



QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST

24/7 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

A Manager's Guide



POWERED BY  spectrum.life

A photograph of a modern office building's atrium. The walls and glass panels are decorated with a vibrant, multi-colored pattern of vertical and horizontal stripes in shades of orange, yellow, green, blue, and red. A spiral staircase is visible in the background, and the overall atmosphere is bright and contemporary.

YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

Welcome to Spectrum.Life's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This guide will help you understand the service so that you and your staff can gain the maximum benefit from it.

WHAT IS THE EAP?

Our Employee Assistance Programme, or EAP, is a proactive, behavioural risk management tool for your organisation.

Our EAP provides employees with easy access to a wide variety of mental health services and practical supports to help them through a range of personal or work related issues, while equipping them with the tools they need to proactively protect and manage their own mental health. The EAP can also support you, as a manager, through any of your own personal issues and help with any unique issues you may face as part of your role. The EAP also offers help and guidance around managing staff better when there is an issue you feel unable to deal with yourself.

Having access to an EAP means employees can reach the help they need directly, as and when they need it, with little or no input needed from you. Your EAP helps relieve some pressure off of you, and ensures your duty of care is fulfilled whilst helping to protect your organisation against potential future litigation.. This booklet will help you fully understand the EAP, its features and benefits, how it works and how to refer an employee to the service when appropriate.



WHAT DOES THE EAP OFFER?

A telephone helpline available 24/7/365.

Mental health support for your employees.

Access to the service through an engaging web portal, live chat, or app.

Immediate access to confidential telephone counselling.

Referral on to face-to-face, phone or video counselling when appropriate.

Telephone consultations with qualified experts providing practical advice in a wide range of fields.

- Legal Assistance
- Financial Assistance
- Consumer Advice
- Career Guidance
- Life Coaching
- Mediation
- Support for Non-Nationals and their Families
- Health Advice, including Physio, Podiatrists and Dietitians
- Advice on practical, day to day issues and services

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COMMON QUERIES FROM EMPLOYEES



When should I use an EAP?

The EAP can help with a wide variety of problems. Our fully qualified team of counsellors and experts are highly experienced in personal and work related issues and can support anyone suffering with issues including, but not limited to:

- Depression, anxiety, stress
- Grief and bereavement
- Addictions
- Relationship and marital problems
- Work stress and work-life balance issues
- Life transitions such as career progression
- Financial concerns
- Queries around a legal issue.

Who will I speak to?

When contacting the EAP you will get straight through to a fully qualified, accredited and experienced counsellor who will work with you to ensure you get the most appropriate help with whatever issue you are facing.

Our counsellors will help identify the root causes of any emotional issue, assisting with onwards referral to appropriate services when required.

What happens on the initial call?

On first contact, the Customer Care Counsellor will explain what the service can provide and its confidential nature. The only information that must be given is the name of the company to initially access the service.

If follow up referral is necessary, the Customer Care Counsellor will gather additional information from the employee (such as name, date of birth, and contact details) to set up the case file.

This information is stored securely and is never shared with an employer or colleagues. It is only ever shared when absolutely necessary with qualified and accredited professionals and the employee will always be made aware of this beforehand.

The information is gathered for a couple of reasons such as:

- To check employee's eligibility for the service.
- So that the team will be able to find and access the contact details and can get in touch with the employee if needs be.
- To enable the Customer Care Counsellor to create a record of the employee's contact with the service, to keep track of their case and any referrals, and ensure they are receiving the care they need as quickly and efficiently as possible.

– So that in the event of the Customer Care Counsellor being unavailable when the employee is looking for help, the other members of the team will have the details of the case at hand and will be able to provide the employee with informed and accurate guidance.

– So that wherever appropriate, the Customer Care Counsellor will be able to share the necessary details with the relevant professional the employee is being referred to e.g. counsellor, legal expert etc.

Is the service confidential?

Confidentiality is the foundation of our EAP. The service is always completely confidential.

When an employee calls, the only information that must be given is the name of your company to initially access the service. You choose what information you share, and no details will be given to anyone unless you instruct us to do so.

As outlined, to arrange a follow up or referral, we will need some additional information. The only information that we would ever provide to your company is anonymous statistics, to enable your company to know how the service is being used. We will never give any information that may cause anyone to be identified and personal details don't have to be supplied to access the service.

All of our counsellors and extended team are bound by professional standards and a strict code of ethics regarding confidentiality and the disclosure of details of individuals who have contacted them.

The only limits to confidentiality are if the individual discloses that they may be at risk to themselves, an identified adult or a child. In these situations we need to let other professionals know, but this will be discussed with the individual if such an event occurs.

How do I get referred for counselling?

Following initial assessment, based on your preferences and suitability, the counsellor will match you to whichever counselling (e.g, face, video, or phone) or counsellor is the most appropriate for your needs.

On referral, contact from a counsellor will be made within 48 hours and they will offer an appointment within 5 working days and will arrange the first session at a time that suits you.

Family member referral to counselling sessions currently only available ROI employees.

EAP SUPPORT FOR MANAGERS

Support for Managers with Day to Day Personal Issues

Managers face unique stressors when looking after their team members, such as handling changes, conflict management, dealing with difficult employees, or stressful workloads.

Our EAP is available 24/7 to support and advise you if you are struggling to cope with the pressures of your management role. Our counsellors can discuss ways that you could lessen the impact these stressors are having on your mental health, and refer you to further support services whenever needed.



Support with Management Issues

Some managers find it particularly difficult to manage situations that involve counselling an employee, and this can blur the boundaries of the manager-employee relationship. Our counsellors can coach a manager in the best way to deal with others and, if necessary, facilitate a referral to the EAP so the counsellor team can assist the employee directly.

This support ranges from guidance on handling performance issues, discipline and grievance situations, managing change, breaking bad news to employees, supporting an employee who is having problems at home, or handling interviews where an employee may become emotional.

Our counsellors provide professional guidance on what to say and what not to say. They can help you appreciate different perspectives of your employees, and give practical advice on dealing with a situation. Often, managers find that just speaking to an external person in a confidential setting is a great source of release.

MANAGING STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Workplace stress is becoming a major health and safety concern for employees and employers alike. The profile of stress in the media has led to an increase in awareness of the negative effects that stress can cause and the number of workplace stress litigation claims are on the increase.

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, companies have a duty to take measures to control that risk.

For example, The Irish High Court has indicated in a recent judgment that an employer who offers a confidential advice service with referral to appropriate counselling or treatment service is unlikely to be found in breach of duty.

However, if you are aware that an employee is struggling to cope at work, the onus is on the organisation and managers to actively provide support and make accommodations to help that employee cope better. Most managers don't know what to do in these situations and feel ill-prepared to manage them effectively.

Understanding Stress

A definition of stress is “the adverse reaction a person has to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed upon them”. There is a difference between pressure and stress. It is important to recognise that some pressure, is good and helps us to perform at our best, but too much can lead to poor performance and negative health effects.

Pressure and Performance

Pressure is inevitable. While it can stimulate individuals to achieve, grow and learn it can also lead to periods of stress. The ways in which people respond to pressure impacts directly on their performance and wellbeing. It is vital to manage pressure effectively and as managers, it is important to recognise and understand how pressure affects employees.



Early Warning Signs

One of the most effective ways of managing pressures on your team is to be aware of some of the early warning signs of excess stress. Here are some things to watch out for:

Physiological

- Weight loss or weight gain
- Frequent colds or flu
- Increase in frequency of lateness
- Increase in accidents
- Decrease in attention to personal hygiene/care

Cognitive

- Prone to errors
- Forgetful
- Decrease in alertness
- Decrease in concentration
- Disruptive behaviour at work

Emotional

- Frequent mood swings
- Apathy
- Hostility
- Tearfulness
- Change in social behaviour with colleagues

Behavioural

- Change in the quality/quantity of work
- Missed appointments and deadlines
- Lack of social interest
- Withdrawal
- Difficulty following instructions
- The most important thing to watch out for when trying to identify signs and symptoms of stress is change

If we consider a time when we have been under stress, such as just before a deadline, often we behave differently than we normally would. We can become short-tempered, agitated, aggressive, pre-occupied and antisocial. Sometimes it is difficult to notice these changes over a long period of time so it is important to look closely at any changes in routines, social interactions, general mood, and the quality of someone's work. Some common symptoms are listed above.

When stress becomes overwhelming, counselling can be particularly helpful in trying to help an individual identify alternative options and strategies for coping.

The longer it takes for someone to ask for help, the more disruption the issue will cause in someone's life and the worse the stress will become. For example, when someone gets into financial difficulties they may become angry, pre-occupied and stressed, this may in turn affect their work, which could lead to them losing their job, making their financial situation much worse.

If people access help sooner rather than later, it is much better for the individual, much less costly for the organisation, and much easier for us to provide assistance. Therefore, it is important for a manager to refer an employee to the EAP as soon as they become aware of a problem.



REFERRING AN EMPLOYEE TO THE EAP

Self-Referral

Self referral is the most common way that individuals can access the EAP and they are able to make contact 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, over the phone or by reaching out through the web portal, app or live chat.

Informal Referral

Often an individual may approach you, as their manager, for help with a concern they have. Under most circumstances, all a manager will need to do is suggest to an employee that they could benefit from using the service and encourage them to call the EAP. This could simply involve providing the contact details and perhaps a room with a phone which offers some privacy and some time for the employee to make the phone call.

If you feel the individual would be reluctant to call the EAP themselves, you can call the helpline directly for advice from a counsellor about the best way to approach the subject with the employee. Often this may be about focusing on the outcome and benefits that could be gained as opposed to the difficulties currently faced.

Formal Referral

Sometimes there may be a need for a more formal approach to making a referral. If the employee cannot find the courage to call us then, with their written consent, it is possible for us to call instead.

In addition, when an individual reports that they are suffering from stress, or perhaps a GP has recommended they have some time off because of stress at work, it is vital that an organisation takes all reasonable steps to assist the employee. One part of this can be offering assistance from the EAP.

In these circumstances, a formal EAP referral form is available from your HR representative. This form can be filled out and submitted digitally. It is recommended that before using this option that managers always consult their HR representative and, in addition, it may be useful to contact the service directly to discuss with a counsellor other ways of facilitating the referral.

To make a formal referral:

- Obtain written consent from the employee via email.
- Complete the Manager Referral Form (available from your HR team).
- Attach the employee's consent email.
- Click 'Submit' at the bottom of the form.
- The 24/7 Support team will inform the referrer that they have received the referral form.
- Employee will be called within 48 hours.

When you are completing the form, do so with the help of the employee concerned, explaining to them why you think it could be of benefit, and that they are not under any obligation to give consent. Additionally, explain that they are not committing to counselling or any other form of assistance by signing the form, they are only agreeing to the EAP calling to offer support.



DOS AND DON'TS: REDUCING WORKPLACE STRESS.

The HSE has identified six causes of stress in organisations: demands, control, relationships, support, change, and role. The following recommended dos and don'ts are supported by the Health & Safety Authority.

DEMANDS

Do:

- Allow regular breaks, especially when the work is complex or emotionally demanding.
- Provide realistic deadlines.
- Provide adequate training and resources.
- Provide meaning, stimulation and opportunities for workers to use their skills.
- Provide sufficient challenges to keep staff motivated and interested in their work.
- Reduce distractions in the physical environment.
- Assess risk of physical violence and verbal abuse, and take steps to deal with it.

Don't:

- Ask people to do tasks that they are not trained to do.
- Encourage staff to take work home with them.
- Allocate more work to a person or team unless they have the resources to cope with it.
- Allow workers to 'cope' by working longer hours.
- Ask young people (under 18 years) to take on work that is beyond their emotional maturity.

CONTROL

Do:

- Allow staff some control over the pace of their work.
- Allow and encourage staff to participate in decision making.
- Empower people to make decisions about the way they work.
- Negotiate shift work schedules.

Don't:

- Monitor employees movements in detail.
- Monitor working style, unless necessary.
- Ask staff to stay late without notice.

RELATIONSHIPS

Do:

- Encourage good, honest, open communication at all levels in work teams.
- Provide opportunities for social interactions among workers.
- Provide support for staff who work in isolation.
- Create a culture where colleagues trust and encourage each other.

Don't:

- Allow any bullying behaviour.

SUPPORT

Do:

- Ensure that staff receive sufficient training.
- Provide constructive, supportive advice at annual appraisal.
- Provide flexibility in work schedules.
- Allow phased return to work after long-term sickness absence.
- Hold regular liaison / team meetings.
- Provide opportunities for development.
- Deal sensitively with staff experiencing personal problems.

Don't:

- Trivialise the problems of others.
- Discriminate against people on grounds of sex, race or disability or for any other reason.

CHANGE

Do:

- Explain what the organisation wants to achieve and why it is essential that the change(s) take place.
- Consult with staff at an early stage, and throughout the change process.
- Involve your staff in the planning process so they understand how their work fits in.

Don't:

- Delay communicating any new developments. This will help reduce rumours spreading.

ROLE

Do:

- Provide a clear job description.
- Clearly define work structures, so all team members know who is doing what and why.
- Give all new members of staff a thorough induction to your organisation.
- Define work objectives (e.g. through a personal work plan).
- Avoid competing demands.

Don't:

- Make changes to the scope of someone's job, or their responsibilities (e.g. at promotion) without making sure that the individual knows what will be required of them and accepts it.



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