

EMPLOYEE
– ASSISTANCE –
PROGRAM

Leader Guide

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Version 1

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

YOUR PEOPLE MATTER	2
Introducing the EAP	2
Why have an EAP?	2
IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE EAP	3
What is the role of the EAP?	3
Who can use the EAP services?	3
Who are the EAP providers?	4
Where are the EAP providers located?	4
How do I inform my employees of the EAP?	4
THE LEADER'S ROLE IN REFERRING EMPLOYEES TO THE EAP	5
Step 1: Recognising a potential problem	6
Step 2: Responding: Effectively approaching a troubled employee	7
Step 3: Referring an employee to the EAP	9
What are the time requirements for counselling?	10
What to expect after you refer an employee to the EAP	10
What if an employee refuses to use the EAP?	10
WHAT IS A MANAGEMENT REFERRAL?	11
MANAGER SUPPORT PROGRAM (MSP)	13
What is the MSP?	13
How can the MSP help leaders?	13
How do I access the MSP?	14
RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS	15
What is a Critical Incident?	15
What is appropriate support?	15
HANDOUTS	17
Handout 1: Employee performance checklist	17
Handout 2: Tips for dealing with strong emotional reactions during important conversations	20
Handout 3: Critical Event Checklist	22
Handout 4: Critical Event: Employee Handout	24
HOW ELSE CAN ASSURE PROGRAMS HELP?	26
CONTACTING THE EAP	Back Cover

YOUR PEOPLE MATTER

This guide has been prepared as an introduction to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). It will help you as a leader to identify employee issues that impact on wellbeing, productivity, and safety. It will also assist in approaching employees regarding these issues, and initiating appropriate referrals to the EAP service. People are your greatest resource. A valuable feature of the EAP is its ability to help you manage your human assets effectively.

INTRODUCING THE EAP

The EAP is a confidential, short-term counselling service to assist employees with work or personal issues impacting on their performance. Employees attend EAP services on a voluntary basis. They may either be self referred or recommended to the service by a leader.

Similarly, confidential EAP services are available to all leaders (superintendents/managers) to assist them in addressing their own issues that could be impacting on their quality of work or personal relationships.

WHY HAVE AN EAP?

Identifying and addressing problems at work can be stressful for both the employee and the leader. Experience has shown, however, that when people are helped to overcome their problems, whether they are personal or work related, they can emerge as more valuable employees.

With the EAP, professional counsellors are on-hand to help resolve these issues. This minimises the time you might need to spend supporting troubled employees, as well as delivering other significant benefits, including:

- » Increased employee performance, motivation and wellbeing
- » Employee retention
- » Reduced absenteeism
- » Improved work environment and work relationships

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUAL WELLBEING AND ORGANISATIONAL RESILIENCE

EAPs are fast becoming an integral component of many organisations' corporate wellness programs. An effective EAP will support your people through change and provide additional resources and services to help maintain organisational resilience through growth and challenging times.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE EAP

ENSURES CONFIDENTIALITY AT ALL TIMES

The EAP is a completely confidential service, ensuring the anonymity of those seeking help whilst promoting a 'safe' and trusting environment.

If an employee chooses to take part in the EAP, no record of their involvement will be kept on their personal file nor their participation discussed with any other person without the employee's written consent.

ATTENDANCE IS VOLUNTARY

Employees can be informed about the EAP counselling option, but it is the individual's decision to seek help - remember, it's their choice.

As participation in the EAP is voluntary and confidential, EAP counsellors can not consult employees solely on a team leader's recommendation.

PARTNERING WITH YOUR LEADERSHIP

The EAP acts in a partnering role. The EAP professionals deliver workplace focused counselling and psychological services directed at the timely resolution of employee issues that could be beyond your responsibility. In doing so, the EAP supports and enhances your leadership. However, the counsellors in no way assume your role in managing employee work performance.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EAP?

- » Early, solution-focused intervention
- » Practical, short-term counselling
- » Specialist assessment and referral

WHO CAN USE THE EAP SERVICES?

- » The employee
- » The employee's immediate family - where appropriate
- » The employer and employee cooperatively
- » Managers and leaders



WHO ARE THE EAP PROVIDERS?

The EAP is an external employee counselling service provided by Assure Programs. Outsourcing the EAP service ensures that employee and employer needs are met both quickly and professionally.

Assure Programs EAP providers are tertiary qualified, registered psychologists, with extensive counselling experience across a broad range of workplace issues.

WHERE ARE THE EAP PROVIDERS LOCATED?

Assure Programs has a well-established national network of over 400 EAP providers located throughout every metropolitan and regional area of Australia and New Zealand.

HOW DO I INFORM MY EMPLOYEES OF THE EAP?

Regular promotion of the EAP is essential for initiating a positive response. Display posters, distribute brochures and inform employees through team meeting announcements and workplace newsletters.

THE LEADER'S ROLE IN REFERRING EMPLOYEES TO THE EAP

In a leadership role, you have the responsibility of managing, directing and showing support for employees who are experiencing difficulties impacting on their work performance, whether they are of a personal or work-related nature.

It is often difficult for employees to accept that certain problems are affecting their attitude and/or job performance. Frequently, employees who have persistent performance or attendance problems are found to have underlying difficulties. The EAP can assist to provide solutions to many of these problems.

THE EAP ASSISTS WITH PERSONAL AND WORKPLACE ISSUES INCLUDING:

- » Stress reactions and symptoms
- » Work/life balance
- » Parenting and elder-care
- » Organisational change
- » Rehabilitation difficulties
- » Interpersonal skills
- » Anxiety or depression
- » Handling traumatic events
- » Relationship breakdown
- » Interpersonal conflict
- » Burnout and lack of motivation
- » Gambling problems
- » Wellbeing and lifestyle coaching
- » Forward planning and goal setting
- » Switching off and improving sleep
- » Self awareness and self esteem
- » Alcohol and substance abuse
- » Work performance issues
- » Harassment and bullying
- » Grief or bereavement
- » Health concerns
- » Financial and legal difficulties
- » Career uncertainty
- » Customer aggression

IN EFFECTIVELY MANAGING THESE ISSUES, YOUR ROLE AS A LEADER INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING:

- » Step 1: Early recognition of the problem
- » Step 2: Approaching the employee regarding the matter
- » Step 3: If appropriate, referring the employee to the EAP for assistance
- » Considering a Management Referral
- » Considering additional services offered by Assure Programs

The following section provides guidelines to assist you in working through these options.



*Realise
your organisation's
human potential
with timely EAP
support*

STEP 1: RECOGNISING A POTENTIAL PROBLEM

As a leader, you might have encountered employees with job performance issues and/or uncharacteristic behaviour. Sometimes people clearly communicate that they are experiencing difficulties and might even approach you directly. Often, however, it is through observing employees' behaviour and non-verbal communications, that you receive the message. You are in an ideal position to detect the early-warning signs that can indicate an employee has a problem. These can include:

- » Sudden shift in performance or reduced quality of work
- » Frequent absence from work
- » Loss of sense of humour
- » Emotional outbursts
- » Becoming aggressive or irritable
- » Obvious signs of stress and anxiety
- » Difficulty with decision-making and trouble concentrating
- » Lack of interest in work/life in general
- » Erratic behaviour, mood swings or changes
- » Becoming withdrawn
- » Conflict with co-workers
- » Unrealistic standards for self and/or others

Handout 1 (page 17) provides a checklist to guide you in determining if an employee needs assistance. While your role in the early observation of these indicators is vital, it is essential you do not form a subjective judgement. The next section guides you in approaching an employee to discuss issues impacting on their job performance whilst maintaining objectivity.

STEP 2: RESPONDING: EFFECTIVELY APPROACHING A TROUBLED EMPLOYEE

Approaching an employee to discuss performance issues is one of the most challenging and important responsibilities of a leader. Many leaders feel apprehensive and unsure about addressing a troubled employee. Some are uncomfortable with the possible employee response (resistance, defensiveness, hostility); others can find it difficult to display objectivity in the face of the many disruptions an employee might have caused. However, if left unaddressed, these issues can magnify.

Leaders can contact the EAP at any time for advice on how to approach employees, and the services that can be offered. This is especially helpful in dealing with urgent people-management issues, including critical incidents and distressed employees (please refer to MSP section on page 13).

Below are some general guidelines that could be of help.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

BEING PREPARED

1. Approach the employee at the earliest indication of the issue
2. Arrange a time and suitable location for a private meeting with the employee
3. Take time to prepare yourself by gathering relevant notes and documentation and organising your thoughts. This includes: mentally rehearsing your approach and being clear on the employee's work performance history; having clearly defined work performance expectations; and establishing your desired outcomes from the conversation
4. If appropriate, consult with your Human Resource department to ensure the meeting is consistent with your organisation's policies and procedures

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW/CONVERSATION

5. Throughout the discussion, use active listening skills to create rapport:
 - » Refer to the person by name
 - » Nod and make eye contact
 - » Allow equal airtime
 - » Encourage the person to communicate by using open-ended questions such as "What?" and "How?"
 - » Confirm the content of the message
 - » Summarise the discussion and clarify any misunderstandings



*You are in
an ideal position
to detect early-
warning signs*

6. Introduce the discussion briefly by indicating that you wish to talk about how things have been going
7. Be welcoming and relaxed, whilst showing concern. Let them know the reason for the discussion, indicating that you have noticed some changes in him/her recently and want to help and/or discuss this
8. Convey your observations of the signs/situations that brought the matter to your attention. Be as specific as possible, providing examples and making reference to the date, time and place. If the employee discloses a concern (work or personal) that has affected their performance, it may be helpful to refer them to the EAP (see page 9 - Referring an Employee to the EAP)
9. Focus on the relevant issues of work performance; avoid making judgements about the employee or using labels, opinions or inferences about personal issues
10. Be objective, fair, consistent and respectful of the employee's privacy
11. Balance the feedback with examples of good work performance and workplace behaviours you have observed
12. Be prepared for emotional reactions. The employee could respond with distress or frustration. If this is the case, give the employee time to express this, waiting until they have run out of momentum. This demonstrates your willingness to listen, and diffuses strong emotions.
13. Remain empathetic and demonstrate your concern for their wellbeing, but reiterate that you also require certain performance standards
14. Have your facts documented; however, avoid coming across in a threatening manner

GENERATING A PLAN AND FOLLOW UP

15. Consider possible solutions, including seeking suggestions from the employee. Solutions might involve temporary adjustments to work duties or change of job roles OR acceptance of a referral to confidential EAP for advice or counselling
16. Arrange a follow-up meeting to assess progress on your agreed solutions and decisions

STEP 3: REFERRING AN EMPLOYEE TO THE EAP

Recommending the EAP services to a troubled employee demonstrates your care and concern. It also removes you from the role of counsellor, allowing you to focus on their work performance and related impacts on business.

REASONS FOR REFERRING AN EMPLOYEE TO THE EAP INCLUDE:

- » Observed changes in performance/behaviour indicative of personal issues
- » The leader seeks additional support from the EAP to address work performance/behaviour concerns
- » When an employee is assessed to be in violation of specific Workplace Health and Safety policies

KEY POINTS WHEN REFERRING AN EMPLOYEE TO THE EAP

A sensitive way of broaching the topic of counselling is to ask the employee if they are receiving enough support to manage during this time. Mention to them that as their manager you are happy to support them in relation to their work role, however it can also be beneficial to seek professional, independent support and advice to cope with emotional concerns. This is where the EAP can assist.

1. Ensure you communicate the role of the EAP:
 - a. It aims to assist employees manage personal/work related issues that might be just that little bit harder than they have previously encountered
 - b. The service is not intended as a disciplinary action, and its use will not be detrimental to the employee's career path
 - c. It is completely confidential and their involvement will not be discussed without their written consent
 - d. Use of the EAP is on a voluntary basis
 - e. Utilising an EAP service is normal and healthy. It is available to all employees within the organisation, and is a frequently used service within many organisations
2. Suggest the employee contact the EAP:
 - a. Give the employee the EAP brochure and/or 1800 card
 - b. Explain that a wide range of counsellors are available
 - c. Indicate that the employee can phone Assure Programs themselves to further discuss how the program works
 - d. Emphasise the importance of keeping any scheduled appointments. If this is not possible, the employee should give Assure Programs at least 24 hours notice, as an hour's counselling entitlement could be deducted for any late cancellations or no-shows



*Leaders can
contact the EAP
at any time for advice
about employees or for
their own concerns*

3. If you want to increase the likelihood of an employee accessing the service, and the need is clearly apparent, offer to:
 - a. Telephone the EAP with the employee's permission, to arrange either a face-to-face meeting, or for a counsellor to call them directly at an arranged time
 - b. Accompany the employee to the initial appointment if you have significant concerns and they are agreeable to your doing so
 - c. Explain that Assure Programs has a senior staff psychologist on call 24 hours, 365 days per year and that this service is always available to them via the 1800 number
 - d. Consider a 'Management Referral' where, with the employee's agreement, you receive feedback from Assure Programs to assist you to provide support to them in the workplace. See Page 11 for more information

WHAT ARE THE TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR COUNSELLING?

Counselling usually lasts for about one hour per session, with most issues being resolved within a few sessions. Understandably, consultations can vary considerably depending on the individual and the nature and severity of the issue.

Most organisations allow normal leave provisions for employees to attend counselling sessions as long as this does not unnecessarily interfere with work. Alternatively, employees may seek confidential assistance during their own time.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER YOU REFER AN EMPLOYEE TO THE EAP

You might be advised that the employee has attended his or her first appointment, but only if the employee gives the counsellor permission in writing for this information to be released.

After an employee has been offered EAP assistance, maintain normal job monitoring procedures and performance expectations. As performance returns to normal, reinforce the process with praise and recognition.

A useful gauge in determining the effectiveness of the EAP is simply to ask the employee how they found the service. Naturally, the employee is under no obligation to confirm or otherwise reflect on their use of the service.

Temporary relapses can occur, in which case, recommend that the EAP be consulted again as soon as possible.

WHAT IF AN EMPLOYEE REFUSES TO USE THE EAP?

It is important to remember that an employee's involvement with EAP is voluntary. While obtaining help is their choice, continued poor work performance is not.

Whether the employee chooses to use EAP or not, your responsibility is to continue to monitor job performance. If the employee's work performance fails to improve, your next option is to proceed with performance management protocols according to your organisation's policies. Follow up on the concerns until there is some resolution. Always be fair, and document all changes relating to the issue.

WHAT IS A MANAGEMENT REFERRAL?

Typically, an employee will seek the support of Assure by self referring to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for confidential counselling. Under the EAP an employee's access of the service, all content discussed and outcomes remain completely confidential and separate from the employer.

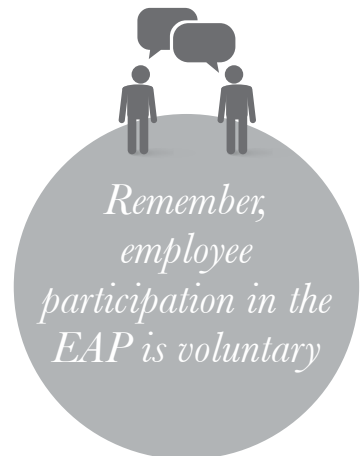
There are some situations where it is appropriate for an employer to engage an employee in a targeted review and/or counselling through Assure Programs. Generally this is to support and assist the employee in managing work, personal, or wellbeing concerns that are impacting them or their workplace behavior and/or work performance. We call this an Assure Management Referral.

A Management Referral is typically initiated following a collaborative discussion between yourself and the employee where:

- » It is recognised that a work, personal or wellbeing concern may be having an impact on the employee or their performance in the workplace
- » You are seeking recommendations from Assure on how to best assist and support the employee in the workplace
- » You are seeking either verbal or written feedback from Assure on the employee's attendance at counselling sessions and their progress towards the agreed goal
- » The employee provides signed consent for the service to proceed

Examples of situations where a Management Referral may be helpful include:

- » Supporting an employee's return to work following a period of absence due to a work or non-work related event
- » Building an employee's interpersonal communication skills to support their workplace relationships and performance; such as giving and receiving feedback, developing active listening skills, or improving assertiveness
- » Managing specific behaviours that have resulted in, or may result in performance issues if unmanaged; such as anger, drug and alcohol problems, or gambling
- » Exploring options for an employee's potential career advancement and best job fit
- » Supporting emotional difficulties that have resulted in, or may result in, performance issues if unmanaged; such as panic attacks, phobias, depression or grief
- » Addressing other concerns that are seen to be impacting an employee's health and wellbeing and/or workplace behavior



HOW TO MAKE A MANAGEMENT REFERRAL

Contact Assure Programs' Manager Support Program on 1800 505 015 to discuss your situation and review the suitability of a Management Referral.

Where it is confirmed that a Management Referral is suitable and you wish to proceed with the service, the senior psychologist will confirm your preferred invoicing arrangement for the service and an estimate of how many sessions may be required to support your employee.

Assure will electronically send you a Management Referral Package including our Management Referral Form.

In advance of completing the referral you will need to discuss with the employee the reason for the referral and the potential benefits of their participation in the service.

During this discussion you will need to agree with the employee and document on the Assure Programs' Management Referral Form:

- » The issue identified as the reason for the Management Referral
- » Actions taken to date to address the issue
- » The mutually agreed goal of the Management Referral
- » What type of feedback (if any) is required to be provided back to you by Assure
- » The employee's written consent to proceed with the type of service requested

MANAGER SUPPORT PROGRAM (MSP)

WHAT IS THE MSP?

The Manager Support Program (MSP) provides leaders with an avenue to obtain timely support in managing personal and interpersonal work issues relating to employee performance, work relationships, and organisational change. This program is designed to complement existing internal human resources functions.

HOW CAN THE MSP HELP LEADERS?

The MSP can benefit leaders in developing the strategies and confidence to tackle the more challenging people management situations, especially those involving emotional responses and wellbeing. The MSP provides a resource for leaders to call an independent and experienced professional to discuss 'people' situations, plan effective responses, and gain specific feedback and guidance on their approaches.

Common reasons leaders access the MSP include:

- » Identifying signs of stress and mental illness in their staff
- » How to encourage staff with high needs or 'reluctance' to attend the EAP or appropriate support (including formal Management Referrals and addressing common misconceptions)
- » Referral information for accessing other support options available through our Organisational Development Services team (e.g. mediation, coaching, training)
- » Supporting staff on sick leave or on a return-to-work plan
- » Strategies for providing effective feedback to staff and managing potentially difficult conversations
- » Managing performance issues or conflicts within the team
- » Implementing change and transition management
- » Building more effective teams
- » Optimising interpersonal relationships with your staff
- » Staying vitalised as a leader - stress management and self-care
- » Managing staff members identified as at risk of harm



*Call Assure
Programs to
discuss your
needs*

HOW DO I ACCESS THE MSP?

To access the MSP please call our toll-free MSP number: 1800 505 015 to arrange a phone consultation. The MSP is fully confidential and is funded as part of your organisation's fully-implemented Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The leader is guaranteed timely access to the MSP, with experience showing that one or two sessions (e.g. 15-30 minutes) are adequate for most situations. Our MSP program is predominantly provided by phone. Alternatively, face-to-face contact may be available where there is a complex need or situation. Should this be the case, Assure Programs would discuss any associated costs with you.

The MSP is designed to provide focused, timely guidance for leaders. If more specialised advice is required, a referral to our Organisational Development Services may be offered in which leadership coaching or tailored training programs could be discussed and explored as additional options to the leader.



The estimated cost of an employee prematurely leaving an organisation is 1.5 times their annual salary. This includes the costs of advertising, interviewing and training, and the loss of experience and knowledge.*

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RESPONDING TO CRITICAL INCIDENTS

LEADERS SUPPORTING PEOPLE FOLLOWING A CRITICAL INCIDENT

WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

A critical event (or incident) is any event or process that has a potential to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of either an individual or group. Critical incidents typically cause a ‘detrimental’ impact, which can include significant disruption, increased levels of tension, emotional responses and changes in performance. Most people can manage and fully recover from these events with:

- » Appropriate support
- » Resilience training
- » Organisational preparedness

1. WHAT IS APPROPRIATE SUPPORT?

Counselling and defusing

Defusing is a specific type of counselling conducted by a professionally-qualified person to promote recovery after a serious incident. It typically involves:

- » The provision of education and information about possible reactions
- » Practical coping strategies to manage these reactions
- » Can be delivered individually or, when appropriate, in a group setting

For effective defusing, please consider these points:

- » Counselling and defusing are ideally conducted between 24 to 72 hours after the event. It is rare that formal debriefing is required before this time
- » Defusing should be offered to any persons directly involved in the event or any persons for whom the event has triggered a strong reaction
- » It is important for organisations to **automatically** offer counselling and defusing as a **voluntary** yet **recommended** support option
- » Phone contact with Assure Programs (EAP) is immediately available and can provide support and advice to managers at the earlier stages of response



*Supportive
leadership assists
personal recovery
from critical
incidents*

Supportive leadership behaviours

Leaders can significantly assist recovery by providing the following supportive behaviours which we call the **3 Rs Approach: Recognise, Respond, Refer**

Recognise signs of post-incident stress as normal reactions. **Respond** with a supportive approach and talking with all impacted employees. **Refer** the employee/s to further support or counselling; e.g. the EAP, their family, or a GP.

These are the sorts of reactions to look out for that might indicate someone is experiencing persistent stress reactions:

- Low energy and motivation
- Poor concentration or memory
- Avoidance of certain places or tasks
- Disturbed sleep or bad dreams illness and physical symptoms of stress
- Anxiety, nervousness and distress
- 'Flashbacks' or unwanted images or memories
- Generalised worry or anger
- Overly sensitive and concerned about safety and surroundings
- Absenteeism

2. WHAT IS RESILIENCE TRAINING?

For best practice, your organisation will provide training to staff and leaders in stress management and emotional resilience, to increase personal self awareness, self management and practical coping strategies. These skills assist in moderating the experience of critical stress and preventing further escalation of distress. Such training also serves to increase general retention, satisfaction with work and life, and productivity.

Please call Assure Programs on 1800 505 015 for further information on these specialist services.

3. WHAT IS ORGANISATIONAL PREPAREDNESS?

Your organisation has a Critical Incident Management process, which is regularly reviewed and updated, and includes strategies for supporting the recovery of employees following an incident. Such activities include:

- » Critical incident management policy and procedure (review and development), also including
 - Duties checklists and guidelines
 - Communication strategies for notification of incidents and bereavement
 - Business continuity practices
- » Staff support and follow up procedures, including proactive rehabilitation and return to work support

Please call Assure Programs on 1800 505 015 for further information on these specialist services.

HANDOUT: 1

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE CHECKLIST

This checklist is a guide to help you identify and clarify changes in an employee's work performance and behaviours that could indicate an underlying work related or personal issue.

The information you use in assessing an employee's situation may come from your own observations, be communicated to you directly by the employee, through feedback from the employee's co-workers, or through customer or client feedback.

Please complete the following checklist by marking those factors relating to the employee concerned.

1. ABSENTEEISM

- Repeat instances of unauthorised absences
- Excessive use of sick leave
- Regular unscheduled use of annual leave
- Persistent Monday/Friday absences
- Regularly arrives to work late
- Regularly leaves work early

2. ABSENTEEISM AT WORK

- Continued absences from work which are not related to their job
- Excessively frequent trips to the toilet, water fountain, etc.
- Longer or more frequent breaks than is organisation policy
- Long or frequent personal telephone calls
- Excessive use of personal email/internet

3. ACCIDENT RATE

- Increased workplace accidents or injuries
- Non-work related accidents impairing work performance
- Reduced adherence to workplace health and safety regulations
- Increased risk-taking behaviours



*You can call
Assure Programs
to discuss more
complex scenarios*

4. CONCENTRATION DIFFICULTIES

- Erratic work patterns - shifts between high and low productivity
- Difficulty recalling instructions
- More time required to complete same amount of work
- Inability to recognise or learn from mistakes
- Impaired capacity to learn
- Repeated errors despite increased supervision
- Sleeping/drowsiness at work

5. PATTERN OF DECLINING JOB EFFICIENCY

- Decreased work efficiency compared to past performance
- Diminished quality of work produced
- Requires more time to produce same standard/amount of work
- Failure to meet deadlines
- Repeats same mistakes
- Inconsistent work patterns
- Unsupported explanations for poor work performance
- Procrastination of decisions or projects

6. DIMINISHED WORK RESPONSIBILITIES

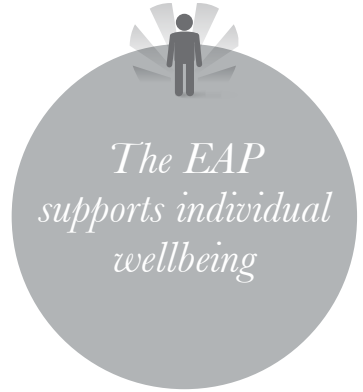
- Reduced quantity of work
- Meets performance targets only because others are requiring less of him or her
- Avoidance of assignments or responsibilities
- Demotion or sideways shift
- Duties of employee adopted by co-workers

7. CHANGES IN ATTITUDE AND RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK

- Expressed frustration or discontent
- Decreased written or verbal communication
- Negative comments about co-workers, leaders or organisation
- Blames others for declining work performance
- Resistance or sensitivity to advice or constructive criticism
- Complaints from co-workers
- Avoidance/withdrawal from others
- Hostility towards co-workers
- Unpredictable response to work requests

8. GENERAL PRESENTATION AND BEHAVIOUR

- Changes in appearance (dress, hygiene)
- Makes unfounded accusations or false statements
- Borrowing money from co-workers
- Increasingly disruptive
- Intoxicated at work
- Expresses insecurities about work performance
- Overrates abilities or performance
- Unpredictable displays of emotion
- Increased comments or complaints from co-workers or customers about employee’s behaviours
- Improbable excuses for poor job performance



9. EMPLOYEE REPORTED OR OBSERVED SIGNS OF STRESS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mood changes eg. anger, tearfulness, agitation | <input type="checkbox"/> Heart palpitations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rapid or slow speech | <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tension and muscle aches | <input type="checkbox"/> Fast and shallow breathing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Disturbed sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memory problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in appetite |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Major change in physical health | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset stomach |

10. COMMENT ON OTHER UNUSUAL OR ABNORMAL INSTANCES OR BEHAVIOUR

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You might have marked one or several factors on this checklist. It is important to attend to any persistent or intense factors or other concerns, which by their nature, require appropriate and immediate intervention. Please refer to the section ‘The leader’s role in referring employees to the EAP’ in this guide to assist you in effectively approaching a troubled employee. If required, contact the EAP on 1800 808 374 to discuss how best to assist the employee concerned.

HANDOUT: 2

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH STRONG EMOTIONAL REACTIONS DURING IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS

From time-to-time leaders are faced with strong emotional responses from staff during important conversations including work performance counselling and regular review meetings. These responses can take the form of distress, worry or frustration/anger.

There are a number of important things leaders can do to take the pressure and discomfort out of these situations.

1. Being prepared for emotional responses during important conversations is an important first step.
 - a. Expect that from time-to-time, you will be faced with strong emotional reactions.
 - b. Organise yourself and mentally rehearse your approach before beginning.
2. People get distressed and/or frustrated for many reasons. We don't always know what is happening in people's lives so we cannot be sure of the sorts of pressures people carry with them to work. If someone reacts emotionally when you are having a conversation, see this as a chance to begin a support process rather than a 'catastrophe'.
3. Staff might present with distress or frustration for personal reasons, or work related reasons, and if this emotion seems quite strong, it will usually be that an individual has bottled it up. Therefore, if you let the employee express the emotion first (i.e. run out of momentum or steam) this will indicate that you are willing/ready to listen, and will automatically reduce the amount of visible emotion.
4. When giving feedback, allow the employee time to slow down and to respond to this new information.
5. If strong emotion is evident it is best to attend to the emotion, in both yourself and the employee, first, to reduce the natural tendency to become tense or defensive. If you are calm you are better able to positively influence important conversations.
6. Attending to our own emotion simply means - 'keeping cool' so that we can focus on an appropriate response to the situation. This is best done with a combination of making your body relax, taking a slow breath, mentally telling yourself to take your time, talk slower and listen for the key message.
7. Validate people's emotions, yet concentrate on responding to the facts of the situation rather than to emotional arguments. Don't take emotional comments personally.
8. Dealing with specific emotions:

ANGER:

- a. If someone is really angry (visibly hostile) you can reflect this to them along with your intention to listen. For example, "Right, now I can see you are quite angry about this. I do want to hear you out...could you start at the beginning for me?"
- b. Wait for the person to run out of momentum.

- c. The active listening approach will help an angry person focus - e.g. “could you tell me more about that day?”, “Take your time” or “Okay, so what you’re saying is that..... (paraphrase and check)... is that right?” Focus only on the rational component and repeating this back to the person.
- d. Adopt a positive, calm and firm tone. Watch your non-verbal behaviour to ensure that it is self-confident.
- e. Do not block complaints. If the frustrated person feels they have a valid complaint, then inform them of the appropriate channels available for them to pursue their concerns.
- f. Conclude with a summary of their position and by reasserting/restating your position.

SAD/TRAGIC/CONCERNING STORIES:

- a. Sad or tragic stories often make us uncomfortable because we don’t know what to say (and there is no magical response). Often the best approach is to listen long enough to get the picture, and provide the person the avenues for support (i.e. discussing the EAP).
- b. It is okay to talk openly about issues that have been raised (e.g. recent bereavement or suicidal thoughts). While people can seem ‘fragile’, they will not shatter like glass if you take sensitive and assertive steps to assist.
- c. Use silence and minimal encouraging gestures to allow the person time to ventilate. Wait until the emotion subsides before attempting to fully engage the person in discussion.

TEARS:

- a. If you are talking to someone who begins to cry - just sit quietly and let them talk for a short time, (they will usually compose themselves fairly quickly).
- b. You might like to say something simple like - “I’m just going to sit here with you and when you’re ready we can keep talking”.

AGITATION AND ANXIETY:

- a. Remain calm and steady.
- b. Encourage the person to focus on the facts of the situation and not so much on future consequences and negative possibilities.
- c. Reassure the person that the issues can be addressed and solutions can be found.
- d. Be clear and specific in your statements. This will help to minimise the scope for misinterpretation.
- e. If the agitation does not subside, suggest pausing for a break, before proceeding.

COMPLAINING AND WHINGEING:

- a. Listen to the complaint or concerns, encouraging them to be as specific and concise as possible, sticking to the facts. Ask for specific suggestions on how to resolve or solve the problem.
9. Seek support or debriefing for yourself from the EAP if a specific interaction or combination of difficult conversations is impacting negatively on your work performance or quality of work life. Remember that leaders have needs too, and that seeking assistance when needed, is a sign of strength and maturity.

LEADERS SUPPORTING PEOPLE FOLLOWING A CRITICAL EVENT

DURING INCIDENT RESPONSE

- Initiate the organisation's emergency and incident response protocol
- Remove employees to a place of safety and comfort
- Contact your manager or response team for advice
- Follow directions and approved communications/scripting from management or your 'Response Team'
- Remain available and visible

POST-INCIDENT RESPONSE

- Determine the nature of the event and appropriate recovery response
- Contact your employee assistance personnel to arrange counselling and advise WH&S and/or HR team: PH: _____
- The Assure Programs Employee Assistance Program: 1800 808 374
- Maintain the collective morale with calm and supportive behaviours
- Offer practical and social assistance, especially for 'displaced' staff
- Encourage staff to use their personal calming and coping strategies
- Use simple directions and continue to update staff

- Continue to monitor people and the environment, to minimise unnecessary 'exposure'
- Reassure staff by listening, normalising stress, and defusing
- Check-in and follow up (over the following week)
- Encourage staff to return to routine, when they indicate they are ready
- Avoid evaluation, blaming, rushing staff back to work or minimising the event

THE ASSURE PROGRAMS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE (EAP) WILL:

- Assist you in assessing the situation and the appropriate response
- Provide immediate phone support to team and/or management where required
- Arrange for a counsellor to be available on-site or available for support, where the circumstances and nature of the event require it
- Provide education, information, defusing and then feedback to managers
- Remind and help you to monitor staff over the weeks following an incident

ESSENTIAL TASKS COMPLETED:

- A nominated person _____ has created list of staff involved for records
- A nominated person _____ has provided the EAP number and offered counselling and other support to staff on this list
- A nominated person _____ has contacted other staff (including, where indicated, those on leave) to inform them of any significant news, support, and outcomes.

HANDOUT: 4

CRITICAL EVENT: EMPLOYEE HANDOUT



SUPPORTING OUR PEOPLE FOLLOWING A CRITICAL EVENT

Our organisation understands that critical incidents can bring expected, unexpected, and sometimes delayed, impacts for our people. Therefore, we will put into place a number of automatic steps to support you:

- » We'll check in on you and ask what you need
- » We'll offer immediate phone support, where needed, to all people impacted by an incident
- » When required, we'll arrange a visit from our counselling service (EAP). They will come on site and talk to us all about normal reactions and the triggers to look out for, so we can support our mates and/or link into a confidential individual session later on
- » We'll automatically offer you an individual confidential 'check in' with the EAP. We'll also follow up with those involved and ask how they're going
- » We'll encourage (and help set up) a follow-up appointment with the EAP for those who've been 'closer' to a critical incident and who we feel could benefit from further support
- » We'll consider and follow advice from your supervisors and the EAP when looking at getting all the staff and crew back to normal duties and productive work

These services are voluntary, but highly encouraged.

These are the sorts of questions we'll ask you about your energy and health during a follow up:

HOW IS YOUR.....

- Energy?
- Concentration?
- Motivation?
- Heart rate and nerves?
- Tension levels?
- Frustration levels?
- Sleep pattern?
- Health: feeling crook or well?
- Readiness to go back to work?

We all have an important part to play. Getting staff back to familiar routines at work and at home while maintaining overall wellbeing remain our primary objectives. To effectively look out for you and your mates will require each of us to look for and **Recognise** when people need a bit of help. We will each need to **Respond** in a supportive way and **Refer** adversely affected staff to the right help and advice in a timely way.

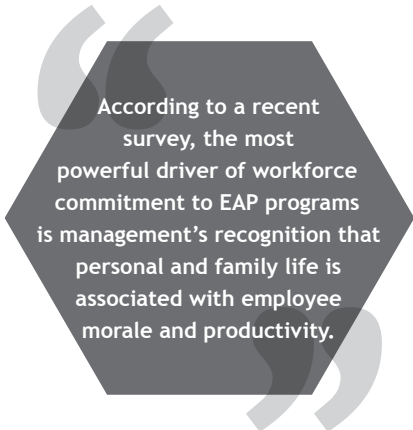
HOW ELSE CAN ASSURE PROGRAMS HELP?

Assure Programs also offers additional services that can complement the role of the EAP.

These include:

- » Organisational culture and stress review/assessments
- » Conflict management and mediation
- » Targeted workshops and training programs, e.g. dealing with difficult customers; personal and interpersonal effectiveness; managing misunderstanding, stress management
- » Career transition coaching and support - assist with complex career transition, including managing redundancies, and organisational change
- » Executive/manager coaching and development
- » Team development
- » Performance and change management
- » Psychological assessment for selection and development

Your HR Manager can organise provision of these comprehensive services. For further information regarding these specialist programs, please call our Director of Organisational Development Services at Assure Programs on 1800 505 015.



According to a recent survey, the most powerful driver of workforce commitment to EAP programs is management's recognition that personal and family life is associated with employee morale and productivity.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW WE CAN HELP YOU DEAL
WITH A CRITICAL INCIDENT, CALL FREE TODAY:

1800 808 374 Australia | 0800 200 277 New Zealand
1800 505 015 Manager Support Program
info@assureprograms.com.au | assureprograms.com.au