performance problems occasionally. It is a pattern of job performance problems over a period of several weeks or months that you should note and document.

Also remember:

- the supervisor is not expected to be a diagnostician
- identification and referral is based strictly on poor job performance/conduct
- the responsibility to correct unsatisfactory work performance or behavior resulting from personal problems rests with the employee. Failure to do so, for whatever reason, will result in appropriate corrective or disciplinary action. However, you are responsible for noting deficiencies, working with the employee in trying to improve these deficiencies, and referring the employee to the EAP when appropriate.

STEP 2. Documenting the Job Problem.

Documentation allows you to focus on observable facts and avoid subjective judgments that can lead to various interpretations later on. When you are faced with declining or erratic performance and/or conduct problems, you need to document observable, verifiable facts. Do you have objective proof of the employee's declining job performance and/or conduct problem?

The following are meant to serve as guidelines.

GUIDELINES FOR DOCUMENTATION

- (A) Be specific—date, time, place—about poor job performance and/or inappropriate conduct.
- (B) Write down what you observed (not your opinions, conclusions, or evaluations.)
- (C) Include good, as well as, poor performance.
- (D) Keep it confidential – share only with employee.
- (E) Do it on a daily basis.
 - Focus on performance/conduct issues, not on personal problems. A troubled employee will often try to draw you into accepting excuses for his/her behavior.
 - Provide objective, factual information that shows the job performance picture over a period of time.
 - Support action to be taken by the employee to correct the problem. Documentation is a necessity if you discipline an employee.
 - **BE OBJECTIVE, FAIR AND CONSISTENT.**

STEP 3. Confronting the Employee About the Job Problem.

Supervisors are often reluctant to confront. Confrontation sometimes is seen as a negative action that only results in bad feelings and damaged relationships. However, a positive confrontation can immensely help in improving a negative situation. A constructive confrontation is advisable with an employee who has a work performance, attendance, and/or conduct problem. The key lies in being prepared: contacting your EAP –getting yourself ready – setting the stage – and anticipating the employee’s reactions.



Your discussion with the employee will be based on objective performance data, such as job elements and performance standards contained in the appraisal process, rather than vague references to the employee’s unsatisfactory job performance. Such a discussion can prove to be motivational for the employee. Some helpful hints are:

I. Realistic Preparation

- a) Select a place and time for the discussion which affords privacy. No one enjoys criticism, however appropriate, but criticism in the presence of co-workers can cause more difficulties than it resolves.
- b) All absenteeism, tardiness, and poor job performance must be documented. Have this documentation in hand during your discussion with the employee.
- c) Be consistent. Do not be more tolerant with one employee than you would with another.
- d) Be aware of and communicate your expectations. What is acceptable or unacceptable?
- e) Attempting to label or diagnose the employee’s problem is not your responsibility. Your concern is with correcting poor job performance/conduct.

II. Details of Discussion

- a) Approach your discussion of performance deficiencies by pointing out that you recognize the employee’s value, including years of service, past performance, technical skills, previous level of competence, and dependability.
- b) Honesty and firmness are a must: Don’t hedge; use your documentation and tell the employee exactly what performance standard/conduct is unsatisfactory.
- c) Remember your goal is to restore this person as a productive employee. Base your job performance discussion on just that.

III. Follow-Through

- a) All employees are expected to follow standards. Make sure your employee understands fully what to expect when indifference or abuse of these standards exists.

- b) A plan for improvement should be realized. Get commitment from the employee.

You may feel hesitant to conduct this process, but it is your job to intervene. You have a legitimate right to confront an employee when the employee's job performance/conduct is below standard. It is highly probable that a troubled employee's performance will improve if he/she is confronted constructively and consistently. On the other hand, if the employee is ignored or warned in an inconsistent and arbitrary manner, it is highly unlikely that his/her performance will improve.

STEP 4. Referring the Employee to the EAP.

After you have documented the employee's performance/conduct and reviewed your findings with the employee during the confrontational interview, you are ready to make the referral to the EAP. The purpose of the referral is to offer help to the employee for improvement before disciplinary action becomes necessary.

The actual referral can be either informal or formal in nature. **The informal referral is appropriate when good communications still exist between the supervisor and the employee.** Also, there is a good expectation that the employee will follow through and contact the Employee Assistance Program on his/her own.

The second type of referral is formal. **The formal referral is appropriate when communication is poor and serious problems exist.** The referral must be documented in accordance with organizational standards and policies. The referral should include:

- A clear statement of the purpose of the memo – referral to the EAP.
- Documentation of declining job performance/conduct.
- That use of the EAP is voluntary, not compulsory, and is confidential.
- Mention of follow-up evaluation of the employee's performance within a specific time. The "Supervisory Plan of Action", page 11, is a recommended format.

STEP 5. Follow-Up.

After having completed steps 1-4, you now are in the follow-up phase. You have observed the employee, documented his/her performance/conduct, confronted the employee with your objective documentation about the areas needing improvement, and referred the employee to the EAP. Continue to monitor the employee to assure that the performance/conduct problem improves and that the employee is performing on an acceptable level.

- Continue to observe and document all levels of performance/conduct, whether it is substandard, standard, or exceptional.
- Arrange follow-up meetings with the employee on a scheduled basis in order to evaluate the employee's on-going job performance.

What you should not do

1. Don't be a diagnostician. You are knowledgeable in the area of performance. Licensed professionals can better determine the nature of a personal problem.
2. Don't get involved in a detailed discussion of a personal problem or the reasons for it. You are evaluating performance, not a personal problem.
3. Don't apologize for bringing up performance deficiencies. As a supervisor, you have the right and responsibility to do this.
4. Don't moralize. There should be no stigma attached to personal problems.
5. Don't get involved in any discussion about possible treatment. Recommend that the employee contact the EAP for advice and recommendation.
6. Don't take any adverse action against a previously satisfactory employee without considering help through the EAP.
7. Don't be misled by sympathy, emotional pleas, "hard-luck stories".
8. Don't "cover-up" for a friend—result: serious delay in getting help.
9. Don't make idle disciplinary threats you are not willing to follow through with.
10. Don't react in the "heat of the moment".

Some problems have a sudden onset and are so disruptive that they require immediate involvement of an upper level supervisor or management staff. Most problems, however, develop slowly and will be noticed first in mild forms. These problems are resolved through a process involving the supervisor and management staff. In situations where an employee has a performance problem, be alert to the possibility of an underlying personal problem.

Written Referral to the Employee Assistance Program: A Letter to the Employee

The purpose of this letter is to express my concern, and to point out significant deficiencies in your work performance. The letter does not constitute a disciplinary action, but disciplinary action may become necessary if job performance deficiencies continue.

You have been under my direct supervision for more than three years. During that time, you have told me about personal problems which have impacted your job performance. These problems have caused you to consistently exhaust your sick and annual leave as quickly as it has been established.

Compounding this problem of excessive leave usage is the unpredictability of your absences. Your periods of dependability alternate with periods of unreliability. As a result, we have made accommodations for you in assignments and have had to plan for your possible absence in scheduling the work of your fellow employees. What is more, I cannot depend on the quality of the work you do accomplish. Because you frequently fail to follow instructions or use sound professional judgment, I find I have to check everything you do.

I am concerned about your welfare, and so, I am strongly recommending that you seek assistance from the Employee Assistance Program. Your use of this counseling service will be kept completely confidential. No personal information can be released to me or anyone else without your written consent. You can contact (EAP, office location, phone number.)

I have discussed this referral with _____ (*insert the name of the EAP counselor*), who is aware that you may be contacting the Employee Assistance Program to schedule an appointment. I will be observing your performance and will reevaluate it in 30 days. I believe that by taking advantage of the counseling services, you will be provided with new skills for resolving your personal concerns, and for bringing about improvement in your job performance.

Sincerely,

NOTE: This letter is an example and should not be used exactly as shown when referring an employee to the EAP. This sample represents one good approach to a particular situation. Since each situation is somewhat unique, supervisors are encouraged to consult with a manager or an EAP counselor in preparing the referral memo.

Supervisory Plan of Action

(Performance Documentation Worksheet)

1. I have made the following observation of the employee's job performance.

2. I have informed the employee of the following job performance standards that will be expected of him/her:

3. These standards are important because of the following impact on the work environment:

4. I have asked the employee to explain his/her failure to meet the specific job performance standards and we have agreed on the following plan to bring job performance up to standard:

5. I have informed the employee of the following consequences if he/she fails to follow job performance standards:

6. I will continue to make observations on the employee's job performance and will again review these matters with the employee within _____ days.

(Supervisor's Signature)

(Date)

(Employee's Signature)

(Date)

NOTES

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