

Publication of Wayne Corporation -

December 2024

Q. What is considered “standard practice” in communicating with a supervisor when a release is signed by a difficult employee following a formal referral to the EAP?

A. Communication practices are typically tailored to the host organization’s or sponsoring employer’s needs, but all EAPs still recognize that referring supervisors need certain information to help them manage an employee’s performance after referral. Types of communication typically include 1) that the employee made it to the program and the status of their enrollment; 2) that the employee is participating in the recommendations of the EAP to address their issue, with no mention of details or diagnosis; and 3) what accommodations by the work unit or employer are needed to allow the employee to successfully participate in the program (i.e., time, attendance, scheduling changes). These elements support good communication and help protect confidentiality and the perception of confidentiality, which are critical to the integrity of the program. Note that historically, EAP standards, including communication with supervisors, emerged from the occupational alcoholism program movement in the late 1960s and EAPs in corporate America in the mid-1970s. These include program mechanics, training of supervisors and orientation of employees, policy provisions, referral processes, confidentiality assurances and limits on confidentiality, and communication with referring supervisors.

Q: Our EAP allows family members to use its services at no cost. Isn’t this exceeding the company’s responsibility since these individuals aren’t employees?

A. Allowing family members to access the EAP is a common practice and offers significant benefits for both employees and the company. Family issues often affect an employee’s job performance, attendance, or behavior. By addressing these challenges through the EAP, companies help employees maintain focus and productivity. While EAPs are typically presented as an employee benefit, management also recognizes their cost-avoidance and loss-prevention value. Allowing family members to reach out fits this model. Family members may seek EAP support for personal issues that, in turn, help resolve serious challenges affecting the employee—challenges the employee may not acknowledge on their own. Providing this access creates a win-win situation, enhancing employee well-being and workplace stability.

DISCLAIMER: Information in the Frontline Supervisor is provided with the understanding that the author and the publisher are not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services. The publisher disclaims any liability, loss, or risk -incurred consequences, direct or indirect, resulting from the use or application of any information in this document. This information is not a substitute for competent legal, EAP, or other professional advice. Edited and formatted by Kimberly Carter, Administrative Manager, Wayne Corporation