

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

March 2025

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at 608-775-4780 or 800-327-9991.

Q. Although the EAP counselor was silent on the subject of my decision to terminate an employee, I ended our discussion with the feeling that I had a “green light.” I think EAP believes there is nothing left to offer this employee. Should I assume this is the case?

A. Do not relinquish responsibility for ownership of your decision or infer from the EAP counselor’s silence that the termination decision is supported or not supported. The silence that you experienced in the conversation with the EAP counselor should be interpreted only as the professional responsibility of EAP to take no stand either in favor of or against administrative action. This prevents EAP from interfering with the organization’s administrative processes and is fundamental to the integration of EAP’s in the work culture. The expertise of the EAP counselor should not be used as a means to judge your management decisions. A disappointing outcome of a decision you thought was approved of by EAP would cause you to blame EAP later. Even worse, the employee might think EAP played a role in the decision.

Q. My employee was caught smoking in his office for the third time. This is against a local ordinance and company policy. I am sure this employee knows where he can find help to stop smoking. Is there any reason to make a referral to EAP?

A. A supervisor referral to EAP is appropriate because a continuing performance-related problem exists. Your employee may know where to get effective help for smoking cessation, but remains reluctant to seek help, follow company policy, and obey the law. Your question is a good example of a problem that is not necessarily what it appears. A wide range of issues other than lack of knowledge could explain your employee’s behavior. None would excuse the violation of your policy and the law, of course, but they may be related to stopping his behavior. Your employee is willing to risk increasing penalties for violating company policy and the law. Why? EAP can explore the answer to this question, help him correct his behavior, and possibly to participate in a smoking cessation program.

Q. My employee has been accused of sexual harassment by a female worker. Should I make a referral to EAP while an investigation is pending? If so, what will EAP do for him?

A. If you are a manager investigating a sexual harassment claim, it can be helpful to remind the accused employee that EAP can offer support. Prior to the completion of an investigation, this may include helping the employee prepare for the possibility of a finding against him. An accused employee will frequently deny the intent to harass, and will have feelings of anger and betrayal toward the complainant. Although accused employees are usually warned against retaliation, support from EAP can aid in preventing retaliation. If a finding of sexual harassment is formally made and a referral to EAP follows, EAP will consider other help to prevent further sexual harassment. Regardless of the outcome of a finding, both complainants and alleged harasses are usually very upset. This anxiety can affect performance, lead to depression, and affect one's personal life. This provides a rationale for referring both the complainant and the accused to EAP.

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