



Learning Series

MENTAL HEALTH

TRAINING FOR: Employers Supervisors Employees

American Counseling & Training, Inc.
EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

P O Box 66083 ♦ Portland, OR 97290

Local 503-774-9971

National 866-774-9971

FAX 503-774-3221



TOPIC: **Mental Health**

Introduction

Mental health is recognized as the fastest growing concern the workplace. Managers are realizing that issues of home and work cannot be separated. Personnel simply cannot turn emotions and concerns on and off. Effective **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)** prevent turnover by understanding the many such issues face employees, and by offering counseling, referral services, and specific training addressing employee concerns such as:

- ❑ Work site stress and anger from interpersonal conflicts
- ❑ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from unresolved trauma
- ❑ Employee relations and work team mediation
- ❑ Parenting questions and partnering issues
- ❑ Effective employee communication
- ❑ Co-worker empowerment and delegation
- ❑ Stress resulting from legal and financial concerns
- ❑ TQM (Total Quality Management) team building concepts

Employee Assistance Programs: The Service

Employee Assistance Programs provide two specific services to a company and its employees.

- ❑ Supervisor and employee training
- ❑ Assessment, clinical support, and referral for all employees and family members within the EAP program contract.

Supervisor and Employee Training

The training of all employees articulates and clarifies the many benefits, goals, and outcomes that Employee Assistance Programs provide, such as:

- ❑ The history and intent of Employee Assistance Programs
- ❑ Accessing the Employee Assistance Program
- ❑ Assuring total confidentiality for the employee
- ❑ Supervisory training
- ❑ Referral services for the manager or supervisor

Extending assessment, clinical, and referral services to family members

Assessment and Clinical Support

Employee Assistance Programs provide a quick and beneficial response to concerns or issues that are affecting a supervisor, employee, or family member at any given moment or location. Contracted counseling personnel are hired to serve potential clients in close proximity to the place of work. These counselors are available on an as needed basis whenever a request for services is made.



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Employers and supervisors are ill equipped to handle these complex issues on their own. When under stress or in crisis, employees or family members need specific and accurate instruction and local counseling resources to assist them. The Employee Assistance Program provider is also aware of local and community resources that match health benefits carried by the employer. Specifically, the Employee Assistance Program provider can offer:

- ❑ Immediate confidential counseling, assessment, or referral concerning supervisors, employees, or family members in need.
- ❑ Assistance when troubled, or unfocused employees are identified
- ❑ Guidance and referral or supervisory or management level employees
- ❑ On site crisis intervention when needed
- ❑ Work group restoration through team building activities
- ❑ Support for employees and preventing turnover
- ❑ Activities to restore effective individual and work team communication
- ❑ Special interest workshops, such as parenting and stress management

The benefits of Employee Assistance Programs are quite clear. Today's valuable employees are faced with potential situations that can and do affect relationships at home and at work. Early self-referral by the employee or a management referral by a supervisor, confronts issues that if ignored, could develop into larger concerns and problems in the workplace. With the presence and options that Employee Assistance Programs provide, managers and supervisors can refer employees, knowing they will receive effective and timely assistance.

Unrecognized Violence: Hazing in the Workplace

Now more than ever before society is aware of violence and anger issues. Within the last twenty years the media, personality studies, and comprehensive trainings keep us updated and informed. The media has informed us through graphic detail of the traumatic school and worksite assaults and shootings. Usually the media includes a brief commentary that accompanies these activities as to the "how's" and "why's" of these lethal incidents. Personality studies also attempt to explain the profile and circumstance leading to these tragedies.

One area often left out of these discussions are the initial or entry level acts of violence referred to as hazing, which begin in childhood amongst both peers and strangers. Industrial psychologists who study and design management training packages report that hazing represents the attempt to legitimize aggression and violence towards others. We all remember the Columbine, CO tragedy and the two youngsters that had been the recipients of hazing and bullying. Their responses to these activities were revenge and violence that eventually took the lives of those who they felt tormented by, as well as innocent bystanders.

As business owners and managers it is our duty and responsibility to educate ourselves and the personnel we manage to recognize activities that might lead to hazing, anger, and violence. The prevention of hazing and other questionable acts between coworkers can be accomplished through effective training and by establishing a company culture that encourages mutual



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respect and open communication among personnel. By stressing a positive company culture, you are making the statement that these acts will not be tolerated in any form.

If hazing does occur, could you identify it? Do you know what hazing looks like? Hazing could be defined as any act that makes others feel singled out and / or uncomfortable:

- ❑ “Good old boy activities” that have fun at the expense of others such as “poking fun” and applying stereotypical putdowns concerning women, minorities, individuals or groups that are different than you such as color, race, religion, disability, age, and national origin.
- ❑ Requiring certain embarrassing activities be performed to gain entrance into a fraternity or organization through acts that encourage ganging up on individuals through mocking or ridicule.
- ❑ Insisting that approval or acceptance be gained only if certain activities are completed.
- ❑ Attempting to legitimize behaviors that stereotype an individual or group. Who are these personalities that haze and mock others?
 - ❑ Individuals who have a history or verbal or physical outbursts.
 - ❑ Emotionally troubled individuals who perceive limited options.
 - ❑ Easily angered individuals that speak of violence and “getting even.”
 - ❑ Individuals that see themselves as victims.
 - ❑ These individuals may also use recreational, prescription, and illegal drugs.

What should a manager do if these behaviors are observed?

- ❑ Document all incidents and events that contain putdowns or comments of a racial, discriminatory, or sexual nature.
- ❑ Improve or increase supervision.
- ❑ Mandate professional evaluations from therapists or psychologists.
- ❑ Refer individual to the Employee Assistance Program.
- ❑ Document attempts to rationalize behaviors.

Business owners and management who fail to act and ignore such behavior are giving indirect approval to perpetrators. All forms of aggression must be dealt with quickly and effectively before isolated incidents evolve into more serious assaults towards others. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the 1972 Sexual Harassment addendum forbids these hazing activities.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

When the numbers of United States military personnel returning from combat activities increases, the numbers of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) incidents rises dramatically. Increased incidence of PTSD results from inner-city military warfare referred to as urban terrain warfare (UTW). UTW is the most stressful combat scenario a soldier can experience. High casualties result from individual soldiers or personnel in small groups interacting with a hostile civilian population without supportive personnel or additional firepower.



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With this close interaction, protection is at a minimum and casualties are traditionally high. These casualties, either physical or emotional, can trigger Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for any healthy adult who is exposed to such traumatic events. While PTSD is traditionally associated with combat scenarios, any traumatic experience including natural disasters, sexual assault, repetitive abuse, or trauma can trigger acute stress leading to behavioral disorders.

Business owners and their supervisors are not equipped to be intervention specialists and to solve returning veterans issues. But they can be trained to recognize PTSD as a concern and refer those individuals to their Employee Assistance Program.

Here are possible signs of individual PTSD symptoms:

- Intense anger, irritability, and rage
- Anxiety or chronic depression
- Difficulty trusting people
- Emotional numbness
- Guilt over acts done or observed
- Hyper-vigilance or being easily startled
- Excessive grief or sadness
- Self-medication with alcohol or drugs
- Social isolation
- Problems with authority
- Low self-esteem
- Nightmares

Employers and supervisors may be startled by out of context responses to normal events. If you have experienced these responses, American Counseling and Training will support you and your personnel with clinical and well as training sessions, which will promote the understanding of PTSD and methods of dealing with affected employees.

For further information contact American Counseling and Training at 503-329-6208