

# EAP Update

A Newsletter for Employers and Managers



## What are Supervisor Consultations and Referrals?

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often say that Fully Effective Employees is also an “Employer Assistance Program” because we offer confidential support, coaching and guidance when employers are facing difficult situations with employees.

### What is a Supervisor Consultation?

Examples of when you would call us for a supervisor consultation include times you may be dealing with potential workplace violence, a workplace accident, possible sexual harassment, an impaired employee, a very challenging team member, or these days, dealing with COVID-19 employee stress. We can also assist you with making a formal supervisor referral or providing a last chance agreement for a positive drug test.



### What is an Informal Supervisor Referral?

It is part of the human condition to have personal problems, and sometimes they can be overwhelming, with employees not knowing where to turn to seek help. If you know that an employee has a personal problem, the EAP is a great resource. A good example is an employee going through a divorce and may have to take time off for court, meet with an attorney or have increased childcare responsibilities. This may impact their productivity and ability to meet their work responsibilities. The employee may also be emotionally impacted, which can cause increased stress, anxiety, depression, insomnia, lack of concentration and motivation. If the emotional issues are left untreated, they often become worse and usually affect work performance.

When you refer an employee to the EAP based on personal problems, you can let him or her know that you are concerned and want to offer them help without getting involved in their personal life. This type of referral is completely confidential and we will not disclose whether or not the employee contacted the EAP. If you did not have an EAP, the problems would likely increase and impact the person’s job. With an EAP, you are providing a confidential way to assist employees with personal problems early on. The earlier problems are addressed, the easier they are to resolve, and the less likely they will affect an employee’s ability to do their job. If the situation appears to be Human Resource related or out of our scope of services, we are happy to refer you to other professionals who can help.

It is important when making an informal referral that you tell the individual that based on the current situation (you can give examples such as increased time away from work, emotional behaviors you have witnessed, etc.) you are concerned that their work performance may become negatively affected. Let the employee know that if this happens, you would then refer them to the EAP as a “formal supervisor referral.” The formal supervisor referral would require that they work with the EAP, and since there may be disciplinary action associated with this referral, you want to provide them with the EAP as a resource now before this could occur.

If the employee’s work performance does become an issue, you would refer the employee to the EAP as a formal supervisor referral. In this situation, the employee signs a release to allow you to talk with the EAP counselor but confidential personal information is not disclosed to the employer. More about formal supervisor referrals in a future *EAP Update* edition.

To talk with us about a consultation or an employee referral, call us at 800-648-5834 and ask for the on-call counselor.

# Recognizing and Responding to Employee Needs Throughout COVID-19

Levels of fear and anxiety related to COVID-19 remain high around the world and it is likely affecting members of your team. According to Dr. Kennette Thigpen, PhD., Vice President of Clinical Crisis and Specialty Services at Workplace Options, employees have been seeking emotional wellbeing support due to a growing number of pandemic-related concerns. “Some employees are struggling with social isolation, while others are frustrated at the idea of going back to the workplace,” shares Thigpen. “Still others are fearful of contracting COVID-19 or infecting a loved one. Regardless of what is fueling their feelings, managers play an important role in recognizing these emotional cues and guiding workers to employee wellbeing support resources.”

**Recognizing emotional distress** Overt signs of emotional distress, like crying or expressing hopelessness, are easy to spot. However, managers should also be familiar with the less obvious signs as well, which can include the following:

- attendance problems
- errors and inconsistent work quality
- reduced ability to focus on work
- mood swings
- withdrawal from coworkers
- sleepiness or fatigue
- less care of personal appearance
- signs of substance abuse



Recognizing these behaviors can be even more difficult when working in a remote setting, as is still the case for many businesses. If you are not meeting face-to-face with staff, regular check-ins to gauge their emotional health is important. Instead of generically asking, “How are you,” try more open-ended questions like, “How are you balancing your time,” or “What are you doing to take care of yourself these days?”

**Responding in a supportive way** When you hear or notice signs of emotional distress, be prepared to offer appropriate comfort and guidance. Admittedly, this can be challenging for some managers. Being supportive includes sharing words of sympathy and letting the employee know that you care and want to hear what they are going through. Taking the time to listen is critical. Use body language to communicate the employee has your full attention. This includes making eye contact and nodding to indicate you are following along. Avoid fidgeting, looking away or using a judgmental facial expression.

When an employee opens up to you and shares what they are experiencing, it’s important to normalize their emotional response with a statement like, “I think a lot of people feel that way as well” or “That seems like a very normal response to what you described.” You might consider sharing some of your own emotional reactions related to the pandemic. The point of this is not to dominate the conversation with your own feelings, but to affirm the employee’s emotions as real and important.

Encourage employees experiencing distress to practice self-care. This includes eating healthy, participating in some physical activity, and getting the appropriate amount of rest. If work-life balance is a struggle, discuss potential solutions.

The EAP is a valuable resource for your employees during this challenging time, so also encourage them to reach out for professional, confidential emotional wellbeing support. (The only exception to this confidentiality is when an employee is at risk of harming themselves or others.) Share our phone number (800-648-5834) or hand them one of our brochures or wallet cards.

COVID-19 is affecting everyone, but not everyone is impacted the same way. As a manager, you are in a unique position to recognize when someone is struggling and point them to the support available to help them. Ultimately, your entire team will benefit when this is done well.

If you need assistance to help your employees, or need more brochures or wallet cards, call us at 425-454-3003.

Source: [www.workplaceoptions.com](http://www.workplaceoptions.com)

# The Society for Financial Awareness

**E**mployers are increasingly aware of the need to provide basic financial education to their employees, as employees frequently need help with a wider scope of financial education and planning. One organization that can help provide financial education to your workforce is The Society for Financial Awareness (SOFA).

SOFA is a nationwide 501(c)(3) corporation whose sole mission, since 1993, is to increase financial literacy. They accomplish this by providing free on-site financial workshops on over 30 topics to empower individuals to get the resources and confidence they need to improve their financial affairs. Their workshops are funded by companies and organizations that have found value in their programs over the years, and the presentations are provided by experts in the field who have been vetted by SOFA and who give their time pro bono to the community.



Workshop topics include managing debt, tax strategies, getting fiscally fit, and for those nearing retirement, a workshop on taking control of your financial future. SOFA's seminars are conducted in a zero pressure environment with no selling or endorsement of any products and are strictly educational in nature. Due to the pandemic, all workshops are now conducted in a virtual environment.

Contact Kristen Lomax at [klomax@sofausa.org](mailto:klomax@sofausa.org) or 425-615-1114 for more information about this free value-added employee benefit.

## Prescription Drug Misuse

**M**isuse of prescription drugs means taking a medication in a manner or dose other than prescribed; taking someone else's prescription, even if for a legitimate medical complaint such as pain; or taking a medication to feel euphoria (i.e., to get high). The term *nonmedical use* of prescription drugs also refers to these categories of misuse. The three classes of medication most commonly misused are:

**opioids**—usually prescribed to treat pain

**central nervous system [CNS] depressants**—this category includes tranquilizers, sedatives, and hypnotics—used to treat anxiety and sleep disorders

**stimulants**—most often prescribed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)

Prescription drug misuse can have serious medical consequences. Increases in prescription drug misuse over the last 15 years are reflected in increased emergency room visits, overdose deaths associated with prescription drugs, and treatment admissions for prescription drug use disorders, the most severe form of which is an addiction. Overdose deaths involving prescription opioids were five times higher in 2016 than in 1999.

The reasons for the high prevalence of prescription drug misuse vary by age, gender, and other factors, but likely include ease of access. The number of prescriptions for some of these medications has increased dramatically since the early 1990s. Moreover, misinformation about the addictive properties of prescription opioids and the perception that prescription drugs are less harmful than illicit drugs are other possible contributors to the problem.



While it is usually not discernable whether an employee is abusing prescription drugs or illicit drugs, if you suspect an employee may have a drug problem, call us for expert assistance at 425-454-3003 or toll free at 800-648-5834.

Source: [www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov)

# Developing a Transgender Inclusive Workplace

Inclusion. Equality. Fairness. Respect. It's reasonable to say that these words have significant meaning to everyone, particularly at work. All employees should be able to participate in, and contribute to, the progress and success of an organization by being included, by being afforded equal rights, and by being treated fairly and respectfully. However, sometimes employees feel they cannot be themselves at work and will not fully engage as part of the team if they believe these basic rights can not be realized because their workplace is not inclusive of all employees or the culture is not forward-thinking. This can be especially true for those who transition from one gender to another, or who identify as a different gender than what they were assigned at birth.

Trans or transgender are inclusive terms for people whose identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Gender transitioning is the process of changing one's gender presentation and/or sex characteristics to accord with one's internal sense of gender identity. This is a private, personal, and individualized process, and not necessarily a medical one. This means that someone does not need to have undergone surgery or be under any kind of medical supervision to be classed and protected as transgender. When an individual decides to live openly in their acquired gender they have made a social transition.

More and more businesses are recognizing the need to establish policies related to supporting and accommodating transgender workers. While not all employers are ready to adapt such policies, awareness about this issue is important to support any current or future transgender employees.

Here are a few suggestions on how to develop a transgender inclusive workplace:

1. Educate staff about what "transgender" means.
2. Train management staff to lead by example by treating transgender workers respectfully and fairly, and by becoming part of the individual's support team. Educate human resource personnel, supervisors, and managers about respectfully discussing transgender issues with employees.
3. Respect the name a transgender person is using. During the transition process, an individual will often change his or her name to align with their gender identity. Use the individual's preferred pronoun and encourage others to do so. For example, when an individual presents as female, use feminine references like she, her, hers. When a person presents as male, use masculine references like he, him, his. When someone does not identify as either male or female, "they" is often preferred. GLAAD's [media reference guide](#) provides important information on trans terminology, its origins, and whether a word is contemporary or outdated.
4. Remove gender-specific rules from a dress code or grooming policy.
5. Permit employees to use the restroom facilities that correspond with their gender identity. Employers may also establish single-occupancy gender-neutral (unisex) facilities or allow use of multiple-occupant, gender-neutral restroom facilities with lockable single occupant stalls. The [Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(OSHA\)](#) has issued transgender inclusive restroom access guidelines.
6. When a transgender employee makes an employer aware of his or her transition and identifies work-related needs as part of the process, have an open dialogue to discuss the employee's needs, work-related barriers, and solutions for overcoming those barriers.

For more in-depth information on creating a trans inclusive workplace visit [The Harvard Business Review](#) and [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#). Another good site to learn more about transgender issues is [GLAAD](#).

**Sources:** [JAN Job Accommodation Network](#) [www.dailydot.com](http://www.dailydot.com), [HR24](#)

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