

THE CONTINUUM **EDGE**

INFORMATION FOR LEADERS

SUPPORTING Struggling employees



Struggles are a part of daily life. Employees may struggle with workplace issues or they may bring their personal struggles to work. Either way, if you can recognize when someone on your team is struggling, it will yield more favorable results for everyone. Here are some ways to help:

— GET TO KNOW YOUR EMPLOYEES

Hold regularly scheduled one-on-ones to get to know employees professionally and personally. This will allow you to build rapport and trust, and develop a good relationship.

— NOTICE CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR AND HAVE A CONVERSATION

Behaviors like irritability, fatigue, forgetting things, and being late or absent can all be signs that an employee is facing a challenge. Changes in behavior might indicate they are going through a tough time or experiencing a mental health or substance use challenge. Use your time together to share your concerns. You can start the conversation with phrases like, "I've noticed some changes recently.", "Are you doing OK?" or "Can we talk about what is going on?". These questions allow you to offer support and resources when appropriate.

— KNOW HOW TO RESPOND AND WHAT RESOURCES TO OFFER

Sometimes, employees just need someone to vent to. However, if you believe their situation is ongoing or there is a need for additional support, you can remind them of their Continuum EAP benefit. A prompt from a respected leader can be all the encouragement needed to follow through with getting help.

On occasion, an employee's struggles may lead to performance problems. Giving feedback, beginning coaching or engaging in progressive discipline is OK under two circumstances:

- 1) Failure to perform.
- 2) Behaviors that are counterproductive or even destructive to the team, performance or morale.

If you find it's time for a performance discussion, consult with your HR department, and consider if making a management referral to Continuum EAP would be appropriate. A management referral will be handled as a team approach to getting the employee back on track. We ask that you, or the HR representative, contact us before making the referral, so we can learn about the performance concerns and who at your organization we will need to coordinate with, prior to the employee reaching out.



- **Employees are often defensive when confronted about their conduct and performance issues. Please offer tips on helping reduce the likelihood of this defensiveness in a constructive confrontation.**

A “constructive confrontation” or corrective interview is undermined if the employee is not receptive and cooperative. The supervisor has a key role in setting the tone for such meetings so they are not conflict-laden. *Here are some tips:*

- Make sure you can clearly describe what performance is not acceptable. Plan, because a vague or awkward description of the performance complaint will become a prompt for defensiveness.
- Have your meeting in a private place.
- Set enough time to relay your comments and for the employee to respond.
- Seek confirmation that the employee understands your concerns.
- Avoid any focus on personality style, which can be difficult if you have experienced much frustration.
- Maintain a constructive tone. Stay calm.
- Seek cooperation — not confrontation — by remembering that your goal is to improve the employee’s performance.



A good approach is to “team” with the employee to resolve the problem and end on a positive note because both of you have the same goal.

Will the EAP give me advice on the management of an employee’s performance, specifically the type of discipline that would be appropriate, given the worker’s temperament, psychiatric issues or other considerations?



A: Continuum EAP is a resource for your organization’s employees and management, but it will not provide guidance on how you should proceed regarding performance management and disciplinary matters specific to an employee. Turn to your manager or Human Resources advisor regarding this sort of guidance. Supervisors are primarily accountable for the performance and conduct of their employees. Supervisors must exercise leadership and judgment in determining appropriate disciplinary measures based on their knowledge of the situation and organizational policies. Furthermore, HR advisors are professionals who can advise on actions that comply with legal and regulatory requirements, such as labor laws, employment contracts and union agreements.