

Q A I've referred the same employee to the EAP twice in six months with no lasting improvement. At what point do repeated referrals become a substitute for the disciplinary action I should be taking?

The EAP should never replace appropriate supervision or disciplinary action. Its role is to provide confidential support for employees dealing with personal problems that may affect work performance. Supervisors remain responsible for managing attendance, conduct, accountability, and job performance. Managers sometimes hesitate to move forward with corrective action when an employee is participating in the EAP. While supporting employees is important, workplace expectations must remain clear and consistent. Performance decisions should always be based on observable behavior and work results, not on EAP participation. Repeated referrals without improvement are a sign that performance management should continue, not pause. The EAP is not a "safe harbor" from accountability. For example, if an employee is referred for attendance problems, improvement in punctuality and reliability is expected immediately. The EAP and supervisory action work best together: one provides support, while the other maintains workplace standards.

Q A My employee agreed to the EAP referral but then only attended one session and stopped. Can I require ongoing attendance as a condition of continued employment?

The EAP is a strictly voluntary program and remains so even if the employee is given an opportunity to accept participation in lieu of some administrative action. The program's voluntary nature is a key factor in its attraction. To alter this feature would undermine the program's use and increase behavioral risk to the organization from poor utilization or the most serious at-risk employees not self-referring. Some companies may establish agreements with employees that include the choice of voluntarily participating in the EAP or facing disciplinary action for a serious infraction of a work rule, like drinking on the job or some other offense where termination is deemed appropriate by existing policies. These agreements do not change or alter the nature of an employee assistance program as being voluntary. Such agreements are strictly between the employer and the employee.

Q A I made an EAP referral and the employee went. Now she's back and performing better, but I've heard she's telling coworkers the EAP "fixed" her supervisor's unfair criticism and said I was actually the problem. How should I handle this?

If the employee's performance has improved, the referral was successful. What employees share with coworkers about their EAP experience is often personal interpretation, incomplete information, or secondhand retelling. There is usually no benefit in trying to correct the story or defend yourself through workplace conversations. Be assured that EAP professionals do not take sides or tell employees that a supervisor is "the problem." Their role is to help employees function more effectively and improve workplace outcomes. Avoid discussing the matter with other employees or attempting to manage the narrative. Doing so can unintentionally create more tension, fuel gossip, or lead to privacy concerns. Instead, stay focused on the employee's current performance and maintaining a professional working relationship moving forward. Your documentation and supervisory actions should already speak for themselves. When improvement occurs, it is usually best to consider the process successful and keep attention centered on continued positive performance and workplace stability.





Can I make an EAP referral for an employee whose only problem seems to be that he cannot get along with one specific coworker?

Yes, the EAP can be helpful, but supervisors should first make a reasonable effort to address the conflict directly. The key question is whether the disagreement is disrupting teamwork, morale, or productivity. Resolving everyday workplace conflict is part of a supervisor's role and should not automatically be handed off to the EAP. Start by meeting with the employees involved, clarifying expectations for respectful behavior, and guiding them toward a workable solution. At the same time, the EAP can be an excellent consultation resource for coaching on how to approach the situation effectively. It is also important to remember that workplace conflict is rarely caused by only one person. Consulting with the EAP may help you better understand contributing factors, communication patterns, and practical strategies for resolution. If the conflict continues or begins affecting performance, morale, or attendance, a formal EAP referral may then become appropriate.



My employee grieved a termination action, claiming she never received a clear warning. My documentation shows multiple meetings, but I now realize my language was vague and noncommittal. What can I learn from this?

One of the most common weaknesses in documentation is lack of clarity and specificity. Employees should clearly understand the concern, the expectations, and the consequences if improvement does not occur. Strong documentation protects both the employee and the organization by creating a fair, understandable record. A simple six-part checklist can help:

1. **Describe the facts clearly:** Focus on observable behavior and measurable performance. Avoid opinions, assumptions, or emotional language.
2. **Document when and where:** Include dates, times, frequency, and specific incidents.
3. **Connect the issue to expectations:** Identify the policy, rule, or performance standard involved.
4. **Explain the impact:** Note effects on productivity, teamwork, customers, safety, or morale.
5. **Record corrective actions taken:** Include verbal discussions, written warnings, coaching, and expectations for improvement.
6. **Document outcomes:** Note the employee's response, any improvement, how long it lasted, and whether problems returned.

Avoid venting, labeling, diagnosing, or sounding angry. Clear, direct, and objective documentation helps employees understand where they stand and reduces misunderstandings later.

Continued EAP Challenge for the top Supervisors, Managers, and HR Professionals:

Your organization has received new EAP brochures with a Company Passcode to access **My Stress Tools** – a new suite of helpful tools on our website to manage stress. **Your homework:**

- (1) Go to the EAP website either by scanning the QR code on the new brochure or going to <https://eapacific.com/employees/my-stress-tools.html>;
- (2) Register for My Stress Tools (call us if you need your organization's Passcode, it's also on the new brochure);
- (3) Take the Stress Profiler and discover what small thing(s) you could do to reduce your stress this year;
- (4) Start doing that; and (5) Promote this so your team reduces their stress and burnout and has a better year!

Your stressed employees probably won't do much if you don't believe it will help. Using **one small free tool** to reduce YOUR stress will help them be much more likely to take advantage of your experience and recommendations!



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