

PROMOTING YOUR EAP AND PEER TEAMS

Lunch and Learn Series

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PROMOTING YOUR EAP AND PEER SUPPORT TEAMS

In workplaces where staff frequently encounter stress, crisis, or trauma—either through their jobs or their own lives—employees need safe, reliable ways to cope and stay grounded. Two effective options are Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and peer support teams. When these resources are visible, trusted, and part of the everyday culture, workers are better able to manage stress, recover from difficult experiences, and maintain their well-being over time.

UNDERSTANDING EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

EAPs provide employees with confidential access to counseling, stress management tools, and referrals for mental, emotional, or family-related concerns. Some workplaces supplement these services with wellness apps, mindfulness trainings, or simple strategies like deep breathing and grounding exercises. These programs help employees recognize signs of stress early and give them a structured place to turn for support—especially after events like the COVID-19 pandemic, when many people noticed new or intensified coping challenges.



HOW PEER TEAMS STRENGTHEN WORKPLACE WELL-BEING

Peer teams offer a different kind of support: connection. Coworkers who understand the work, share similar experiences, and know the day-to-day realities of the job can often reach people in ways that formal services cannot.

Peer support may begin casually—someone checking on a colleague after a frightening incident or offering to talk through a stressful situation—but it can quickly grow into something more intentional. Over time, these teams learn skills like trauma-informed communication, de-escalation, and emotional first aid. They check on coworkers after difficult days, help people create safety or coping plans, and follow up afterward to ensure no one is carrying their stress alone.

This kind of support helps reduce isolation, normalize emotional reactions, and build a sense of shared responsibility within the team.



RECOGNIZING THAT STAFF CARRY TRAUMA TOO

Many trauma-informed workplaces focus heavily on client needs, sometimes overlooking the reality that staff may be experiencing similar or greater levels of trauma. Some employees live in the same communities they serve, with daily exposure to violence or crisis. Others have personal trauma histories. Trauma responses can be reactivated by situations they encounter on the job.

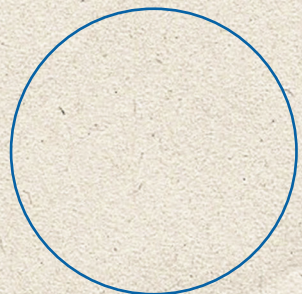
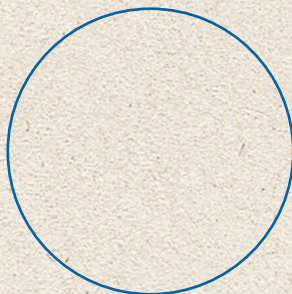
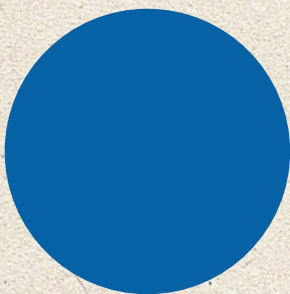
Without safe outlets, staff may push through exhaustion, minimize their own needs, or dismiss burnout symptoms. Creating multiple pathways for support—including EAPs, peer teams, therapy referrals, and mental health days—helps employees see that caring for themselves is not only acceptable but essential. These supports also help reduce stigma, especially in groups where seeking help has not always been culturally accepted.

SUPPORTING OVERWHELMED STAFF AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Many organizations face similar challenges: too much work, too few people, and constant exposure to emotionally heavy situations. As these pressures build, even the most dedicated workers may experience burnout or empathetic distress without realizing it.

Some organizations use brief self-check tools in trainings or meetings to help people pause and reflect. Others teach employees how to recognize burnout symptoms or talk to supervisors about flexible options. Trainings on self-care, burnout, and workplace coping reinforce the idea that mental health is universal—and that everyone benefits from noticing their own limits.

Role-playing exercises can also help staff practice navigating stressful situations before they happen, making it easier to respond calmly and effectively in real time.



EMBEDDING SUPPORT INTO WORKPLACE CULTURE

For EAPs and peer teams to work well, they need to be part of normal workplace practice. Introducing them during new employee orientation, revisiting them in staff meetings, and encouraging supervisors to talk openly about mental health helps make these resources feel accessible rather than intimidating.

Over time, as employees use these supports and share positive experiences, the culture begins to shift. People become more comfortable naming their feelings, taking mental health days, or talking with peers after stressful events. They learn that reaching out is a sign of strength, not weakness.

MOVING FORWARD

Promoting your EAP and building strong peer teams is ultimately about creating a culture where people are seen, supported, and encouraged to care for themselves. When organizations commit to these practices, employees become more resilient, teams function more cohesively, and workplaces become safer places for everyone.

Supporting the helpers ensures they can keep helping—and that they can do so in a sustainable, healthy way.

ACTIVITY:

EAP COMMUNICATION PLAN

This classic framework organizes tasks into four quadrants:

Step 1 - Gather your EAP information (or look into options for an EAP if you don't have one).

Step 2 - Clearly share the contact information and enrollment instructions.

Step 3 - Clearly describe high-level resources employees can get from the EAP (Ex: 6 Free Therapy Sessions, Support on Legal Matters, Discount Programs).

Step 4 - Discuss ways to share the EAP information (Flyers, Newsletters, Email Blasts, Posters, etc.). Customize the EAP Flyers.

Step 5 - Discuss strategic times you can share EAP information (New Hire Orientation, Annual Trainings, After Serious Incidents, During Mental Health Awareness Months, Health Fair Events, etc.)

Step 6 - Clearly share contact information of who can answer EAP questions for your organization.