



Employee Assistance Program

State of Vermont
Supervisory Guide
To the
Invest Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

INVEST EAP
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**STATE OF VERMONT MANAGEMENT & SUPERVISORY QUICK TIPS:
What to do / Where to call**

Situation	What to do	Where to call
Critical incident has occurred	Call main counseling line and request critical incident assistance	888-834-2830
Employee has tested positive on alcohol / drug screen	Call main counseling line or Account Manager to discuss EAP assistance	888-834-2830 or 888-392-0050 Toll-Free 802-951-5156 Burlington
Need assistance with a challenging supervisory issue	Call main counseling line or Account Manager to request a supervisory consultation	888-834-2830 888-392-0050 or 802-951-5156
Desire to make a Supervisory Referral for an employee to EAP due to a performance issue	Call main counseling line or Account Manager to request a supervisory consultation	888-834-2830 888-392-0050 or 802-951-5156
Employee is in emotional distress and you wish to refer him/her to EAP	Ask employee if it would be helpful for you to call EAP and then put him/her on the line with counselor -or- Provide employee an EAP brochure or the EAP toll free number and encourage him/her to call	888-834-2830 888-834-2830
You have a question for the Account Manager	Call Account Manager, Myra Handy, LICSW	888-392-0050 or 802-951-5156
You require more program brochures or posters	Call or email Account Manager to request materials	888-392-0050 staff@investeap.org myrah@investeap.org

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Introduction

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) offer all members of an organization the opportunity to speak privately and confidentially about the issues and stresses that can make for a difficult balancing act between home life and work life.

Through the most commonly used aspect of EAP, the **self-referral**, employees - and their household members - reach out independently to the toll free line and connect with a counselor. EAP counselors assist by *assessing* problems and concerns, and then often by meeting in person for either short term counseling (generally 1 – 5 sessions), or to strategize with the employee helpful resources or referrals to longer term support.

One of the most valuable aspects of EAP is the way that it can coach and guide **supervisors and managers** to do their very best to support their employees, both as people and as productive performers. The two central categories of targeted EAP benefit to the supervisor or manager are:

- **Supervisory/Management Consultation**
- **Supervisory Referrals**

In this manual, we will explore both of these options in depth. Please know that you can reach out to EAP at any time with questions. Key contact information is as follows:

Phone:	888.392.0050 (toll free) or 802-951-5156 (Burlington) Main Office / Account Manager - Myra Handy, LICSW 888.834.2830 State of Vermont Employee Counseling Access Number
Web:	www.vtstate.investeap.org password: vteap
Email:	staff@investeap.org
Fax:	802.863.7515

I. Supervisory / Management Consultation

Just as individual employees should self-refer to the EAP when they are under stress or grappling with personal or work issues, supervisors and managers should reach out to EAP when they are faced with a staff member's declining performance.

The Supervisory / Management Consultation begins with a call to EAP. In most cases you will be channeled to the VT State EAP Account Manager (who is clinically licensed) for this consultation. If the Account Manager is unavailable, you will speak with an EAP counselor (EAP Specialist). Your EAP consultant will listen to your dilemma, ask probing questions, and work with you to gain an understanding of the situation's history, and how you would like to see it resolved. EAP will help you to frame a **performance problem** if one exists. This means that the consultation will not focus on theories of *why* your employee may be acting in a certain way, but will instead serve to identify how **performance has been impacted or compromised**.

Supervisors and managers should never try to "diagnose" an employee. Root causes of personal matters are not what the supervisor is there to identify. Rather, the very clear function of the supervisor is to direct and manage **performance**, so the lens through which the employee should be viewed is one of "*is he/she performing their role in an effective way?*". To attempt to look through a lens that seeks to understand what goes on at home or in any other arena **not observable** by you is to venture onto shaky ground. We are each entitled to privacy in our life outside of work, but if troubles result in poor performance on the job, it is that poor performance that triggers the supervisor to act.

The bottom line ? If you have a concern about an employee, call EAP to consult. We will help you assess the situation and make a recommendation based upon the details of your experience.

- If the Supervisory Consultation reveals a clear performance problem, EAP will likely recommend a **Supervisory Referral**.
- If, however, an employee's performance is still strong or meeting standards but they have disclosed to you a hardship in their personal life, it is appropriate for you to gently and *privately* remind them that they have EAP available to them 24/7. This would be considered an **Informal Referral** – a way for you to extend to them a valuable resource without seeking any details of their situation.

REMEMBER: Your role is to lead and provide employees with the tools that help them perform at their peak. Not only are you *not* responsible to play the role of 'counselor', but in fact you should avoid stepping into such a position. Because the workplace needs to focus on work, you and your employee can experience discomfort if you try to become personally involved no matter how well intended. Your employer has provided the resource of EAP for exactly this reason: when you feel an employee's needs go beyond what you can offer, we **can** be part of the solution.

So, how does the Supervisory Consultation work ? It begins with your outreach to EAP. Explain to the person taking your call that you need to consult on an employee issue and you will be directed to either your Account Manager or an EAP Specialist for this service. Here are a few questions you may want to consider in advance of your call:

Supervisory consultation checklist:

- ✓ **What is the performance problem ?**
- ✓ **How has the work site been impacted ?**
- ✓ **When did the problem begin ?**
- ✓ **What have your exchanges been like with the employee(s) involved ?**
- ✓ **What have your – or others’ - interventions been to date ?**
- ✓ **Have you seen any changes as a result of interventions ?**
- ✓ **Could problem solving be enhanced by consulting with other levels of supervisors ? [i.e. your own boss, HR, etc.]**
- ✓ **Ideally, how would you like this problem to resolve ?**

You will likely speak to your EAP consultant for about twenty minutes (more or less depending on circumstances). This call will be confidential, and in cases of complex issues it may be the first of a series of calls you have as options are collaboratively explored. Sometimes the consult will not result in a recommendation for you to do anything at all; you may simply access us to gain validation that you are handling a situation as best as you can. While we can never guarantee **specific outcomes** of any matter, we can assure you that we are here to partner with you as you perform the critical role of supervision and management.

II. The Supervisory Referral

Guidelines and Process for State of Vermont Employees:

The question of when is the “right” time to use the Supervisory Referral option is not something that can be definitively documented in a manual. The decision to use the Supervisory Referral option is something that the Supervisor, perhaps other management staff, and the EAP State of VT Account Manager should make together. This decision will be based on the particular circumstances of the employee and the work place.

It is important to call for the Supervisory/Management Consultation before directing an Employee to call EAP.

This consultation will allow the Supervisor to clarify specifics about the situation and prepare for explaining and making the 'Supervisory Referral' with the Employee. This pre-referral conversation will also serve to alert the EAP staff of an incoming matter, as well as the referring Supervisor's take on the situation; to get a sense of history; and to clearly define the issue into a **performance related problem** that serves as a focus for corrective efforts by the Employee. Channeling through the EAP State Account Manager helps all parties to be aware of expectations and guidelines.

It is crucial that Supervisors and Managers understand that the intention of the Supervisory Referral procedure is to *encourage* an Employee who is having a problem on the job to access the EAP program. The intended result of this intervention is that the Employee will get the assistance they need to address their difficulty so they can return to their former level of acceptable performance. **EAP should never be perceived as punishment, and to present it in any way other than as a helpful resource will likely reduce the Employee's willingness to use it.**

PLEASE REMEMBER....

- Supervisors can expect that –with an Employee's signed authorization - EAP will report back to them only *limited status information* such as: whether an Employee kept an appointment, whether a plan has been developed to improve the performance issue, and most importantly whether the Employee is following through with the plan. In the event an Employee does not agree to sign an authorization, EAP cannot communicate any information to the supervisor.
- Supervisors are **not** privileged to information about the nature of the Employee's problem or details of the treatment plan. Confidentiality is maintained even in the case of a Supervisory Referral.
- If a Supervisor continues to have questions about his or her role in the situation, EAP is available to them within the bounds of confidentiality.

Steps to making a Supervisory referral:

1. Call EAP State of VT Account Manager in Burlington at 802-951-5156 or long distance 888-392-0050 to discuss nature of referral

- If the referral is appropriate for EAP, State Account Manager will advise the Supervisor to encourage Employee to call the local EAP staff counselor directly.
- Prior to directing an Employee to set up an appointment with the EAP counselor, Supervisor should please review and confirm the following with Employee:
 - a) That the Employee understands the performance issues the Supervisor would like to see addressed; and that EAP remains a **voluntary** option toward correcting the situation.

b) That the Employee understands that his/her personal information shared during an EAP session will **not** be communicated back to the Supervisor. EAP remains confidential even when a Supervisory Referral is made.

- If Supervisor finds that the Employee is confused or concerned about this process, the Supervisor can suggest that the Employee call the State Account Manager for any clarification he or she may need.

2. Provide Employee with name and phone number of identified EAP Counselor

- Supervisor gives Employee name and number of EAP staff counselor.
- Once Supervisor has advised State Account Manager that he/she has referred the Employee, State Account Manager in turn will inform identified EAP counselor of the situation and the probable incoming call from Employee.
- When Employee calls, EAP counselor will arrange to meet with Employee and ask him or her to **voluntarily** sign an authorization that will permit the counselor to tell the Employee's Supervisor the following limited information:
 - a) Whether or not the Employee made and kept an appointment for an initial EAP assessment session, and
 - b) Whether or not the Employee has participated in developing a plan to address performance difficulties
 - c) Whether or not Employee is following through with plan

NOTE: If Employee *does not* sign a release, the counselor may share **nothing** with referring Supervisor

- With a signed release, the Counselor contacts the Supervisor to relay that EAP assessment has begun. Supervisor's role now is to **monitor Employee's work performance on the job.**

III. The Informal Referral

As mentioned earlier, the informal referral is one in which you as the supervisor provide a gentle reminder that the EAP is available to help. An example would be in the case that you are aware an employee has had a death in the family. While the employee may be showing up for work and doing their job just fine, you might wish to offer them the support of EAP should they ever feel they need it. This should be done in the privacy of an office, or if appropriate, in an email in which you can provide the toll free number for EAP.

The distinction here is that there is no observable performance issue, yet the employee may be grappling with difficulties. Low key, privacy-sensitive acknowledgement through an offer of EAP could mean a great deal if and when the employee wishes to gain additional support or resources.

REMEMBER: In the case of an Informal Referral, you simply offer the EAP as a resource. You may never know whether the employee chooses to use the program or not, but you have done your part to show you care.

IV. Talking to Your Employee

Conducting the 'Performance Counseling' Session

1. In scheduling a meeting to discuss a performance issue, make sure you allow adequate time for your comments and any feedback from the employee. Whenever possible, conduct the meeting in a private place where the employee will not be embarrassed if the conversation is overheard by coworkers.
2. Choose your time based on your knowledge of the employee. Is this someone who needs to have a meeting like this on Friday so he or she can sort things out over the weekend? Or is this a person who will feel like you are dumping on him or her and then leaving no opportunity to respond for 2 days? Use the same thought process for deciding how information is best given. Although you will be meeting to have a discussion, would this employee like to read through some written notes before talking? Would a verbal discussion with a commitment to follow up with something in writing be more in the style of the employee?
3. Set and maintain a constructive tone: be calm, professional, and focused.
4. Seek cooperation, not confrontation, by focusing on how the employee's performance fits into the performance of the total organization.
5. Unless you think the employee will attempt to take control of the discussion, choose several points throughout your comments where you can stop and get confirmation from the employee that he or she understands the problems and your expectations. Providing opportunities for him or her to respond will allow

the employee to be active in the discussion and may lessen the negative connotation of a "lecture" from the boss.

6. At the conclusion of the meeting, end on a positive note by emphasizing that improving the employee's performance is a mutually beneficial goal. Offer a written summary then or to be given to the employee later. Having a written summary is particularly valuable if you will be trying something new or changing any work assignment routine.
7. Keep notes for yourself documenting the date of the discussion and any specific agreements you reached with the employee regarding changes to the way work is assigned or structured.
8. Follow up. If the employee shows improvement, let him or her know it immediately! If the employee appears to be still struggling, go back and talk again.

Source: US Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

V. Ongoing Performance Monitoring

For the busy manager pulled in multiple directions, putting aside time for supervision may seem a luxury, but it is not. Supervision is an absolute necessity and the core work product or process of a manager whose job is to assure the optimal performance of his or her people. But when projects pile up, many standard supervisory maintenance tasks fall by the wayside. The tendency is to go on 'autopilot', trusting that your folks are getting their work done as you yourself desperately attend to the 1,001 items that come in via voicemails, emails, and an endless succession of management meetings. Before you know it, six months pass and you are woefully out of touch with staff.

To prevent this scenario from unfolding, the best approach is to utilize the concept of **performance monitoring**. Just as it sounds, this is the process by which you as the supervisor or manager keep an eye on your staff. More than simply watching your employee's performance from time to time, you inquire about their progress (and it is ok to ask not only their own opinion, but others' as well) and you schedule discussion time even if just by phone or email. The point is *not falling out of touch*, not allowing for expanses of silence and time to pass between you.

The most critical element of performance monitoring, however, is a piece that should be in place but may not have seen the light of day in some time: the employee's **performance standards**. Performance standards should be communicated in a written format, detailing the specific duties, expectations, and consequences of job performance. Performance standards are not the same thing as the **job description**, which is more of a summary of the employee's role as it stems from the **job title**. When a performance standard document is kept up to date annually – ideally as a collaborative venture between supervisor and employee – the expectations are clear and can be an invaluable point of reference. The employee's performance review is a great time to re-visit the performance standards and set the stage for the next performance

period. This way, a 'contract' is agreed upon by both parties, and should a question arise about the employee's performance there will be clear guidelines against which to measure the situation.

So once the job title, description, and performance standards are in place, and the employee goes about his or her work, how do you as the supervisor monitor performance ?

While it will differ from workplace to workplace, performance monitoring should include:

- ✓ Regular **contact** with your employee (in-person; phone; email) at a frequency that makes sense to you (daily; weekly; or monthly).
- ✓ Some **formalized reporting** your employee is expected to provide to you regarding his or her progress. Alternately, this can instead originate with you through your detailed inquiry about progress.
- ✓ Your use of **multiple perspectives** to understand how your employee is functioning – checking in with teammates, cross-function peers, and clients / customers as appropriate and in a positive, quality-affirmative way. (NOTE: This is *NOT* a process of micromanaging or 'snooping' on individual employees. Rather it is a function of your regular checking in with all staff individually to surface how things are going, being sure they have what they need from other teammates and functions, etc.)
- ✓ **Ongoing, scheduled, formalized performance review meetings** (quarterly; biannually; or annually) to review job description, standards, specific goals and plans.
- ✓ **Identification of training needs** when a performance deficit is identified. Training options may be something to discuss with HR or Personnel.
- ✓ **Self-assessment and employee feedback** on your own supervisory and management performance in order to assure quality performance.

...and perhaps most importantly:

- ✓ **Documentation** of employee performance, both good and bad, so that you have a record of the performance history in addition to the annual performance review materials. Remember, if something prompts you to document, you should also be sharing it with the employee so he / she is aware of recognition of stellar performance *or* the observation of a decline in functioning. Otherwise he/she may not know to continue what is working well and cease what is causing dysfunction.

Ultimately, the process of performance monitoring is about keeping in touch. In order for that process to be meaningful and effective, a performance framework is essential. Talk to your Human Resources department, colleagues or staff at the Summit to learn more about the existing performance framework for your workplace, and remember that your Employee Assistance Program is here to help as well.

Appendices: Resource Documents

Types of Referral to EAP
Crisis in the Workplace: A Guide for Managers
INVEST EAP Basics
Tips for Preventing Poor Performance
Tips for Coping with Critical Incidents
Tips for Counseling Employee about Poor Performance



Types of Referral to EAP

1. The Self Referral

Employees call INVEST EAP directly to schedule an appointment or talk to a counselor about a particular concern. The EAP is designed to provide convenient, confidential counseling so problems can be addressed in their early stages, before they begin to interfere with work or personal life.

To self-refer anytime, 24/7: State of Vermont Employees & Household Members call	888-834-2830
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2. The Informal Referral

Although the majority of EAP clients seek assistance on their own, many would not do so without the support or encouragement of a colleague or family member. Supervisors, co-workers, or peers may consider recommending EAP's services to individuals who are struggling with a personal or work-related problem. In addition, supervisors may help to facilitate an informal recommendation through one of the following options:

- Provide an EAP brochure (Ask your HR professionals or call 888-392-0050) and encourage the employee to contact an EAP counselor
- Offer to assist the employee in placing the initial call or requesting the employee's permission to schedule an appointment for him or her
- Arrange an employee's work schedule to accommodate EAP appointments

If you wish to make an Informal Referral, please suggest that the employee call our	
• General Counseling Line	888-834-2830
OR if you are concerned about the employee and wish a consultation, please call your	
• Account Manager	888-392-0050

Types of Referral to EAP – cont.

3. The Supervisory Referral

The Supervisory Referral is voluntary and associated with a pattern of deteriorating performance or conduct. Supervisors may refer employees to the EAP when:

- an incident or problem continues to affect a staff member's behavior or performance
- an EAP informal supervisory recommendation has been ineffective or is deemed inappropriate due to the nature of the problem

If you wish to make a Supervisory Referral, please begin by calling our Management Consultation staff:

- Account Manager 888-392-0050
- General Counseling Line 888-834-2830

4. Safety Sensitive Referral

Supervisors may require an employee to see an EAP counselor as the result of a serious incident or problem that affects the safety of the employee or workplace. In such a referral, failure to use the EAP normally results in job action up to and including termination of the employee's employment. A mandatory referral should be made only if:

- The employee has been asked to take leave of the workplace due to concerns for the safety of the employee or workplace
- There is an obvious, serious impairment of the employee's functioning, where safety of the employee or the safety of others in the workplace is a serious concern
- A Supervisory (performance-related) referral is deemed inappropriate due to the nature of the problem
- The employee is subject to a special drug, Department of Transportation, or chemical dependency and fitness-for-duty policy

If you wish to make a Safety Sensitive Referral, please begin by calling our Management Consultation staff:

- Account Manager 888-392-0050
- General Counseling Line 888-834-2830

Crisis in the Workplace: A Guide for Managers

Here are some general guidelines for managers to help deal with crises in the workplace

- ❖ **Stay in charge.** Let employees know that you are concerned and doing all you can to help. You represent the organization to your staff, and your caring presence can mean a great deal in helping them feel supported.

You do not have to say anything profound; just be there, do your best to manage, and let your employees know you are concerned about them.

Increase visibility and take time to ask folks how they are doing. Try to keep other official business from pulling you out of your work area for long periods of time.

- ❖ **Share information with your employees as soon as you have it available and give them time to talk and comfort each other.** Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know." Particularly in the first few hours after a crisis, information will be scarce and much in demand. If you can be an advocate in obtaining it, you will help lessen anxiety.
- ❖ **Call an informal meeting.** Some co-workers may feel the need to talk about the situation or incident. A meeting can give co-workers an opportunity to connect and talk about their feelings. Put regional offices on speakerphone if you want to have a "town meeting" for the entire agency.
- ❖ **Ask for support from higher management.** Relief from deadlines and use of practical help such as 'temp' employees to lighten burden of administrative work can make it easier for you to focus on helping your employees and your organization return to normal functioning.
- ❖ **You don't have to "keep a stiff upper lip" or advise anybody else to do so.** Let people know, in whatever way is natural for you, that you are feeling sadness, shock, anger, or whatever your natural reaction may be to the situation. This shows your employees you care about them. Since you demonstrate that you can function rationally in spite of your strong feelings, they will see that they can do likewise.

- ❖ **Encourage employees to talk about their experience.** This may be hard to do, but helps with healing as people express their painful thoughts and feelings in a safe environment and come to realize that their reactions are normal and shared by others. Your employees may prefer to discuss the situation among themselves. Some groups may want to have an outside facilitator to help them discuss their reactions. ***This is something EAP can help you to plan and deliver.*** Don't be afraid to participate and to set a positive example by discussing your own feelings openly. Your example says more than your words.
- ❖ **Be aware of the healing value of work.** Getting back to the daily routine can be a comforting experience, and most people can work productively while still dealing with trauma. However, the process of getting staff back to work is one which must be approached with great care and sensitivity. In particular, if someone has died or been seriously injured, the process must be handled in a way that shows appropriate respect for all concerned.
- ❖ **Be aware that the crisis may affect employee productivity and motivation.** Expect some loss of productivity, motivation, and mistakes, especially from people close to the event. Some staff may request time off whereas others may prefer to work. Respect these individual differences.
- ❖ **Take care of yourself.** As a Manager or Supervisor, you bear a unique feeling of responsibility for your employees. You experience heightened levels of stress as a result of your concern for others well-being, and feelings that you must "do something". Take care of yourself first and foremost. Identify a right-hand person whom you can lean on a bit for assistance as you lead the workplace through a crisis. Recognize that there is only so much you can do, and don't neglect your own needs to process and get support.
- ❖ **Set an example.** Many people are often afraid to say the "wrong thing". If you are expressing concern, appreciation, or support, others will follow your lead and this creates an openness that facilitates healing.
- ❖ **Ask for support from your Employee Assistance Program & encourage employees to take advantage of EAP as a way of preserving health, not as a sign of weakness.**

*Source: adapted from Duke University HR Personal Assistance Services



What is EAP ?

- Employee Assistance Program
- A CONFIDENTIAL benefit
- A resource for information to assist you in dealing with areas of stress in your life, from the practical to the complex
- A starting point for problem-solving with a seasoned EAP professional, whether you have a personal or work related concern
- Short term supportive counseling, with referrals to other professionals as needed
- A telephone or face to face service – whatever your comfort level, we have an option that will work for you
- Dedicated website with resources and articles that can provide help for coping with stressful situations in your life
- A completely voluntary program

Who is eligible to use EAP ?

- You
- Members of your household – spouse, partner, children, etc.

What types of issues are appropriate for EAP ?

- If it is a source of stress or uncertainty to you, it is an EAP issue. If it distracts you during your workday, it is an EAP issue. A call to EAP is always appropriate.
- Examples of issues could include:

Stress
Grief/Loss
Relationship problems
Depression
Anxiety
Alcohol/substance dependence
Anger
Life transitions
Legal difficulties
Financial stress
Problem with co-worker



What's in it for my employer ?

- Through providing employees the EAP benefit, employers are giving a vital resource, while also protecting the productivity of their workplace. If you are stressed and distracted, inevitably your work will suffer, and employers can prevent this by giving you an EAP.

What happens once I contact EAP ?

- A call to EAP puts you in touch with Masters or Doctoral level counselors, 24 hours a day. In the case you reach a counselor's confidential voice mail, you are always given the option to select an immediate connection to a crisis counselor who can listen to you, help you manage your stress, and provide referrals if you'd like to see a counselor.
- You may be completely satisfied with talking to someone by phone, but you will also be offered the option of a referral to a counselor convenient to your location
- Everything you discuss is completely confidential. EAP professionals adhere to the highest level of ethical standards governed by their disciplines – psychology, social work, mental health counseling, family therapy etc.
- Once referred to an EAP counselor, you and the counselor will work to define the problem or issue, and assess whether the work will be resolvable short term or requiring a longer term referral.
- Short term counseling is available generally up to five sessions
- Longer term counseling indications mean that your EAP counselor will work within your insurance plan to find a counselor with an appropriate specialty who can work with you over time toward resolution.

Will my employer or colleagues know I am using EAP ?

- EAP is a benefit administered **separately** from your organization. It is a contracted program staffed by mental health professionals obligated by state and federal laws to maintain the confidentiality of their clients and adhere to the ethics of their profession.
- The only information EAP provides back to your employer is through generalized annual usage summaries which have all identifying data removed. Usage is reported in percentages relative to the entire employee base, as are categories of issues. Case details are never shared.

How do I learn more about EAP ?

- Call toll free 1-888-834-2830
- Or, browse the website for resources at www.vtstate.investeap.org



Tips for Preventing Poor Performance

The best way for supervisors to handle poor performance issues is to take action to avoid performance problems before they occur. Such preventive actions include:

1. **Communicating clear performance standards and expectations to employees. (Consider sharing *your* supervisor's performance expectations with your staff.)**

If your employees don't understand what is expected, it will be very hard, if not impossible, for them to meet those expectations. Providing clear expectations doesn't necessarily require you to lay out precisely written, detailed instructions on every performance component. Generally, the question you should ask yourself is: "Would a reasonable person understand what was expected?"

2. **Providing regular and frequent feedback on performance.**

Such feedback, both positive and negative, whether given in regularly scheduled meetings or in unscheduled discussions, is crucial to ensuring that expectations are understood. Frequent feedback lessens the likelihood that an employee will be surprised if it becomes necessary to take formal steps to resolve poor performance. Always look for opportunities to confirm that your employees understand what is expected.

3. **Rewarding and recognizing good performance, informally and formally.**

Recognizing good performance is simply another way of clarifying expectations. Recognizing good performance also increases the likelihood that good performance will continue.

4. **Making full use of the probationary period for new employees.**

Performance problems often first show up during the initial period of employment. This period is designed to provide an opportunity for management to address such problems.

Source: US Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

Tips for Coping with Critical Incidents

Because you are reading this article, you, or someone you know, probably are in the process of recovering from a critical incident or some type of traumatic impact. Perhaps you experienced a flood, hurricane or earthquake. Or maybe you have been in a serious accident or the victim of crime. Traumatic experiences such as these tend to be sudden and overwhelming. In some cases, there are no outwardly visible signs of physical injury, but there is nonetheless a serious emotional toll.

It is common for people who have experienced traumatic situations to have very strong emotional reactions. Understanding normal responses to these abnormal events can aid you in coping effectively with your feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and help you along the path to recovery.

What happens to people after a disaster or other traumatic event?

Shock and **denial** are typical responses to disasters and other kinds of trauma, especially shortly after the event. Both shock and denial are normal protective reactions.

Shock is a sudden and often intense disturbance of your emotional state that may leave you feeling stunned or dazed.

Denial involves your not acknowledging that something very stressful has happened, or not experiencing fully the intensity of the event. You may temporarily feel numb or disconnected from life.

As the initial shock subsides, reactions vary from one person to another. The following, however, are normal responses to a traumatic event:

Feelings become intense and sometimes are unpredictable. You may become more irritable than usual, and your mood may change back and forth dramatically. You might be especially anxious or nervous, or even become depressed.

Thoughts and behavior patterns are affected by the trauma. You might have repeated and vivid memories of the event. These flashbacks may occur for no apparent reason and may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating. You may find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions, or become more easily confused. Sleep and eating patterns also may be disrupted.

Recurring emotional reactions are common. Anniversaries of the event, such as at one month or one year, as well as reminders such as aftershocks from earthquakes or the sounds of sirens, can trigger upsetting memories of the traumatic experience. These 'triggers' may be accompanied by fears that the stressful event will be repeated.

Interpersonal relationships often become strained. Greater conflict, such as more frequent arguments with family members and coworkers, is common. On the other hand, you might become withdrawn and isolated and avoid your usual activities.

Physical symptoms may accompany the extreme stress. For example, headaches, nausea and chest pain may result and may require medical attention. Pre-existing medical conditions may worsen due to the stress.

How do people respond differently over time?

It is important for you to realize that there is not one 'standard' pattern of reaction to the extreme stress of traumatic experiences. Some people respond immediately, while others have delayed reactions - sometimes months or even years later. Some have adverse effects for a long period of time, while others recover rather quickly.

And reactions can change over time. Some who have suffered from trauma are energized initially by the event to help them with the challenge of coping, only to later become discouraged or depressed.

A number of factors tend to affect the length of time required for recovery, including the degree of intensity and loss. Events that last longer and pose a greater threat, and where loss of life or substantial loss of property is involved, often take longer to resolve.

Also, a person's general ability to cope with emotionally challenging situations will effect the outcome. Individuals who have handled other difficult, stressful circumstances well may find it easier to cope with the trauma.

What about other stressful events preceding the traumatic experience?

Individuals faced with other emotionally challenging situations, such as serious health problems, family-related difficulties, legal or financial stresses, or have another mental health condition may have more intense reactions to the new stressful event and need more time to recover. The more stress in a person's life, the fewer resources they have to cope with a critical incident.

How should I help myself and my family?

There are a number of steps you can take to help restore emotional well being and a sense of control following a disaster or other traumatic experience, including the following:

1 - Give yourself time to heal. Anticipate that this will be a difficult time in your life. Allow yourself to mourn the losses you have experienced. Try to be patient with changes in your emotional state.

2 - Ask for support from people who care about you and who will listen and empathize with your situation. But keep in mind that your typical support system may be weakened if those who are close to you also have experienced or witnessed the trauma.

3 - Communicate your experience in whatever ways feel comfortable to you - such as by talking with family or close friends, or keeping a journal.

4 - If your company or a professional in your community offers Critical Incident Stress Management services, it is VERY IMPORTANT to attend the group debriefings and/or utilize the Individual sessions. CISM can often prevent long-term consequences of traumatic impact.

5 - Find out about local support groups that often are available such as for those who have suffered from natural disasters, or for women who are victims of rape. These can be especially helpful for people with limited personal support systems.

6 - Try to find groups led by appropriately trained and experienced professionals. Group discussion can help people realize that other individuals in the same circumstances often have similar reactions and emotions.

7 - Engage in healthy behaviors to enhance your ability to cope with excessive stress. Eat well-balanced meals and get plenty of rest. If you experience ongoing difficulties with sleep, you may be able to find some relief through relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs.

8 - Establish or reestablish routines such as eating meals at regular times and following an exercise program. Take some time off from the demands of daily life by pursuing hobbies or other enjoyable activities.

9 - Avoid major life decisions such as switching careers or jobs if possible because these activities tend to be highly stressful.

10 - Become knowledgeable about what to expect as a result of trauma.

How do I take care of children's special needs?

The intense anxiety and fear that often follow a disaster or other traumatic event can be especially troubling for children. Some may regress and demonstrate younger behaviors such as thumb sucking or bed-wetting. Children may be more prone to nightmares and fear of sleeping alone. Performance in school may suffer. Other changes in behavior patterns may include throwing tantrums more frequently, or withdrawing and becoming more solitary.

There are several things parents and others who care for children can do to help alleviate the emotional consequences of trauma, including the following:

-Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you during the months following the trauma - for example, allowing your child to cling to you more often than usual. Physical affection is very comforting to children who have experienced trauma.

-Provide play experiences to help relieve tension. Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.

-Encourage older children to speak with you, and with one another, about their thoughts and feelings. This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety related to the trauma. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.

-Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and going to bed to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

When should I seek professional help?

Some people are able to cope effectively with the emotional and physical demands brought about by a natural disaster or other traumatic experience by using their own support systems. It is not unusual, however, to find that serious problems persist and continue to interfere with daily living. For example, some may feel overwhelming nervousness or lingering sadness that adversely affects job performance and interpersonal relationships.

Individuals with prolonged reactions that disrupt their daily functioning for more than one month should consult with an experienced mental health professional trained in Critical Incident Stress Management and Post Traumatic Stress. INVEST EAP can help by referring you to a trained CISD professional.

These professionals work with individuals affected by trauma to help them find constructive ways of dealing with the traumatic impact and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

With children, continual and aggressive emotional outbursts, serious problems at school, preoccupation with the traumatic event, continued and extreme withdrawal, and other signs of intense anxiety or emotional difficulties all point to the need for professional assistance. A qualified mental health professional can help such children and their parents understand and deal with thoughts, feelings and behaviors that result from trauma.

Adapted from the American Psychological Association: Practice Guidelines for Traumatic Stress.
<http://www.apahelpcenter.org/articles/article.php?id=22>



Performance Problems on the Job: Quick Tips for Counseling Your Employee

Topics to discuss during a counseling session include:

- ✓ Your Expectations
- ✓ The Employee's Performance Standards
- ✓ Critical Element(s) Where the Employee Is Failing
- ✓ What the Employee Must Do To Bring Performance to an Acceptable Level

Following are tips to help you prepare for and conduct effective counseling sessions:

- ✓ Before counseling, make sure you can state clearly what would constitute acceptable performance.
- ✓ Whenever possible, conduct the counseling session in a private place.
- ✓ Arrange adequate time for your comments as well as comments from the employee.
- ✓ Clearly state performance expectations and seek confirmation that the employee understands those expectations.
- ✓ Focus on the poor performance, not on personalities or other distractions.
- ✓ Always maintain a constructive tone, along with a calm and professional demeanor.
- ✓ Seek cooperation, NOT confrontation.
- ✓ Remember that your goal is to improve the employee's performance, not to win an argument with the employee.
- ✓ Try to end the session on a positive note by emphasizing that your mutual goal is improving the employee's performance.

Source: US Office of Personnel Management (OPM)