

Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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A Manager's Guide to Suicide Prevention

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Since 1999, suicide rates have risen by 25% in the U.S., robbing families and friends of loved ones and causing collective concern at why it is happening. While there is no definitive answer, what is certain is that people who die by suicide are unable to see another choice to end their pain.

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These tragedies devastate not only loved ones, but also reverberate in the workplace where the person held a job. What is heartening, though, is that nearly 75% of those who attempt suicide will tell someone before doing so. This can provide an important opportunity for friends, families, and supervisors at work to offer a life line to those in distress before they become another tragic story. And since 90% of those who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental health condition (often combined with substance abuse,) professional mental health care is essential for treating the underlying condition which may be fueling the suicidal thoughts. In order to help, it is important to notice these behavioral indicators associated with suicide:

General Warning Signs

- **Pre-occupation with death or talking about suicide:** "I wish I was dead," "Everyone would be better off without me," "Life is too hard," etc.

- **Talking about a specific plan and/or intent to end one's own life**
- **Readying actions:** stock-piling medicine, buying a gun, giving away personal possessions, saying goodbyes to friends and family
- **Expressing feelings of:** hopelessness, desperation or being "trapped," feeling like a burden to others, or being humiliated
- **Heavy or increased use of drugs or alcohol**
- **Dramatic changes in mood**
- **Withdrawal from friends and family**

Warning Signs at Work

- Isolation and withdrawal
- Low morale
- Change in performance (positive and negative)
- Aggression and conflict
- Reactivity to "normal" situations
- Being controlling or demanding
- Competitiveness
- Argumentativeness
- Making warning statements
- Recklessness
- Frequent absences or lateness
- Unrealistic expectations of self or others

What Managers Can Do

Check to see if your company has a policy/procedure to follow if you have an employee that you consider to be at risk to harm themselves or others. In addition, the EAP offers the following suggestions that we hope you will find useful.

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Your EAP service is free, confidential and available 24/7 to help you balance your work, family, and personal life.

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If an employee confides to you concern about a colleague and the person *is at work*:

- Arrange to speak with the person of concern immediately in a private place. Express your concern about his/her wellbeing based on the specific statements or behaviors you've learned about. Don't be afraid to be direct and ask if the employee is having suicidal thoughts. Asking someone about suicide won't make the person do it. Rather, it conveys your concern for the person's safety and desire to help. Depending on his/her response, you may want to ask:
 - o Do you have a plan to end your life?
 - o Have you thought about when or where you might attempt suicide?
 - o Are you going to try to take your own life?
 - o Have you ever attempted in the past?
- Ask if the employee has a current mental health provider. If so, offer to contact the provider for him/her—you will still need to initiate an immediate supportive action such as calling the EAP.
- Don't try to convince someone he or she "shouldn't" feel suicidal. Instead, be empathetic, offer the person assistance with finding professional help, and tell the person that he/she isn't alone.

Next Steps

- Offer to contact the EAP for immediate telephonic support with an EAP counselor.
- If the employee agrees to you calling the EAP, advise the EAP counselor of the situation and then allow the employee to speak confidentially with the counselor in your office and step out.
- Know that the EAP can assist the person with safety planning and next steps, and will tell you if they believe the employee needs immediate support, including transportation to a hospital emergency room.

If the employee is expressing serious and immediate suicidal ideation *with intent*:

- Be sure not to leave the person alone or let him/her leave the area alone.
- Remove any items that could be used for self-harm from the immediate area.
- Consider contacting a family member or friend to transport the person to the nearest hospital emergency room, or
- Facilitate transportation to nearest hospital emergency room.
- If the employee is unwilling to go to the hospital, call 911 immediately for a community assessment and support.

If an employee confides to you concern about a colleague and the person is *NOT at work*:

- Try to contact the person and convey your concerns (see suggestions above)
- If you are worried that the person is in danger and are unable to reach him or her, call 911 and request a "welfare check." The police will be dispatched to the person's home to assess his/her safety and respond as necessary.
- Contact the EAP--an EAP Counselor can discuss the situation with you to identify next steps.

If you suspect an employee may be suicidal, take it seriously and act immediately.

Either contact 911 immediately for an emergency response, or you can reach out to your EAP 24/7 by calling (800)777-4114 for consultation. In addition to your staff, please remember the EAP is here to support you as managers as you navigate these serious situations with your employees. We have your back!

