

THE FRONTLINE SUPERVISOR

Helping you manage your most valuable resource: Employees

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Do You Know the 5 Signs of Suffering?

Nearly one in every five people, or 42.5 million American adults, suffers from a diagnosable mental health condition. Often our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even family members are suffering emotionally and don't recognize the symptoms or won't ask for help.

While your role as a manager or supervisor is primarily to focus on behavior and activities that are work related, you may also be in a position to notice signs that an employee may be suffering. Here are 5 signs that may mean someone is in emotional pain and might need help:

- They stop taking care of themselves. They may engage in risky behavior.
- They withdraw or isolate themselves from other people.
- They seem uncharacteristically angry, anxious or agitated.
- They seem overcome with hopelessness and overwhelmed by their circumstances.
- Their personality changes

Q How do I respond if I become aware of an employee who is suffering?

If work performance is affected.....

As a manager or supervisor, if work performance or working relationships are beginning to be affected, you have an "opening" for a conversation with the employee. Showing concern in a compassionate manner about the work issues you've observed, clarifying your expectations, and reminding them of EAP services may be an important step in motivating them to seek help. Practicing a script in coaching your employee may be useful, such as the following example.....

"John, I've noticed you've been late to work several times the past week. You seem preoccupied and unengaged at work and have been somewhat irritable with your co-workers. I'm concerned about you. Sometimes, if people are having personal problems,

it can affect their work. That may or may not be true for you, but I'd like to remind you that our Employee Assistance Program benefit provides free, confidential help. I value you as an employee and need for you to address the behaviors I've mentioned."

To be clear, it is important to maintain appropriate professional boundaries as a manager. Some employees may share more information than you need or want to know. Avoid counseling your employees or making comments that diagnose, such as "you seem depressed". Acknowledge that they may have "a lot on their plate", give them an EAP business card and encourage them to call. In some cases, if they are agreeable, you might even offer to dial up EAP and give them the phone to talk or make an appointment in private.

If you observe signs of suffering but work is not yet affected.....

Let them know what you've observed and remind them of EAP. "Mary, you haven't seemed yourself lately. You seem more preoccupied, withdrawn and down and out. I don't mean to intrude, but I'm concerned about you. I want to remind you that our EAP is available if you need help or want to talk. Here's their card."

If employees come to you with concerns about a co-worker.....

Coach them on how to talk to their co-worker directly about what they've observed and offer EAP. As a manager, make sure you actively promote your EAP at your worksite. Keep posters, cards or other promotional material visible in the workplace. Consider inviting an EAP professional to a staff meeting for a brief review of the benefit and how to access services. Together, we can create awareness and reduce the signs of suffering. Please visit www.changedirection.org to learn more.

The above information contains answers to common questions supervisors have related to their employees and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to EAP for a management consultation at 608-775-4780 or 800-327-9991.