

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

# How to Support a Colleague with Depression

Research has shown that "Personal/Emotional" problems have increased by 47 per cent in the last four years. It is also clear that good supports both at the workplace and within families contribute to better recovery rates. All methods of treatment (medication, short-term counselling, long-term psychotherapy) are more effective when that crucial support is present.

Employees do need support. This needs stating because depressed employees are occasionally mislabelled as apathetic with a couldn't-care-less attitude.

The following steps may be of help to the depressed person or their colleagues:

- Make sure employees are aware of any special counselling services and other benefits they have available through the workplace.
- Develop an environment in which co-workers support each other. If an employee confides in a peer about stresses, medical problems or feeling generally depressed, co-workers should encourage that person to seek the help that is available.
- Have managers be affirming of employees who are likely suffering from stress and depression. They are more likely to seek help if they believe they are being supported.
- Decreased performance levels, if present, should also be a part of that discussion.
- Make sure a safety protocol is in place in the event that the depressed person is a risk to themselves or others in their safety-sensitive position. In other words, a severely depressed employee should not remain in a safety-sensitive position until a clinical assessment has taken place.

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Employees suffering from any of the symptoms mentioned earlier should be encouraged to receive help through their family doctor or professional.

Professional help may provide the following:

- User-friendly access and intake procedures conducted by Masters level clinicians; same-day access for employees in crisis.
- A supervisory referral component where job performance is at issue.
- Assessment systems where suicidal risk is explored with every client-symptoms are often hidden.
- Clinical counselors with specialized skills in recognizing depression and determining suicidal risk. Suicide is the lethal complication of depression, and even the mildly depressed will sometimes attempt to harm themselves.
- Consultant psychiatrists who are available to consult on difficult cases, and who may be available to conduct emergency assessments at short notice.
- Easy access for HR and other managers to Clinical Directors for advice on how to deal with particularly troubling situations in the workplace.
- A systemic approach which demonstrates a willingness to involve other family members. Spouses, children and other relatives are very much affected by the way the depressed person feels, and they should be part of the recovery process.
- Worksite and group interventions to help management teams and employees deal with particularly difficult transitions.

Effective treatment will certainly shorten the duration of depression, even when it appears in its severest form. Many treatments have proved effective including short-term counselling, long-term psychotherapy, as well as the use of medication. Good support in the workplace and effective counselling can only enhance a generally favorable picture in helping employees deal with depression.