



Employees—
Your Most
Valuable
Resource

Frontline Supervisor

April 2017

Kentucky Employee Assistance Program

(502) 564-5788 or (800) 445-5327

■ **I am a long-time friend with my employee who is a participant in the employee assistance program. Can I ask her to sign a release so the EAP can give me more information about the nature of her problems and how they are being treated?**

You can ask, but the EAP will recommend against it. Establishing a separate information flow to you creates a relationship that is fraught with risk and assorted problems. The EA professional will offer quality guidance on your role in managing performance so your employee has the best chance of returning to the level of performance you require. Your employee is free to share information, of course, but when supervisors try to manage performance and also process personal problems, employees typically diminish their involvement in treatment recommendations due to role conflict. Why? The employee perceives you as a trusted, safe, and understanding friend, and will relate to you on this basis rather than as the employer's representative, which is your job. Undermining this employer-employee dynamic removes a constructive force and sense of urgency that troubled employees rely upon to become motivated and stay focused on treatment.

■ **Do some employees with depression still function satisfactorily at work, but if treated, could perform even better and more happily? I have an employee who appears depressed, but demonstrates no obvious job performance problems. Still, I bet they would benefit if they went.**

Many depressed employees can function at work adequately, but if treated would likely experience an uptick in their social and occupational functioning. Some employees may suspect they have untreated depression, and some may not identify it at all because they have slowly adapted to its symptoms over an extended period. A crisis may bring these individuals into contact with outpatient mental health services, where the diagnosis is first identified. Depressed employees may appear slow to respond, lacking in energy, or resist engaging with others. Suggest self-referral to the EAP for obvious symptoms only. However, if work tasks cannot be accomplished satisfactorily, consider a formal EAP referral. Be careful not to adapt to the personality of a depressed worker by labeling them as lazy, quiet, unassuming, or "eccentric." When this happens, others adapt, reduce confrontation, work around the employee, and allow the condition to linger, with unforeseeable consequences.