

# ***MANAGEMENT: REFERENCE MATERIALS***

## **EAP: An Introduction to Employee Assistance Programs**



**Materials compiled by:  
Employee Assistance Advisory Committee**

EAP Reference Information is available at:  
<http://oser.state.wi.us> – click on “Employee Programs”

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# What is the Employee Assistance Program?

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential, voluntary work-site program to assist state government employees affected by behavioral, medical or productivity concerns or problems. EAP helps in the prevention, identification and resolution of these problems and concerns. In short, EAP informs the employee about the available resources best qualified to assess, diagnose and/or treat an issue confronting the employee. These problems include, but are not limited to:

- ◆ Health
- ◆ Marital and relationship
- ◆ Family and parenting
- ◆ Financial
- ◆ Alcohol and other drug abuse
- ◆ Legal
- ◆ Emotional
- ◆ Stress or anxiety
- ◆ Life crisis
- ◆ Work

## *What services are offered by EAP?*

- ◆ Confidential and timely problem-assessment
- ◆ Referrals to appropriate service providers
- ◆ On-going follow up services
- ◆ Consultation and training to EAP coordinators, supervisors and managers
- ◆ Information and education on community resources
- ◆ Wellness/prevention activities

## *Who can use EAP?*

All state employees are eligible for EAP services. The program is also available to members of an employee's immediate family, either at the request of the employee or the family member. Employees who have supervisory and management responsibilities may also use EAP as a resource in dealing with employee performance issues.

## *What is the purpose of EAP?*

The primary purpose of the EAP is to maximize employee job performance by: assisting in the early identification of problems, and offering proper support and informed choice of referral to appropriate community and professional resources for help in resolving problems.

## *How does EAP help?*

EAP provides information and assessment of problems. It makes referrals to resources in the community and follow-up to ensure that employees have connected with the needed assistance and is satisfied with the quality of services.

## *How is EAP structured?*

The EAP program structure in each agency depends on the size of the agency and the agency management's decision on how to best provide the services. Large or mid-size agencies tend to have an EAP Director who oversees the operations of their agency's program; provides training, consultation and support to coordinators, supervisors and managers; gives confidential assistance to employees who contact the EAP; and encourages their agency to promote the health and well-being of their employees. A few agencies contract with outside professional vendors to provide EAP services to their employees.

Many agencies use Employee Assistance Coordinators who are employees who volunteer to offer assistance to their co-workers. They receive special training to become a better listener, help clarify an employee's problem and identify the resources available for further assistance. The EA Coordinator does not provide counseling or therapy. Their role is to offer support, discuss options and help make referrals to resources in the local community.

## *How do I contact EAP?*

Many agencies post flyers or have information in their Employee Handbooks about their EAP, including the names of the Director and Coordinators. If you do not know the EAP contacts in your agency, see your agency Human Resources Director. Agency EAP Contacts

If you wish to discuss a problem with someone outside your own agency, you may contact an EAP representative in another agency, who may be willing to meet with you or refer you to someone else. You may also contact the Statewide EAP Program in the Office of State Employment Relations.

If you are unable to contact an EAP representative and you need immediate assistance, you may use one of many crisis hotline numbers in Wisconsin. These non-state mental health agencies are staffed by professional counselors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can expect to receive personal support and any needed information about other community resources. Crisis Hotlines

## *What are some of the key features of EAP?*

In a private confidential interview, an EAP person will listen to the employee to determine the nature of an employee's concern and the type of referral best suited to fit their needs. EAP staff is not expected to function as counselors. Their role is to help employees find the assistance they need, either medical or otherwise, to deal with their problem(s).

All contacts with the EAP are confidential except with the specific, written consent of the employee or if there is information relating to suspected abuse or neglect of a child or elderly person, or a threat to harm one's own life or safety or the life or safety of another person. Some agencies may have additional, specific exceptions to the confidentiality standard, such as a threat to the operations of the agency or illegal activity on state property.

The EAP is completely voluntary. It is always the employee's choice to accept or reject a referral and treatment. Lack of participation in EAP is not a cause for disciplinary action. Use of the EAP will NOT jeopardize an employee's job status or opportunity for job promotion. No record of services provided by the EAP will be entered in the employee's personnel file.

Whether the employee accepts, rejects, or fails to respond to treatment or referrals for assistance for personal problems, it is still the responsibility of the employee to meet the job requirements.

Use of the EAP does not diminish the supervisor's responsibility to require an acceptable level of job performance or his or her obligation to use personnel and management procedures available to maintain an acceptable performance level.

There is no cost to the employee for the services of the EAP, but there may be fees for outside services to which the employee is referred. These costs must be paid by the employee or may be covered by the employee's health insurance. Every effort is made to keep expenses to a minimum.

The time required for the interview between the employee and EAP Staff is considered normal work time and requires no leave time. However, each agency may have specific guidelines regarding this issue, so check with your HR office for further clarification.

Referral to an outside resource may be accounted for by the use of work time, sick leave, accumulated annual leave, or leave without pay in accordance with your agency's policy or union contracts.

## *Where can I find more information?*

Please go to the OSER website for more resources for supervisors and employees on the state's Employee Assistance Program: [http://oser.state.wi.us/section\\_detail.asp?linkcatid=332](http://oser.state.wi.us/section_detail.asp?linkcatid=332).

# Management Consultation & Your EAP

One of the benefits of your Employee Assistance Program is management consultation. It allows for early intervention on job performance problems. It is an alternative to trying to get rid of problems by ignoring them, hoping they will go away, getting angry, or eventually losing an employee who represents a big investment in training and experience.

Your EAP staff is available to consult with managers and supervisors who are dealing with an employee who is experiencing problems. These problems may include a decline in job performance or other difficulties on the job, which the usual supervisory practices have not effectively changed. If you want to sort out your options, talk about strategies, or just blow off some steam (and then problem-solve) give EAP a call.



Contact an EAP staff person if:

1. You're not sure how to encourage an employee to use EAP.
2. You want to reference EAP in a memo you're writing to an employee on work performance but need help with the wording.
3. You feel burned out—the employee has exhausted you emotionally and you don't feel rational any more; you want some fresh ideas or approaches.
4. You've gotten too involved with the employee's problem and need help extricating yourself.
5. Your employee tells you he/she has a personal problem and wants you to help—and you are not sure what you can do or what you should do.
6. You're planning to meet with your employee and talk about behavioral and/or performance problems, but feel uneasy on how to proceed.

Be sure to consult with your own supervisor and/or Labor Relations regarding questions about disciplining an employee.

Remember that the discussion with your EAP is confidential. This is not a substitute for your normal supervisory responsibilities, but is another tool to help you deal with difficult situations. Management consultation can help you resolve employee situations in a respectful manner for the employee and yourself.

## *A Guide for Supervisors*

Don't speculate on what may be causing a problem with an employee's job performance, but watch for "red flags" signaling that there may be more here than meets the eye. By looking for sudden or radical changes in behavior or the development of patterns (e.g., consistent tardiness, long lunch hours, or missed deadlines) you can spot problems early – before they get worse.

Alcohol and drug abuse are major problems in most work environments, but there are many other reasons why people begin to mess up on the job. Not being able to find a child care provider, pay bills, or resolve conflicts with a spouse can cause problems—all of these things can cause deteriorating work performance. When people are preoccupied with personal problems, they usually don't perform as well.

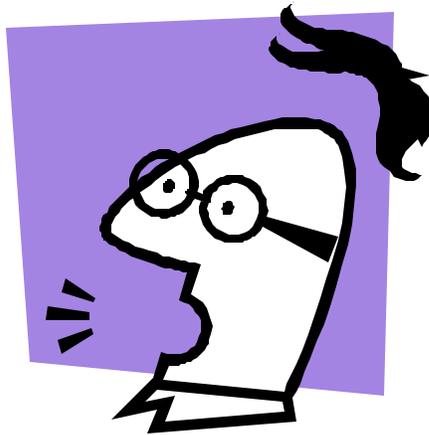
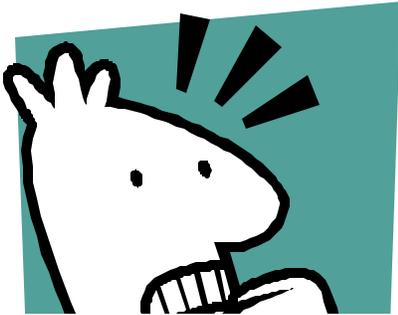
When you observe the following behaviors it might be time to encourage the employee to contact EAP:

1. A sudden and dramatic change in a good employee's personality, work habits, or job performance.
2. Patterns of long lunches or breaks, unexcused absences, excessive sick leave use, tardiness, leaving work early, accidents on the job, or personal injuries.
3. Patterns in missed deadlines, increased mistakes, bad judgment and decisions, inability to follow instructions, poor concentration, and lower productivity.
4. Physical signs of stress or fatigue; the person appears tired, worn out, on edge, distraught, or distracted.
5. Deteriorating relationships with you and co-workers—evident in emotional flare-ups, uncooperativeness, mood swings (may be high and outgoing one day, depressed and withdrawn the next), over-reacting to criticism, imagining criticism, borrowing money from co-workers, or withdrawal.

- 6. Excessive denial—evident in the employee blaming others for errors, minimizing the problem, providing unreasonable excuses, or diverting attention away from the problem.

Helping an employee improve work performance can be time consuming. Working with an employee whose job performance problem is caused by a personal problem is frustrating. In these situations, you end up dealing with your own emotions and feelings—as well as those of your employee and his or her co-workers. Things can get very complicated. Keep in mind that your efforts to be rational and logical with the employee simply may not work (although you need to start with reason and logic).

It is for all these reasons that we have an EAP. It can help your employee understand and resolve a personal problem, and free you from having to take on that role yourself. And remember, you are NOT alone—all EAP.



## *Why Supervisors Might Not Confront Poor Performance*

**Denial**--"It's not a problem." "What problem?"

**Rugged Individualism**--"I can handle it myself."

**Minimizing**--"It's not that big a problem."

**Normalizing**—"Everybody has bad times."

**Helplessness**—"I don't know how to get help."

**Embarrassment**—"You don't think I can take care of my own employees?"

**Fear**—"That employee would get really mad if I mentioned it." "What if we get into a fight?" "What if I don't handle it right?"

**Insecurity/Self Doubt**—"I don't know if I can handle it." "I just don't think I should interfere."

**Friendship**—"She's a friend-what will she think?"

**Overworked**—"I just don't have time to take on any more."

**Hopelessness**—"It just can't be fixed."

**Union Concerns**—"They'll file a grievance."

**Affirmative Action Concerns**—"I can't confront protected classes."

**Halo Effect**—"S /he have done an outstanding job in the past."

**Morale**—"My other employees will get mad if I confront her/him."

**No Frame of Reference**—"The employee is new to my department."

**Empathy**—"I really feel sorry for her/him."

**Unaware of Procedure**—"I didn't know I was to offer assistance."

**Lack of Training/Skills**—"What is constructive confrontation?"

**Impractical Procedure**—"There are so many steps and no time."

**Lack of Upper Management Support**—"My boss (or HR) overturns my decisions."

**Waiting Game**—"S/he will transfer/retire soon anyway."

**Lack of Information**—"I haven't been able to document performance."

**Procrastination**—Unwittingly allowing the problem to progress to later and more serious stages by preventing the person from experiencing the natural consequences of his/her actions.

## *Coaching and Providing Feedback to Employees*

One of the most crucial aspects of the supervisor's role is to provide feedback to employees about how they are doing in their jobs. This includes positive information as well as constructive criticism. It is very important that the supervisor recognize declining performance and intervene early on with factual data, but not make any attempts to diagnose the cause of the performance problem. The supervisor should be supportive and encourage the employee to seek assistance, especially if the change in performance may be due to a personal problem.

If the supervisor follows the established procedures for documenting performance deficiencies, the initial discussion with the employee will be based on objective performance data, rather than vague references to the employee's unsatisfactory work. The goal of the coaching discussion is motivation, not punishment. The supervisor must discuss declining performance, since the situation may only get worse making it more difficult for both the supervisor and the employee in the long run.

## *Preparation for the Meeting between the Supervisor and Employee*

1. Document behavior, performance changes, and incidents using descriptive statements and data. (Include dates, times, places, observations.) Have this documentation in hand during the discussion with the employee.
2. Allow for adequate time to meet with the employee so the discussion does not end before you are ready.
3. Be aware of your own biases and personal feelings about the individual. It is important to be in control of your emotions during the meeting.
4. Select a place and time for the discussion which affords privacy so the conversation cannot be overheard.
5. Be consistent. Don't tolerate more with one employee than you would with another employee.
6. Determine in advance that it is the employee's behavior that will effect the desired change in performance. Otherwise, look to other options in resolving the problem (e.g. system issues).
7. Decide ahead of time what minimum action you will accept as a result of the meeting, what the possible alternative solutions are, and when you expect the performance to improve.

## *The Discussion with Your Employee*

1. Preface your discussion of performance deficiencies by pointing out to the employee that the agency recognizes his/her value (the number of years with the agency, technical skills, past performance, previous level of competency and dependability, etc.).
2. Be firm and honest. Don't hedge. Use your documentation outline and tell the employee exactly what it is that dissatisfies you with his/her performance.
3. A good rule of thumb is to base your discussions on this person's performance rather than on the person. Remember your goal is to restore the employee as a productive member of your work unit.
4. Don't let the employee play you against others. Have a union representative, another supervisor, or personnel director present when appropriate.
5. Remember you should be in control of the meeting! If things feel like they are getting out of hand, take a break or reschedule.
6. The first priority is to get an agreement with the employee that a problem exists. The second priority is to mutually discuss alternative solutions to resolve the performance problem.
7. If the employee blames his/her poor performance on an off-the-job problem, or is currently in progressive discipline, encourage the employee to seek assistance through the EAP.

## *Follow-Through*

Set up a mutual plan for improvement. Get a commitment from the employee and document it. Set down specific work criteria and meet periodically with the employee. If there isn't the desired improvement, the supervisor should continue to intervene by using Constructive Confrontation and the "Sometimes Speech" (see p. 9) to demonstrate the seriousness of the employee's situation.

Take responsibility to intervene. Don't be afraid to intervene or get involved. You have a legitimate right to intervene when an employee's overall job performance is below standard. It is highly probably that a troubled employee's

performance will improve if he/she is coached and given specific feedback consistently. On the other hand, if he/she is ignored or warned in an inconsistent and arbitrary manner, it is highly *unlikely* that his/her performance will improve.

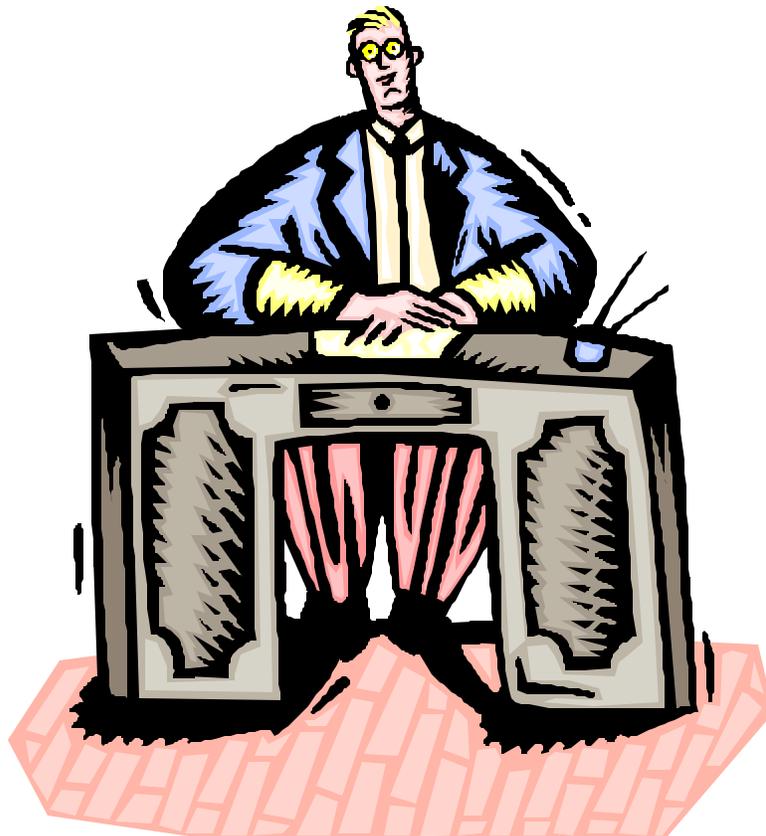
### *Points for Constructive Confrontation*

1. Maintain awareness and control of your own feelings.
2. Provide a description of the behaviors of concern – be as factual and specific as possible.
3. Identify the impact of the behavior: state clearly what effect the behavior has on the workplace and show how the behavior has caused problems.
4. Give a description of what change you want to see.
5. If warranted, take disciplinary action.
6. State the consequences if the desired change does not occur.
7. Offer EAP (see "Sometimes Speech" below).

### *The "Sometimes Speech"*

"Sometimes, job problems like these are the result of things happening outside the workplace. Now this may not be true in your case, and you may feel it's really none of my business. However, because sometimes it is true, we have the Employee Assistance Program. It's free, it's confidential, and it's helped people with all kinds of problems. I encourage you to meet with our local Employee Assistance Director/Coordinator.

You are allowed work time to talk with an EAP staff person. Whether or not you decide to do so is up to you. My concern is that these performance problems get corrected. Continuation of this behavior would give me no choice but to take further action. I am glad to help you contact the EAP if you want me to. Otherwise, here is the information about the EAP and who you could contact."





### *Constructive Confrontation Checklist for Supervisors*

	<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1.	Did you greet the employee in a professional manner, making sure it was a good time to talk?			
2.	Did you explain that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a problem?			
3.	Did you explain/review your concerns about the performance problems or work rule violations?			
4.	Did you state your concerns in behavioral terms using statements that accurately, specifically describe behavior seen or heard, undeniable facts (dates, times, place and circumstances)?			
5.	Did you explain/review the results of this behavior? (How it affects you, other workers, causes other problems.)			
6.	Did you explain to the employee that their behavior must improve and state what you want in behavioral terms?			
7.	Did you indicate potential consequences if job performance doesn't improve or work rule violations continue?			
8.	Did you keep your feelings under control?			

### *Employee Assistance Referral Checklist*

	<b>ISSUE</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1.	Did you use the "Sometimes Speech" to encourage the employee to use Employee Assistance?			
2.	Did you show concern?			
3.	Did you avoid being judgmental?			
4.	Did you avoid "counseling" the employee concerning their personal problems?			
5.	Did you offer to set up an appointment with an EAP Coordinator or Director?			
6.	Did you restate the behavioral changes necessary for satisfactory job performance?			

## *Common Mistakes Supervisors Make When Dealing With Performance Problems*

How do you respond when you're faced with an employee with a performance problem? If you're like most supervisors, your responses might take the following forms:

### **1. No obvious need to analyze performance.**

You "know" what the problem is and you don't need to bother with collecting more information: *"I know what's wrong with her. She's rude and caustic with the public. What's there to talk about?"*

Problem: You never look deep enough to discover what is going wrong. The result may be that you've missed the boat entirely.

### **2. Speculating on reasons for ineffective performance.**

You start looking and searching for explanations and causes of the employee's poor performance—and often end up *speculating* on what you think is wrong with the employee: *"She's having problems with her boyfriend" or "He's strung out on alcohol in the afternoons."*

Problem: You end up wasting your time speculating on causes when you should first look at defining the work performance problem and then working backwards to discover the cause. Looking for the personal dysfunction behind a performance problem may be interesting, but it will take you way off track. Instead, focus on specific performance factors and incidents.

### **3. Thinking too abstractly.**

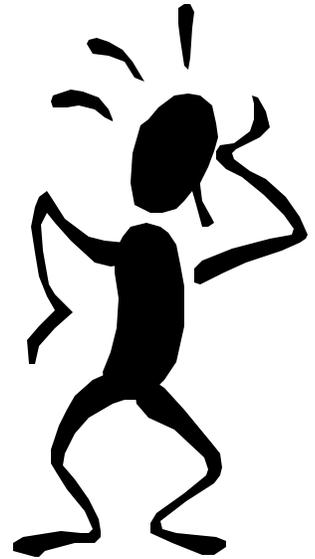
You tend to think in abstract generalities: *"He's got a bad attitude" or "She's so negative" or "He isn't very cooperative."*

Problem: If you think in abstract terms you won't be able to understand the details of what is going wrong with the employee's performance—and you'll have a hard time communicating this abstract concept to your employee.

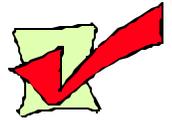
### **4. Emphasizing what an employee is doing wrong.**

After you've been working with a problem performer for awhile you get frustrated and tend to focus on the negative behaviors: *"He's impossible. Any task I give him turns bad." or "She can't do anything right."*

Problem: When you feel negative about a person, and when that feeling begins to dominate how you see and relate to this person, it's easy to miss the *positive* things the person was doing or may still be doing. Focusing on the negative is a guaranteed de-motivator.



## Checklist of Work-Related Performance Problems



Repeated or continuous patterns of performance deterioration in a number of the following areas probably indicate that intervention with the employee is needed.

### Absenteeism

- 1. Multiple instances of unauthorized leave
- 2. Excessive sick leave
- 3. Frequent Monday or Friday absences
- 4. Repeated absences, particularly if they follow a pattern
- 5. Excessive tardiness, especially on Monday mornings or in returning from lunch
- 6. Leaving work early
- 7. Peculiar and increasingly improbable excuses for absences
- 8. Higher absenteeism rate than other employees for colds, flu, gastritis, etc.
- 9. Frequent unscheduled short-term absences (with or without medical explanation)

### On-The-Job Absenteeism

- 1. Continued absences from post more than the job requires
- 2. Frequent trips to water fountain or restroom
- 3. Long coffee breaks
- 4. Excessive socializing or discussing problems with co-workers
- 5. Frequent personal phone calls or emails on work time

### High Accident Rate

- 1. Accidents on the job
- 2. Accidents off the job

### Difficulty in Concentration

- 1. Work requires greater effort
- 2. Job takes more time
- 3. Forgetful
- 4. Details often neglected, mistakes, poor judgment

### Confusion

- 1. Difficulty in recalling instructions
- 2. Increasing difficulty in handling complex assignments
- 3. Difficulty in recalling own mistakes

### Generally Lowered Job Efficiency

- 1. Missed deadlines
- 2. Acts without permission of supervisor
- 3. Wasting material
- 4. Making bad decisions
- 5. Complaints from clients/customers
- 6. Improbable excuses for poor job performance
- 7. Alternate periods of high and low productivity

### **Poor Employee Relationships on the Job**

- 1. Angry outbursts/argumentative
- 2. Withdrawn/depressed
- 3. Complaints from co-workers
- 4. Overreaction to real or imagined criticism
- 5. Unreasonable resentments
- 6. Wide swings in attitude or morale
- 7. Blames others for poor performance
- 8. Overly critical of others
- 9. Constant complaints to co-workers and supervisors
- 10. Makes unreliable or untrue statements
- 11. Unclear or imprecise communication

### **Abnormal Behavior**

- 1. Coming to or returning to work appearing "high" or in abnormal condition
- 2. Obviously bizarre or abnormal actions on the job
- 3. Smelling of (what appears to be) alcohol

## *Reintegrating the Recovering Employee*

When an employee takes a leave of absence from work for hospitalization or treatment for his/her problem, returning to the working world can be stressful. Reintegration of this employee is a final step in the referral procedure for the supervisor and the EAP staff person. Initially, this can be an anxious time for all involved. Administrators may ask, "Should I go easy on the employee?" The employee may wonder, "What do my coworkers think of me?"

Returning employees may feel uncomfortable, guilty, and /or ashamed because of past behavior on the job. They may be concerned about how others perceive them, or they may feel quite the opposite. Each case will vary. With time, these questions are resolved and the initial uncertainty works itself out. However, the transitional period may cause discomfort. The suggestions below may ease the process for all concerned.

1. Act natural and be yourself.
2. Do not over-sympathize or overprotect. This behavior is a return to the old "enabling" behavior. The returning employee already feels different. Your overreaction will only exaggerate and intensify that "difference."
3. Be honest. A pat on the back for a job well done is very important and can be reinforcing, if it is deserved. The employee will sense if you are not sincere.
4. Be aware of mood swings and shifts in attitude. Do not ignore them because these could be symptoms of regression or relapse.
5. Focus on overall performance of the employee. We all have "off" days. Rather than look at isolated incidents, notice patterns. Remember, recovery is a process.
6. Be supportive of the employee's on-going treatment needs and encourage participation.
7. Everyone makes mistakes. Be aware of your expectations of the employee and that it is human to make mistakes.
8. Minimize the need for questioning the employee. Clarify what information is needed prior to the employee returning to work and limit the amount of personal information you request.
9. Be patient with yourself and the returning employee. This process takes time.

## *Back-To-Work Conference*

After an employee has been on leave from the workplace, there is a need to help the employee and the workplace make the reintegration transition. An important element in facilitating this transition is the back-to-work conference. Coordinated by the Employee Assistance Program Director, the meeting brings together the employee, the employee's supervisor, and the EAP Director. The back-to-work conference is to focus on "work-related issues" pertaining to the employee's resumption of work responsibilities.

Conference objectives would include:

- ◆ Update the employee on events that may have occurred during his or her absence.
- ◆ Encourage the employee to identify concerns about returning to work as well as pinpointing support systems for dealing with those concerns.
- ◆ Review work performance problems that existed prior to leave and develop a plan for resolving each of them.
- ◆ Identify job-related issues that emerged prior or during leave and develop a plan for addressing each of them.
- ◆ Identify any special needs that the employee anticipates upon returning to work such as modified job responsibilities, reduced hours, or schedule changes, etc. Discuss a plan to address these needs.

The conference should be presented as an option available to all employees who have been on a leave of absence and as something the employer sees as valuable. Everyone included should be reminded that the meeting will focus only on "work-related" issues.

For assistance in scheduling and preparing for the back-to-work conference, contact your Employee Assistance Program Director.

