

The Successful SUPERVISOR

2011

July

Tips from  LifeSolutions

There is growing awareness among employers that depression has serious consequences for work and workers. The prevalence of depression in the population, which affects millions, limits an individual's effectiveness, performance, and productivity. For employers, there are both obvious and hidden costs that, when calculated, are much more than most of us realize. And the direct impact from this treatable and manageable illness on health care dollars can be calculated.

In this second of a two-part presentation on depression at work, we are focusing on the specific behaviors and strategies supervisors can use when confronted with a depressed employee. 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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Supervision is more than performance reviews or day-to-day monitoring of productivity. As noted in last month's issue, supervisors and managers are uniquely positioned to recognize when an employee's work performance is subtly slipping or deteriorating due to depression or other personal issues. By paying close attention, supervisors may spot problem behaviors early, enabling them to offer support to that employee and guide him or her toward a helpful intervention.

Supervisors need to learn four key skills: observation and documentation, constructive dialogue, consultation with HR and EAP, and follow up.

Observation and Documentation

Observation involves **paying attention** to an employee's work performance. Declining job performance patterns may occur in one or more of the following areas:

- ◆ Productivity – decreased ability to get the job done, excuses for poor performance, working more slowly than usual
- ◆ Errors – frequent mistakes or inattention to detail
- ◆ Procrastination – missed deadlines or poorly completed projects
- ◆ Irritability – disruptive or uncooperative behaviors, unreasonable resentments
- ◆ Attendance – frequent tardiness, excessive use of sick leave, late returns from breaks
- ◆ Distraction – inability to concentrate, preoccupation, or decreased interest in work
- ◆ Affect – moody, withdrawn, sad, self-denigrating remarks

Documentation: Careful documentation of patterns — the what, when, where, and frequency of the behaviors — should accompany your observations.

Constructive Dialogue

The primary goals of constructive dialogue are to:

- ◆ Demonstrate concern and reassure the employee of his or her value to the company;
- ◆ Identify work performance issues and clarify expectations;
- ◆ Ask if there is a personal problem and offer empathy, but avoid counseling or diagnosis; and
- ◆ Let the employee know that you are making a referral to EAP for assessment if you believe that is appropriate.

Consultation with HR and EAP

Prior to meeting with the employee, it is always recommended that you consult with your HR representative to make sure you are on solid ground in terms of company policies and procedures. In addition, consulting with your EAP account manager or a representative from the EAP National Service Center will allow you to walk through the referral process, plan out your talking points, and make sure that the referral is appropriately set up with EAP.

Follow Up

Your support for the employee does not end with the referral. Sometimes supervisors are concerned that they will do or say something that will "push the employee over the edge." The supervisor may walk on eggshells or be reluctant to hold the employee accountable. The goal is to balance accountability with compassion and flexibility. Be prepared to hold a reasonable line on job expectations while anticipating lapses or setbacks. Recovery from depression, like most serious illnesses, takes time. Offer encouragement and support when you notice improvements. Meet often to fine-tune the amount of work that you assign during this phase.

LifeSolutions consultants are always available to answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to contact us at 1.800.647.3327.

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LS-SUCSFL SUP JULY C20110610-04 (RT) 6/16/11