



I N T E R V E N T I O N  
C O U N S E L I N G  
T R A I N I N G  
M A N A G E M E N T

A GUIDE TO  
ASSISTING  
THE  
TROUBLED  
EMPLOYEE

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## What is the EAP?

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is an employee benefit designed to support Human Resource professionals and improve workplace productivity by offering confidential consultation to individuals with problems that can affect job performance.

The service is not limited to individual counseling. Consultation with supervisors and managers who are concerned with the performance of a specific employee are part of COPE's core mission, as are organizational interventions for Critical Incidents, Change Management, Stress Management, Workplace Performance, Wellness and other work-related issues.

## Who is COPE?

COPE, Incorporated is a provider of Employee Assistance and Workplace Assistance Programs with over 35 years of experience serving the greater Washington, DC area. Through counseling and consultation, COPE professionals apply their expertise in psychology and human behavior to help employees enhance productivity, both personally and professionally.

## How does the EAP work?

An employee, family member, or organizational representative may call the EAP to receive immediate consultation from a Master's level EAP professional. The EAP professional taking the initial call will assess the employee's immediate need and make a determination as to the services required. Persons receive immediate telephone consultation, if appropriate, or an appointment is scheduled for the near term.

## ISSUES WE CAN ASSIST YOU WITH

### WORKPLACE ISSUES

WORK-RELATED STRESS

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

CO-WORKER CONFLICT

VIOLENT OR CRITICAL INCIDENT

RETURNING TO WORK

ADJUSTING TO CHANGE

### PERSONAL ISSUES

BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

ELDER AND CHILD CARE

GRIEF AND LOSS

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

FAMILY AND MARITAL STRIFE

DOMESTIC ABUSE

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

#### What additional service does the EAP offer?

- Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD)
- Crisis Intervention
- Training & Seminars
- Management Consultations

#### Who can refer an employee to the EAP?

- Self Referral
- Suggested Referral
- Formal Supervisory Referral

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE TROUBLED EMPLOYEE

Managing the performance of employees is a difficult and time-consuming task, even in ideal circumstances. When an employee's performance is impaired by emotional or personal problems, managing job performance can become much more complicated. All employees have occasional difficulties, but when conduct becomes consistently problematic or performance frequently fails to meet expectations, a serious personal problem may be a contributing factor. **A pattern of job-performance difficulties that exists over time indicates the need for supervisory action.**

Many types of personal problems can affect an employee's performance. Common life problems such as marital strife, financial difficulties, or child care complications occasionally affect many people. More serious difficulties, such as a developing or existing substance abuse problem or a serious emotional conflict, can also be the cause of a more serious performance decline.

An employee with a personal problem that is affecting behavior or conduct often does not respond to management techniques that might otherwise be effective. This lack of employee improvement can also affect the supervisor, creating **feelings of frustration, guilt, anger, and inadequacy.**

*Ideally when there is a problem at work, you and your employee can talk about what is happening in a way that resolves the problem. If successful, both of you will have learned something useful about the job and each other.*

~

*When dealing with a highly disruptive, chronically troubled employee try to avoid the three "Ts"—toleration, transfer and swift termination—all of which are likely to lead to greater stress for you, the workplace and the employee.*

# CAP: CONDUCT • ATTENDANCE • PERFORMANCE

When managing employees, supervisors and managers are expected to monitor and evaluate the following three areas of employee activity:

1. **Conduct**

Does the employee's demeanor enhance or inhibit the success of the work unit?

2. **Attendance**

Is the availability, punctuality, and daily accessibility of the employee acceptable?

3. **Performance**

Is the quantity, quality, and timeliness of the product or service provided acceptable?

Focusing on these three areas of **work-related** problems, will bring greater success in dealing with difficult situations and help avoid other potential problems (such as claims of discrimination based on disability.)

As an example, do not tell the employee you think he or she has an "alcohol problem," or is "suffering from depression." **Don't be drawn into the personal problems of employees.** Stay in the role of supervisor and focus on workplace issues: **conduct, attendance, and performance.**

*If you haven't been keeping accurate records regarding your employees' attendance, performance, and behaviors, now is the time to begin. Document what you see and when you see it. Are they coming in late, taking extended lunches, missing every Friday/Monday, and calling in sick on payday? Are they focused, meeting deadlines, working to capacity? Have they lost interest, suffer mood swings, or become less communicative?*

## EXAMPLES OF CAP

### Conduct

- ✓ Avoids supervisor or co-workers
- ✓ Loss of interest or enthusiasm
- ✓ Unusually sensitive or hostile to advice or constructive criticism
- ✓ Less communicative
- ✓ Frequent mood swings
- ✓ Threats of violence and/or harm to others
- ✓ Disregard for safety
- ✓ Unusually critical of supervisor or co-workers

### Attendance

- ✓ Absenteeism
- ✓ Tardiness
- ✓ Early departures
- ✓ Extended lunch periods
- ✓ Frequent absence from the work station

### Performance

- ✓ Lower quality of work
- ✓ Erratic work patterns
- ✓ Decreased productivity
- ✓ Failure to meet schedules
- ✓ Increased errors
- ✓ Impaired judgment or memory
- ✓ Inability to concentrate
- ✓ Inability to get along with co-workers, customers, managers

# HOW TO ASSIST THE TROUBLED EMPLOYEE

## ***Step 1.***

### **Acknowledge your feelings**

It is usually helpful for supervisors to first acknowledge to themselves feelings of **frustration, guilt, anger, inadequacy, or fear**, and then to consider how such feelings might affect the objective assessment and monitoring of a problem employee.

## ***Step 2.***

### **Seek support from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

Advance preparation and organization can enhance the effectiveness of a corrective interview, but anxiety about confronting another individual is natural. Supervisors are not trained as counselors and sometimes struggle to maintain their objectivity. The EAP counselor can assist the supervisor in objectively reviewing the employee's declining performance issues. Role-playing is sometimes a useful technique to deal with a supervisor's anticipatory anxiety. The counselor can then assist the supervisor in developing a plan to address declining performance or inappropriate conduct.

## ***Step 3:***

### **Initiate a corrective interview with the troubled employee**

Once the supervisor has identified the performance decline and developed a plan for addressing the inadequacies, the employee can be addressed.

The first corrective interview is a discussion between the supervisor and employee that is designed to accomplish the following objectives:

## OBJECTIVES OF A CORRECTIVE INTERVIEW

- ❖ To clarify existing performances standards and/or conduct expectations.
- ❖ To identify the indicators of performance decline or a problem with conduct or demeanor.
- ❖ To develop a plan to address the existing problem.
- ❖ To communicate the consequences of a continuing problem.
- ❖ To set a date for a follow-up discussion to assess progress.
- ❖ To modify an existing plan, or to initiate consequences for lack of improvement.

*If you'd like to test your skills in managing difficult employee situations, go to [www.cope-inc.com/edu](http://www.cope-inc.com/edu) where you'll find several case studies.*

- 1. How would you handle a talented employee with a new, high-pressure job who tends to push her stress onto co-workers and subordinates?*
- 2. An employee with a declining performance problem also struggles to control his temper. Lately you've been worried about your safety. What action steps would you take?*

*If you'd like to discuss these case studies or a challenging situation of your own, contact [eap@cope-inc.com](mailto:eap@cope-inc.com) or call 202-628-5240 and ask to speak to an EAP Professional.*

## HOW TO CONDUCT A CORRECTIVE INTERVIEW

Preparation for the first corrective interview should involve taking time to develop a plan, documenting facts on which to base the ensuing discussion, consulting with an Employee Relations Specialist regarding any disciplinary or administrative action, and arranging for an appropriate time and place to conduct the meeting privately.

It is helpful to **make an outline of the corrective interview**. If the employee is referred to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), a consultation with the EA counselor, at least by phone, is advised. Conducting the corrective interview early in the day is best. **Privacy without interruption is important**. It is essential to remain rational and to **avoid meeting anger with anger**. It is helpful to comment on an employee's contribution to the workplace and to focus on the importance of improvement.

**Employees may be resistant, defensive or hostile**. Employees with problems may try to offer excuses or to focus attention on the supervisor as a diversion from the main issue. **It is best to avoid discussing personal problems in this context**. It is more helpful to concentrate on performance. If, however, the employee suggests that a personal problem exists, this provides an excellent opportunity for the supervisor to recommend use of the EAP. The employee and supervisor may then develop a plan, which may include the EAP, to address existing problems.

**A follow-up meeting needs to be scheduled to monitor progress**. It is helpful to end the meeting by focusing on the importance of improvement. Often, a single corrective interview is sufficient to elicit a sustained, positive employee response.

If the performance improves and the improvement is sustained, the optimum outcome has been achieved.

## HOW TO CONDUCT A CORRECTIVE INTERVIEW

If there is no improvement, or only temporary improvement, **a second corrective interview may be necessary, and it will require a more serious tone.** Other administrative action may also be necessary according to your organization's policies. Each corrective interview should convey an increasing sense of urgency in encouraging the use of the EAP. Advise the employee that it is important for the supervisor to be notified that participation in the EAP has been confirmed.

An employee cannot be forced to utilize the EAP, but those that do utilize the service often find it very helpful. The crucial issue to be emphasized is that performance must improve. **Documentation of each corrective interview should be maintained.** Assure employees that **participation in the EAP will not affect future employment or career advancement. Participation is confidential and does not become part of an employee's personnel record.** Any information shared with management is shared only with written release by the employee, except in cases of a court-order.

Although constructive confrontation is never easy, devising a plan and sticking to it can facilitate this process. Dealing with problem performance promptly and firmly will provide the employee with an optimum opportunity to correct his or her performance deficiency and to remain employed.

## THE DOs & DON'Ts OF THE CORRECTIVE INTERVIEW

- DO** set aside enough time
- DO** conduct it in private without interruptions
- DO** consult with Personnel and/or the EAP before the corrective interview
- DO** prepare an outline
- DO** have the facts on performance or conduct and stick to the facts
- DO** listen carefully to the employee's response
- DO** emphasize that participation in EAP is **voluntary** and **confidential**
- DO** have action steps at the end
- DO** document the interview
- DO** schedule a follow up interview to evaluate the employee's progress
- DON'T** conduct it on the spur-of-the-moment
- DON'T** moralize
- DON'T** stray into personal issues
- DON'T** lose your temper
- DON'T** try to figure out what is wrong with the employee
- DON'T** be distracted
- DON'T** delay or cover-up
- DON'T** threaten discipline unless willing to carry it out

## EAP IS FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS, TOO

Today's manager is short on time and long on responsibility. The stress of meeting deadlines, supervising staff and addressing unexpected challenges can take a toll.

Managing employees is particularly challenging and workplace solutions are rarely "one size fits all." Depending on your organization, different skills may be prized: technical skills for dealing with things; human skills for dealing with people; and conceptual skills to grasp abstract ideas. Regardless of the organization, **without 'people skills' even technically proficient, experienced managers struggle to advance their ideas and build a loyal and effective team.**

As a supervisor, part of the job is to work with employees to get a job done.....even in the face of personal and professional distractions. And as much as everyone tries to leave personal business at home, there are times when those issues affect work. A supervisor must be firm but understanding and take employees' personal lives into consideration. However, when an employee allows a personal problem to interfere with his or her ability to do the job, it affects the entire team and department. That's when action must be taken.

Regardless of pay grade or job description, **the best managers know when to step back, assess a situation, and ask the right questions.** Trust the EAP to help navigate the complexities of managing a diverse workforce. COPE is there to partner with managers, Human Resources, Benefits staff and other specialists in a confidential and impartial manner.