

SOLUTIONS

NEWSLETTER

A newsletter designed to support leadership and human resource staff.



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The following questions and answers offer practical guidance related to common challenges supervisors may encounter in the workplace. Acentra Health, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), is here to provide confidential support and consultation to managers seeking assistance with a wide range of workplace issues.

My employee's dog died recently, and while everyone feels for her, it's been over a month, and she still seems to be struggling. I am not diagnosing her, but should I ask if she is depressed and would like to reach out to the EAP?

It's natural to be concerned, but supervisors should avoid asking whether an employee is "depressed" or using other diagnostic terms. That kind of question can be considered a medical inquiry. Instead, focus on what you're observing and express concern in a supportive, non-clinical way. For example, noting changes in mood, energy, or engagement and checking in on their well-being. Asking about depression or any diagnostic term can expose the employer to complications under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA limits employers from making medical inquiries unless they are job-related and consistent with business necessity. Even a well-intentioned question can suggest a perceived disability and trigger privacy concerns, potential discrimination claims, or obligations for accommodation the employer never intended. Show compassion, but keep focused on performance, expected improvement, and referral to the EAP for personal support.

My employee complained about marital problems. I gave her the name of a marital therapist that the EAP has given to other employees. This is an outstanding worker and there are no performance issues, but was this still a mistake?

You should refer employees—even high-performing ones who report personal problems—directly to the EAP. This protects you from liability and ensures a thorough assessment of issues you can't explore in depth. The EAP is trained to uncover underlying problems that may be linked to surface conflicts such as verbal disputes. It's also standard EAP practice to follow up and evaluate the effectiveness of professionals they refer to in the community—something not possible under the circumstances you describe. The therapist you mentioned may be one of the EAP's referral sources, but others are available, and each employee's needs are carefully considered before a referral is made. It would be best practice to share the name of the marital counselor with the employee and direct them to call the EAP for more information. The EAP can provide any other recommendations that would be appropriate.



I have been around long enough to know that what makes my job more pleasurable is a positive, low-drama work environment. I think it takes a bit of luck and skill to obtain it, but what's the general advice for supervisors in working toward achieving this goal?

Many skills help maintain a positive work environment—one with less conflict, gossip, and negativity, and one that emphasizes goals and team success. Success comes from your consistent behaviors that nurture positivity. It's difficult to apply a quick fix to morale and negativity issues. It's better to make your goal of a low-drama, high-positivity environment intentional.

The following are some strategies to achieve a positive environment:

1. **Model calmness, fairness, and respect** in how you communicate with employees.
2. **Address workplace tension** early before gossip begins.
3. **Establish clear expectations**—don't leave employees wondering what you want or what they are supposed to do.
4. **Gather your thoughts before you speak.** Keep in mind that employees can and do recall the previous conversations had with you.
5. **Give frequent feedback in private.** You'll discover these one-on-one conversations reveal the workplace "temperature," making it easier to address problems early.
6. **Don't make team meetings a rare event.** They are tools to recognize effort, encourage teamwork, and demonstrate transparency. This clear communication plays a powerful role in preventing speculation, gossip, and negativity.

We had an employee who tested positive for marijuana and was referred to treatment years ago. Recently, he came up positive on a random drug screen. He says it was because of passive inhalation of marijuana smoke, and he sounds very

convincing. What is this issue or concern all about?

Passive inhalation of marijuana smoke is a common explanation employees offer when confronted with a positive drug test. It is technically possible for someone to inadvertently inhale marijuana smoke, but modern laboratory testing makes this explanation highly unlikely. Drug tests are designed with established cutoff levels, so a result is not reported as positive unless the concentration of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) (the psychoactive component in marijuana) exceeds a well-validated threshold. Simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time and inadvertently being subjected to marijuana smoke will not meet the cut-off levels. This is more likely an attempt to deflect responsibility or avoid the consequences.

Why is domestic violence that takes place entirely away from the workplace regarded as a risk for the employer and fellow workers?

It may initially seem that domestic violence and workplace violence have no correlation, but there are numerous documented incidents demonstrating that domestic violence is a risk for the employer and coworkers. The aggressor may decide to come to the workplace because there is certainty that the victim will be present and easy to locate. With desperation, often associated with violence, a loss of boundaries can occur, leading the aggressor to view the workplace as a stage for confrontation. If this happens, confrontation with others is inevitable, and this increases the potential for actual harm to anyone who happens to be in the way or nearby. It is often the case that the aggressor simply does not care about consequences when experiencing rage. Many organizations consider domestic violence a legitimate workplace safety issue, and many also educate and train supervisors to recognize warning signs, coordinate with Human Resources, and follow a protocol to reduce risk. If you have concerns that an employee may be experiencing domestic violence, reach out to your Human Resources administrator or to the EAP for guidance.



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Employee Assistance Program

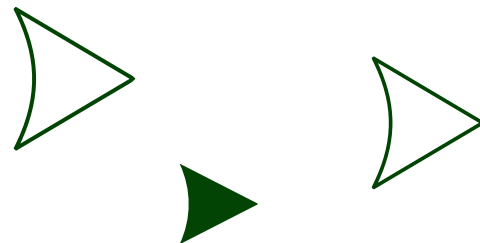
Your EAP provides counseling sessions at no cost, as well as a wide variety of services to enhance overall well-being and support healthy work-life balance. In addition, your EAP is available to provide meaningful solutions to address the many challenging situations facing those in management roles. Leaders can take advantage of unlimited management consultations and receive guidance and assistance related to employee and team functioning concerns.

The EAP can be accessed anytime. For no-cost, confidential support from a licensed, experienced counselor, call today. You can also access helpful management tips and resources on the website.

 **Phone: 1.800.833.3031**

 **Website: EAPHelplink.com**

 **Company Code: IOWA**



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