

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Recovery roads: Accessing help for mental health concerns

Most of the time, you're able to handle the day-to-day stresses of life. You know what works best for you to help deal with and work through tough or challenging situations at work and home. There may be times, however, when one or a series of events happen that leave you feeling overwhelmed, panicked and wondering if you'll be able to cope. It's during these times when you may find yourself asking: can I handle this on my own or do I need some outside help?

This is a tough question to answer and the truth of the matter may be difficult for you to admit, especially if you're used to, "staying strong," and, "forging ahead." But if you're having trouble moving forward after a difficult event in your life and find it's affecting your physical and emotional health as well as your personal and professional life, it's probably time to seek out support.

Not sure how? Try:

Making an appointment with your doctor. Your family doctor knows your medical history and can start by giving you a physical examination to ensure your problems aren't caused by an undiagnosed physical condition.

If your physical checks out and everything is normal, your doctor can refer you to a mental health professional. While it may be hard to open up, now is not the time to be putting up walls. Be sure to share all details about how you've been feeling physically and emotionally with your doctor so that he or she can refer you to the most appropriate professional.

Connecting with your Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Your EAP can provide you with the confidential resources and help you need—including counselling, articles, information packages and referrals—24 hours a day, seven days a week to begin the process of moving through this difficult time. Once you call, you'll speak with a qualified EAP counselor who will assess your needs, preferences and risk level and then work out the best course of action for you.

Calling a crisis hotline. When you feel on edge or can no longer cope, crisis hotlines can help you immediately work through your feelings and help "talk you down" from an extremely distressed state. They also usually provide referrals and can help you work out what your next steps should be.

Contacting a community service referral agency or community information centre that will direct you to mental health services in your area and/or give you information about other programs and resources you require.

Attending a self-help group. Talking about your feelings and experiences with others who are grappling with similar issues can help you better understand the steps on your road to recovery and highlight the fact that you are not alone. Support group members and leaders may also be able to give you open, honest feedback on your struggles, advice on how to cope and which professionals or services you might find helpful.

Talking to friends and others you trust. Don't hide your emotional hardships from the people you love and care about—they're there to help. A friend, family member or other trusted person in your life can be a great source of support and may be able to help by doing research, making some calls for you and

steering you towards the professional support you need.
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Going to the local hospital. If you are in severe emotional distress or feel suicidal and need immediate assistance, go directly to the emergency department of the hospital. They'll help to keep you safe until more specialized assistance is available.

Fear, judgement, showing weakness: these are three of the main reasons people avoid getting outside help when they clearly need it. While it may be difficult, ignoring the fact that you're no longer able to manage the emotional challenges you're facing won't make them go away. Instead of shutting others out and shutting down, embrace support and hope. By taking advantage of all the resources available to you, you'll put yourself on the path to a life that is better, stronger and healthier.