



**MANAGER'S GUIDE FOR THE WORKPLACE**  
***THE TROUBLED EMPLOYEE: A TEAM APPROACH***



**COPE**  
incorporated



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## **Overview of the Workplace Assistance Services**

### **What is Workplace Assistance?**

A Workplace Assistance is a work-based service that provides counseling and consultation to individuals, managers and the larger organization on issues that affect job performance and morale. At COPE, we apply our knowledge of human behavior and workplace dynamics to four core areas:

- Employee Assistance
- Management Consultation
- Risk Management
- Training and Development

The service is not limited to individual counseling. Training, development, consultation and education are available to the larger workforce, from frontline supervisors and business units to union stewards and company management. The specific issue can range from the performance of an individual employee to broader organizational challenges such as:

- critical incidents
- substance abuse policies and procedures
- corporate communication to manage the stress of change
- integrating healthcare and wellness resources to reduce costs and absenteeism

### **About COPE**

Since 1978, COPE has partnered with companies nationwide to improve workplace productivity by removing the barriers that prevent people from doing their best. COPE's services provide effective, targeted solutions to the health, work and personal concerns of employees at every level of the organization.



Located in the nation's capital, COPE is uniquely qualified to assist companies – from governmental agencies to single owner enterprises – in areas as diverse and complex as human resource policy, labor relations, and crisis management.

## **Employee Assistance Program (EAP)**

### **How does the EAP work?**

An employee or employee family member – or in certain circumstances a company representative - may call the EAP to consult with a Master's level COPE professional. The COPE professional who takes the initial call will assess the immediate need and make a determination as to the services required. Persons seeking services are either scheduled for an onsite appointment, or given telephone consultation if appropriate.

### **What types of problems can the EAP assist with?**

#### ***Work-Related:***

- Job Stress
- Conflicts with Co-workers/Supervisors

#### ***Personal:***

- Family & Marital/Relationship
- Legal & Financial
- Personal Adjustment (*Grief & Loss, etc.*)
- Substance Abuse
- Emotional Problems (*Depression, Anxiety, etc.*)
- Elder Care
- Child Care

### **What additional service does the EAP offer?**

- Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD)



- Crisis Intervention
- Training & Seminars

### **Who Uses the EAP?**

Most calls for assistance are the result of a call from the employee – a full 73%.

- Self Referral – 73%
- Suggested Referral by Manager – 14%
- Referred by Other (Coworker, Family, Health Unit or Fitness Center) – 13%

### **When a Personal Problem becomes a Personnel Problem**

Occasionally, a troubled employee's personal problems intrude on the productivity and morale of others at work: the personal problem becomes a Personnel problem.

In these situations, a formal referral is made by the supervisor or manager to

COPE. The formal referral is the first step in a process that includes:

- Problem identification
- Constructive confrontation
- Corrective interview(s) and follow-up
- Referral for diagnosis and treatment
- Return to work or termination



## **How to Recognize Troubled Employees**

Managing the performance of employees is a difficult and time-consuming task, even in ideal, uncomplicated situations. When an employee's performance is impaired by emotional or personal problems, the management of job performance can become much more complex. All employees have occasional difficulties, but when conduct becomes consistently problematic or performance frequently fails to meet expectations, a serious personal problem may be contributing to the job decline. *A pattern of poor job performance over time indicates the need for supervisory action.*

Many personal challenges can affect an employee's performance. Common life events such as marital strife, financial difficulty, or childcare complications occasionally affect people. More serious problems such as a developing or existing substance abuse problem or a serious emotional conflict may be the cause of a more serious performance decline.

An employee with a personal problem that is affecting behavior or conduct usually does not respond to management techniques that might otherwise be effective. The lack of employee improvement can contribute to *feelings of frustration, guilt, anger, inadequacy, or fear for the supervisor or manager.*



## **Three Problem Performance Categories:**

### **The availability of the employee**

- ✓ Absenteeism
- ✓ Tardiness
- ✓ Early departures
- ✓ Extended lunch periods
- ✓ Frequent disappearance from desk or work station

### **The productivity of an employee**

- ✓ Lower quality of work
- ✓ Erratic work patterns
- ✓ Decreased productivity
- ✓ Failure to meet schedules
- ✓ Increased errors
- ✓ Impaired judgement or memory
- ✓ Inability to concentrate
- ✓ Inability to get along with co-workers, customers, managers

### **The demeanor of an employee**

- ✓ Avoids supervisor or co-workers
- ✓ Loss of interest or enthusiasm
- ✓ Unusually sensitive or hostile to advice or constructive criticism
- ✓ Less communicative
- ✓ Frequent mood swings
- ✓ Threats of violence and/or harm to others
- ✓ Disregard for safety
- ✓ Unusually critical of supervisor or co-workers



## **How to Assist Troubled Employees**

### ***Step 1.***

#### ***Acknowledge your feelings***

It is usually helpful for a supervisor to first acknowledge feelings of *frustration, guilt, anger, inadequacy, or fear* and then to consider how such feelings might affect the objective assessment and monitoring of a problem employee.

### ***Step 2.***

#### ***Seek support from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)***

Advance preparation and organization can enhance the effectiveness of a corrective interview, but anxiety about confronting another individual is natural. It is often difficult for supervisors to be objective, and supervisors are not trained as counselors. The COPE counselor can assist the supervisor in objectively reviewing the employee's declining performance. The counselor can then assist the supervisor in developing a plan to address declining performance or inappropriate conduct. Role-playing is sometimes a useful technique to deal with a supervisor's anticipatory anxiety.

### ***Step3:***

#### ***Initiate a corrective interview with the troubled employee***

Once the supervisor has identified the performance decline and developed a plan for addressing the inadequacies, the employee can be confronted. The first corrective interview is a discussion between the supervisor and employee that is designed to accomplish the following objectives:



## **Objectives of the Corrective Interview**

- To clarify existing performances standards and/or conduct expectations.
- To identify the indicators of performance decline or a problem with conduct or demeanor.
- To develop a plan to address the existing problem.
- To communicate the consequences if the problem continues.
- To set a date for a follow-up discussion to assess progress.
- To modify the plan, or to initiate consequences if there is no improvement.



## **How to Conduct A Corrective Interview**

Preparation for the first corrective interview should involve taking time to develop a plan, document the facts on which to base the upcoming discussion, consult with an Employee Relations Specialist regarding any discipline or administrative action, and arrange for an appropriate time and place to conduct the meeting privately.

It is helpful to ***make an outline of the corrective interview***. If the employee is referred to the COPE Employee Assistance Program (EAP), speak to the COPE counselor, at least by phone.

Conducting the corrective interview early in the day is best. ***Privacy without interruption is important***. It is essential to remain rational and to ***avoid meeting anger with anger***. It is helpful to comment on an employee's contribution to the workplace and to focus on the importance of improvement.

***Employees may be resistant, hostile and defensive***. Employees with problems may try to offer excuses or to focus attention on the supervisor as a diversion from the main issue. ***It is best to avoid discussing personal problems in this context***. It is more helpful to concentrate on performance. If, however, the employee suggests that a personal problem exists, this provides an excellent opportunity for the supervisor to recommend use of COPE's EAP. The employee and supervisor then develop a plan, which may include the EAP, to address the problem.

***A follow-up meeting needs to be scheduled to monitor progress***. It is helpful to end the meeting by focusing on the importance of improvement. Often, a single corrective interview is sufficient to elicit a sustained, positive employee response. This is the optimum outcome.



***If there is no improvement, or only temporary improvement, a second corrective interview may be required, delivered in a more serious tone.*** Each corrective interview should convey an increasing sense of urgency in encouraging the use of the COPE EAP. Advise the employee that it is important for you, the supervisor, to be notified to confirm participation in the EAP. Other administrative action may also be necessary according to your organization's policies. ***Document each corrective interview.***

An employee cannot be forced to use the EAP, but it is often helpful. The crucial issue to emphasize is that performance must improve. Assure the employee that:

- ***Participation in the EAP does not affect future employment or career advancement.***
- ***Participation is confidential and does not become part of an employee's personnel record.***
- ***It is a free benefit provided by the employer.***
- ***Any information shared with management is shared only with written release by the employee. However, information can be court ordered.***

Although constructive confrontation is never easy, devising a plan and sticking to it can facilitate this process. Dealing with problem performance promptly and firmly will provide the employee with an optimum opportunity to correct a performance deficiency and to retain employment.



## ***Do's & Don'ts In A Corrective Interview***

- DO** set aside enough time, preferably early in the day
- DO** conduct it in private without interruptions
- DO** consult with Personnel and/or the EAP before the corrective interview
- DO** prepare an outline
- DO** have facts on performance or conduct
- DO** stick to the facts on performance or conduct
- DO** listen carefully to the employee's response
- DO** emphasize that participation in EAP is *voluntary* and *confidential*
- DO** have action steps at the end
- DO** document the interview
- DO** schedule a follow up interview to evaluate the employee's progress

- 
- DON'T** conduct it on the spur-of-the-moment
  - DON'T** moralize
  - DON'T** stray into personal issues
  - DON'T** lose your temper
  - DON'T** try to figure out what is wrong with the employee
  - DON'T** be distracted
  - DON'T** delay or cover-up
  - DON'T** threaten discipline unless willing to carry it out



## Employee Feedback and COPE EAP Referrals

As a supervisor you have many responsibilities. Part of your job, is to work with your employees to get a job done. When a job isn't getting done, as it should, you are going to hear about it from your manager. You know your employees have a life outside of work. As much as we all try to leave our personal business at home, there are times when personal issues affect work. As a supervisor you try to be understanding and take your employees personal lives into some consideration. However, when an employee allows a personal problem to interfere with his or her ability to do their job it affects the entire team/ department.

If you haven't been keeping accurate records regarding your employees' attendance, performance, and behaviors, now is the time to begin. Document what you see and when you see it. Are they coming in late, taking extended lunches, missing every Friday/ Monday, calling in sick on payday? Are they focused, meeting deadlines, working to capacity? Have they lost interest, having mood swings, or seeming less communicative?

Supervisors are reluctant to use the EAP. Many supervisors feel as though they are betraying or hurting the employee. They are aware of all the employee's personal problems and feel some obligation to help the employee, after all supervisors are people too. Sometimes supervisors face similar problems and aren't sure what to do for themselves, let alone the employee. Some supervisors fear retaliation from the employee.

In reality, a deeply troubled employee happens rarely while thousands of regular EAP referrals happen every day. Remember, the COPE EAP is designed to help supervisors and employees.

If you are concerned about an employee's attendance, performance, or behavior, it is important to address the problem as soon as it becomes a problem. We often try to put things off in hopes they will get better. However, with a troubled employee, the problem doesn't usually get better; it gets worse.

When you decide to discuss the issue with your employee, there are several things we suggest you keep in mind.

- Be direct.
- Identify the problem(s).
- Stick to the objective facts - attendance, performance and conduct.
- Don't share your own personal issues.
- Tell the employee what you expect of them.
- Don't moralize or try to diagnose what you think may be the problem.
- Don't threaten the employee.
- Be objective in your handling of the situation- keep your personal feelings out.
- Stay focused on the work-related problem.
- Expect explanations and excuses.
- If the employee mentions personal problems, refer him/her to COPE's EAP.
- Stay on message – focus on the problem.
- Explain current and future consequences if expectations are not met.
- Repeat your expectations.
- Set a follow-up meeting to review the employee's progress.

*COPE's Employee Assistance Program helps employees sort through their personal problems. If you have any questions or would like to discuss a specific situation, please feel free to contact the EAP at **202-628-5100**.*

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## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM APPOINTMENT VERIFICATION FORM

This is to serve as an official notification that \_\_\_\_\_

[ ] is scheduled for an appointment with the COPE EAP on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ am / pm

[ ] has attended his/her scheduled appointment with the COPE EAP on \_\_\_\_\_ from  
\_\_\_\_\_ am / pm to \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee Assistance Program Counselor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Tel: 202-628-5100 or Tel: 1-800-841-7406 fax: 202-628-5111*

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1-202-628-5100  
1-800-841-7406

1120 G. Street, NW, Suite 550  
Washington, DC 20005

Fax: 202-628-5111

## *AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION*

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Client's Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Counselor's Name)

1. Name of person or client making disclosures and requesting information:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Employee Assistance Program)*

2. Name of persons or organizations to whom disclosure will be made and/or with whom information will be exchanged:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Purpose or need for the disclosure:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Extent and nature of information to be exchanged:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Permission is granted until \_\_\_\_\_

*(Date or event on which release will expire)*

- *I understand that confidential information concerning me cannot be disclosed without my written consent and that I may revoke this consent at any time, in writing, except to the extent that action has been taken previous to my revocation.*
- *I understand that the EAP cannot guarantee that the party to whom the information is being released will keep the information confidential, and if re-disclosure occurs, the information may not be protected by federal law.*
- *I understand that COPE will not condition the provision of services on my signing of this authorization.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Client)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Witness)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date Signed)

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*Confidential*

## Employee Assistance Program Supervisory Referral Form

### General Instructions:

The purpose of this form is to provide information to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) regarding the reason for your supervisory referral.

It is *essential* that you complete *all* of the information requested to the best of your knowledge. Please limit your responses to objective fact as opposed to hearsay and/or assumptions. This information will serve as a means of assessing the employee's problem, will help the EAP to determine the steps necessary in assisting the employee in alleviating his or her problems, and will be used to measure outcomes regarding the effectiveness of the EAP supervisory referral process in terms of helping to minimize employee problems.

An EAP Staff member will follow-up with you by phone in six (6) months to complete a follow-up survey which allows COPE to determine the effectiveness of the referral process, the outcomes related to EAP services, and whether or not any additional steps are necessary at this time in assisting the employee in alleviating his or her problems.

*It is recommended that you review the contents of this form with the employee prior to referring him or her to the EAP.*

\*\*\* **Note:** This form should **ONLY** be completed by the person making the referral. \*\*\*

*(Please Print In Ink or Type)*

Referral Date \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ (optional)

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ EOD: \_\_\_\_\_

Position Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

Department / Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Employee's Work Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Shift: \_\_\_\_\_ To: \_\_\_\_\_ Days Off: \_\_\_\_\_

Referred By: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Office Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## REASON(S) FOR REFERRAL

Please complete all of the sections below, basing your responses on the employee's performance in the *past six months*. If sufficient space is not available, please attach a supplemental sheet.

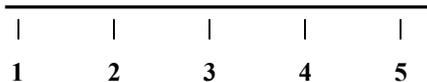
### ATTENDANCE

\_\_\_\_\_ The employee does not have a problem with attendance.

\_\_\_\_\_ The employee has a problem with attendance as evidenced by the consistent presence of one or more of the following:

- Extended lunch periods
- Frequently away from work station
- Significant number of days absent
- Late occurrences
- Unusual excuses for absences
- Early departures

Please rate the severity of this problem on a scale from 1 to 5 based on behavior observed during the past six months. (*1 = extremely severe, 2 = moderately severe, 3 = somewhat severe, 4 = troublesome, 5 = could become troublesome if behavior continues*)



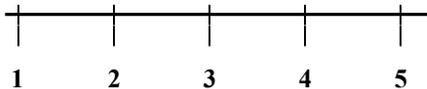
### JOB PERFORMANCE

\_\_\_\_\_ The employee does not have a problem with job performance.

\_\_\_\_\_ The employee has a problem with job performance as evidenced by the consistent presence of one or more of the following:

- Lower quality of work
- Erratic work patterns
- Decreased productivity
- Failure to meet schedules
- Increased errors
- Impaired judgment/memory/concentration

Please rate the severity of this problem on a scale from 1 to 5 based on behavior observed during the past six months. (*1 = extremely severe, 2 = moderately severe, 3 = somewhat severe, 4 = troublesome, 5 = could become troublesome if behavior continues*)



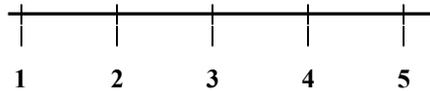
**BEHAVIOR / CONDUCT**

\_\_\_\_\_ The employee does not have a problem with behavior / conduct.

\_\_\_\_\_ The employee has a problem with behavior / conduct as evidenced by the consistent presence of one or more of the following:

- Avoids Supervisor or Co-workers
- Unusually sensitive or hostile to advice or constructive criticism
- Loss of interest or enthusiasm
- Less communicative
- Frequent mood swings
- Threats of violence and/or harm to others
- Disregard for safety of Supervisor/Co-workers
- Unusually critical of Supervisor/Co-workers
- Inability to get along with coworkers, customers, managers

Please rate the severity of this problem on a scale from 1 to 5 based on behavior observed during the past six months. (*1 = extremely severe, 2 = moderately severe, 3 = somewhat severe, 4 = troublesome, 5 = could become troublesome if behavior continues*)



**REASON(S) FOR REFERRAL**  
*(continued)*

Please **CIRCLE** the appropriate answer:

YES NO Have the above observations been discussed with the employee?

YES NO Have these observations been recorded/documented and filed?

YES NO Has a corrective and/or warning interview taken place?

If 'YES', when did the interview take place? \_\_\_\_\_

**What were the results of the interview? (e.g., Letter of Warning, suspension, etc.):**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

YES NO Has the manager discussed with the employee the need to receive confirmation of EAP participation and asked the employee to sign a release for that purpose?

Comments and/or Additional Information:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Referring Person*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

My manager has discussed the contents of this form with me. I understand that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor will inform my manager whether or not I have contacted the EAP and met with a counselor. Only this information will be provided to my manager. This information will be given whether or not I have signed a Release of Information form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Employee's Signature*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*