

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

Employers are becoming increasingly aware that depression has a serious impact on the workplace. It affects not only the individual involved, but also the workplace in general and the employer's bottom line. Depression affects millions of workers and may limit individual effectiveness, performance, and productivity. This generates both obvious and hidden costs that, when calculated, add up to much more than most employers realize.

Supervisors are not expected to diagnose or treat depression. However, they are in a position to identify when an employee is demonstrating deteriorating work performance that could indicate an underlying problem with depression. While treatment should be left in the hands of a professional, a supervisor can facilitate an intervention when depression is suspected, by encouraging the employee to utilize EAP resources. While remaining in a management role, a supervisor can also coach an employee back to a more acceptable level of performance. Having a clearer understanding of depression will enable a supervisor to do this more thoughtfully and with greater self-confidence. This Successful Supervisor points you to some of the tools you'll need: information, skills, and strategies. We are always interested in your questions and comments. Please contact LifeSolutions at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or call an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.

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Understanding the Problem

Depression is a medical condition for which effective treatment is readily available. If someone appears depressed, it is helpful to suggest that he or she consider getting an evaluation for possible treatment. Symptoms can range from a mild dysphoria (anxiety, discontent, fatigue, and sadness) to a deeply pervasive experience of despair, hopelessness, negativity, and loss of focus that can seriously affect body, mood, and thought. At this point, the individual is generally very aware of being unhappy (though he or she may not know how to cope with it), and others are likely to notice that something is not quite right. Symptoms of depression can be triggered by a combination of factors, including biochemistry, genetics, thought patterns, environmental and family relationships, medical conditions, and stress. Consider the following:

- ◆ Depression is found in 15% of the population at any one time.
- ◆ Females are twice as likely as males to experience depression.
- ◆ Depression continues to be the leading cause of disability in the workplace.
- ◆ Six percent of all employees are affected each year.
- ◆ More than 70% of the people who are diagnosed with depression are employed.
- ◆ Among suicides, depression is the primary psychiatric disorder.
- ◆ Depression is the cause of 16,000 deaths annually.

The financial costs of depression are staggering. Depression is often a component of other health conditions. Consequently, depressed employees may incur almost twice as many medical costs as other employees (the cost of depression care in 2000 was \$26.1 billion). Additionally, it is estimated that up to \$51.5 billion in lost productivity and \$86 million in lost workdays can be attributed to depression per year. The average number of sick days lost to depression (9.9) is higher than for heart disease (7.5). Hidden workplace costs include low productivity, lack of engagement, poor decision-making, accident proneness, turnover, incomplete projects, errors, poor customer service, and dysfunctional relationships with co-workers.

The Supervisor's Role

As noted earlier, it is not the supervisor's job to diagnose or counsel employees regarding mental health issues. It is also not helpful to the employee for the

supervisor to ignore deteriorating performance out of compassion. This is called "enabling" and only serves to delay an employee's getting the help he or she may need. Supervisors can do several things to support the employee:

1. Maintain workplace expectations while offering resources.
2. Communicate concerns regarding performance or behaviors *without diagnosing*.
3. Encourage the employee to seek help with whatever may be interfering with his or her ability to do the job.

In the second installment of this two-part *Successful Supervisor*, we will focus on other ways a supervisor can be supportive of an employee who may be experiencing depression. *If you have any questions, call LifeSolutions.*

Nothing in this information is a substitute for following your company policies related to information covered here.

Sources:

1. Elinson, Lynn, et al. *Depression and the Ability to Work*. Psychiatric Services. 2004;55(1):29-34.
2. Dixon, Kevin. Remarks at Picower Institute for Learning and memory "On Depression" symposium at Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT), quoted in "Direct Costs of Depression in the Workplace Are Tip of the Iceberg; Employers Have Huge Stake in Promoting Depression Treatment." PRNewswire. Oct. 13, 2005. <http://www.prnewswire.com/cgi-bin/stories.pl?acct=104&story=/www/story/10-13-2005/0004167764&edate>. Accessed Feb. 20, 2006.
3. Lerner D, Adler DA, Chang H, Lapitsky L, Hood MY, Perissinotto C, Reed J, McLaughlin TJ, Berndt ER, Rogers WH. *Psychiatr Serv*. 2004;55(12):1371-1378.
4. Depression in the Workplace: A Special Publication from Managed Care Magazine, VOLUME 1, NO. 1, SPRING 2006.