Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)



What is an EAP?

An EAP, or employee assistance program, is a confidential, short term, counselling service for employees with personal difficulties that affect their work performance. EAPs grew out of industrial alcoholism programs of the 1940's. EAPs should be part of a larger company plan to promote wellness that involves written policies, supervisor and employee training, and, where appropriate, an approved drug testing program.

Do we offer EAP Services?

No. Regulators does not offer EAP services. See question below about how to find an EAP service provider. EAPs are usually a program purchased or funded by your employer and provided by an external organization or occasionally by a department within your company. You can find out if your employer offers an EAP service by asking your manager, Human Resources Department, Union or Health and Safety Representative.

Who offers EAP services and how do I find them?

To locate service providers in your area, use an internet search engine. Key words include "EAP service providers". You may wish to add your location to help narrow the results.

What is the purpose of an EAP?

The EAP offers help with the resolution of difficulties that may be affecting work. These difficulties, however, do not have to be caused by workplace issues. Employee Assistance Programs are designed to help people understand or overcome their difficulties regardless if the source is work or otherwise. While most EAPs offer a wide range of services, they often refer to other professionals or agencies who can offer more or extended care in particular areas.

What types of services does an EAP offer?

The range of areas typically managed by an EAP provider include:

- Personal difficulties.

- Job stress.
- Relationship difficulties.
- Eldercare, childcare, parenting difficulties.
- Harassment.
- Substance abuse.
- Separation and loss.
- Balancing work and family.
- Financial or legal.
- Family violence.

Some EAP providers are also able to offer other services including retirement or lay-off assistance, and wellness/health promotion and fitness (such as weight control, nutrition, exercise, or smoking). Others may offer advice on long-term illnesses, disability challenges, counselling for crisis situations (e.g., death at work), or advice specifically for managers/supervisors in dealing with difficult situations.

Who can use an EAP?

EAPs are open to all employees and members of their immediate family.

What happens when I call an EAP?

In most cases, an EAP phone number is posted or otherwise distributed to staff members. This number is often to what is known as a referral agent.

A referral agent could be a someone from within the organization such as a health professional in the medical department, a union counsellor or an employee who has received EAP training. If there is no internal referral agent, the worker could be referred to an external EAP resource. Referral agents must be familiar with available community resources which could include social, financial and mental health services, professional counsellors, or ministers. A referral agent defines the specific nature of the situation and refers the person to the appropriate resource for assistance. The actual referral depends on the type of difficulty, the preference of the person, and the ability of the person to pay for the service (if costs are not otherwise covered by the organization or an insurance program).

When a worker voluntarily contacts an EAP provider, a confidential record is opened. The EAP provider will collect any necessary information and, depending on the severity of the situation and the capabilities of the EAP personnel, will decide if the situation can be handled by the provider or if a referral is needed to an outside resource (such as a particular substance use program). Interviews are typically offered to the employee within a set period of time (e.g., interviews will be conducted within 24 or 48 hours) unless the situation is judged to be an emergency.

What happens with an EAP referral and who knows about it?

In an EAP, there are three types of referrals:

1. Self-referral where the worker seeks help on their own.
2. The informal referral where a supervisor, friend or co-worker recommends the EAP.

No record of these two types of referral appears in the worker's personnel file.

3. A formal referral is based on job performance and the supervisor recommends the EAP. This recommendation may or may not appear in the individual's personnel file depending on the situation. Often, no notation is made unless there is a need for formal disciplinary action. What is discussed during the sessions, however, is not reported to the employer in either case.

What makes an EAP successful?

Several factors make an EAP successful:

- Strict confidentiality.
- Open to workers and their immediate families.
- Recognition and commitment by management, workers, and union (if there is one) that an EAP is needed.
- Policies and procedures supported by top management, workers and the union.
- Establishment of both formal and informal referral procedures.
- Promotion of the EAP and encouragement to use the service.
- Managers and workers educated in how to access EAP.
- Periodic evaluation of the EAP to be sure the needs of both the worker and the employer are being met.

In addition, the EAP must be monitored and evaluated to ensure continued quality of the referral/assistance and to correct potential trouble situations. An appropriate assessment, referral and follow-up of progress are important for continued success of the EAP.

What things should be considered when contracting or hiring an EAP provider?

Hiring professional services, no matter what the service may be, requires some investigation. It is the client's responsibility to find a competent consultant who is qualified by education, knowledge, and experience. The following questions are not meant to be the only questions you may ask, but rather they are a start to your checklist.

1. What is the experience of the provider?
   - How many years has the provider been serving these clients?
   - Can the provider provide a list of references?
2. Where are the provider's offices located? (A local organization is generally preferred because they are familiar with the community and its resources.)
3. What is the provider's scope of services?

Examples may include:

- Stress management.
- Child care or elder care referral.
- Wellness program.
- Counselling for crisis situations (e.g., death at work).
- Advice specifically for managers/supervisors in dealing with difficult

situations.

Exactly how would the organization provide services to our employees? For example, would the provider use an 800 number, referral network, on site service, etc.

What is the policy on returning calls? How long before a call-back is placed (e.g., within 24 hours, 48 hours)?

4. How does the provider determine to whom the clients are referred? How and how often is the list of referral sources updated?
5. What is the provider's availability?
    - How many staff members are available in typical and non-typical business hours?
    - What services are available in non-typical business hours?
    - What is the availability for night or swing shift workers?
6. How many counselors are provided per worker?

What are the backgrounds of the counselors, i.e. education, credentials, years of experience, etc.?

7. Does the EAP offer education or training for your workplace? If so, what type of training is provided?
8. Does the provider have a follow-up or utilization review service? If so, how is it done?
9. What kinds of return-to-work, aftercare, or support services are offered?
10. What types of publicity and promotion of EAP services would be offered?
11. What is the fee structure? (E.g., flat fee? Based on average usage statistics and number of employees? Per referral?)
12. What types of reports are produced to the employer? (E.g., number of referrals, what types, etc.)