

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

# Frontline Supervisor



■ **My employee has adult attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I know this because the employee told me. Unfortunately, his symptoms are very evident. He has a doctor, and I question if it is having much effect. Can the EAO help?**

**Make a referral to the EAO** based upon the performance issues you have documented. Focus on performance instead of the diagnosis. With this approach you will see faster improvement because the EAO can address the reasons underlying the problems you're witnessing. Adult ADHD is not simply a medication issue. There are two important components of ADHD: the condition itself and the psychological impact of the person's failed attempts to adjust and compensate for symptoms. Both of these issues must be addressed by treatment professionals. Stress, substance abuse, poor self-esteem, and depression can all be indirectly associated with ADHD. Procrastination, for example, a possible symptom of ADHD, may contribute to a host of workplace problems. These problems could lead to still more problems associated with family and relationship issues. As you can see, there is a lot for the EAO to explore.

■ **Referring an employee to the EAO because of severe conduct problems is straightforward. My concern is how I approach an employee who appears disturbed or agitated on the job.**

**Many supervisors share your concern**, but planning the steps you would take in a situation where an employee appears upset or agitated can help you feel better prepared if it happens. Your organization does not want you to place you at risk, so consider if you need help from another manager, or even the police in an unusual situation. Some troubled employees may exhibit unusual behaviors that are not threatening, such as talking strangely, appearing confused or disoriented, or crying. Enlisting another manager to help you approach an employee can be helpful. This can reduce defensiveness, and you gain the benefit of having a reliable witness in case one is needed later. Guiding the employee to a private office or workspace away from others or an unsafe environment is a good first step. Gently encourage the employee to accompany you and your colleague; don't grab the person's hand or otherwise risk antagonizing him or her. To be prepared for these circumstances, consult with the EAO along the way.

■ **I am a long-time friend with my employee who is a participant in the**

**You can ask, but the EAO will recommend against it.** Establishing a separate information flow to you creates a relationship that is fraught with risk and assorted problems. The EA professional will offer quality guidance on your role in managing performance so your employee has

**employee assistance office. Can I ask her to sign a release so the EAO can give me more information about the nature of her problems and how they are being treated?**

the best chance of returning to the level of performance you require. Your employee is free to share information, of course, but when supervisors try to manage performance and also process personal problems, employees typically diminish their involvement in treatment recommendations due to role conflict. Why? The employee perceives you as a trusted, safe, and understanding friend, and will relate to you on this basis rather than as the employer's representative, which is your job. Undermining this employer-employee dynamic removes a constructive force and sense of urgency that troubled employees rely upon to become motivated and stay focused on treatment.

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**Should supervisors participate in conflict resolution sessions with employees, or refer these issues to the EAO? It all seems a bit intimidating.**

**Helping employees resolve** differences is an important supervisory skill.

Many resources for doing so exist. It is a myth that you must be formally trained to sit down with two workers in conflict and help them resolve differences. Find an approach that matches your work style and job setting. One model entails meeting with both employees together and having each explain their side of the conflict. Don't make judgments, just listen. Next, meet each employee separately and encourage a full venting. Listen empathically. Ask for ideas about resolution. After these three meetings, you will witness a diminishment of tension. Other options include referring your employees to the EAO to have a facilitated conversation with an EA professional. This will include an opportunity for you to receive guidance from an EAO consultant on ways to move forward.

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**Do some employees with depression still function satisfactorily at work, but if treated, could perform even better? I have employees who appear depressed, but I can't refer them to the EAO because their work performance is not a concern. Still, I bet they would benefit if they went.**

**Many depressed employees** can function at work adequately, but if treated would likely experience an uptick in their social and occupational functioning. Some employees may suspect they have untreated depression, and some may not identify it at all because they have slowly adapted to its symptoms over an extended period. A crisis may bring these individuals into contact with outpatient mental health services, where the diagnosis is first identified. Depressed employees may appear slow to respond, lacking in energy, or resist engaging with others. Suggest self-referral to the EAO for obvious symptoms only (e.g., "you look really tired"). Or if work tasks cannot be accomplished satisfactorily, consider an EAO referral. Be careful not to work around the depressed employee by labeling them as lazy, quiet, unassuming, or "eccentric." When this happens, others adapt, reduce confrontation, and allow the condition to linger, with unforeseeable consequences.

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## NOTES