

# MCPS EAP Supervisor Handbook



## Employee Assistance Program Overview

One of the most interesting and complicated parts of being a supervisor is managing employees as human beings. Problems in the workplace arise more often than many would like to admit. As a supervisor, you are faced with addressing work performance issues such as chronic absenteeism, frequent mistakes, escalating conflicts, and deteriorating work performance. You as the supervisor are instrumental in carrying out difficult decisions that may result in discipline or termination of a once-valued employee.

The **Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** is a resource available to supervisors and employees. This handbook summarizes how to utilize EAP in ways that benefit you, your employees, MCPS, and, ultimately, the students.

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# What is the Employee Assistance Program?

Many employees experience personal and/or workplace difficulties throughout their career at MCPS. Such problems exist at all levels of the organization. No one is immune from experiencing challenges that affect themselves and/or their families, friends, work situations, coworkers, and/or supervisors. The EAP provides employees with an opportunity to receive professional assistance in addressing problems and concerns. In addition, the EAP offers supervisors a wider range of responses before disciplinary action or termination is necessary. Intentional use of the EAP is key to employee and organizational success.

The EAP provides free, confidential services to all MCPS employees, their immediate adult household family members, and MCPS retirees. EAP services include assessment, short-term counseling, wellness workshops, referrals to community resources, and crisis response. Below are some of the issues the EAP can help address:

- Job-related stress/concerns
- Relationship/family concerns
- Balancing work and family
- Mental health concerns
- Financial/legal concerns
- Alcohol and/or drug use
- Stress or life crises
- Grief and loss

## Confidentiality

One of the biggest concerns employees have about utilizing the EAP is confidentiality. Everyone who uses the EAP is protected by professional standards of confidentiality, as well as by federal and state law. It is important that you, as the supervisor, communicate to your employees that no information regarding employee use of EAP will be shared without the written consent of the employee.

## Mandated Reporting

Exceptions to confidentiality occur when EAP staff have concerns about the safety of employees and/or others. This will be explained to the employee at the time of their first EAP appointment. However, no information regarding EAP use will enter the employee's personnel records or affect future job advancement.

# Referring Employees to the EAP

Below is a guide to help you determine when to make an EAP referral and how to decide what type of supervisory referral is appropriate for your employee's situation.

## Informal Referral

If an employee needs help dealing with a personal problem that has not begun to affect work performance, acknowledge the employee's concerns and suggest that they call the EAP for assistance. When making an informal referral, we recommend you provide the employee with an EAP brochure (available to download or print out on our website). EAP participation is voluntary and unless the employee signs a release of information, the supervisor is not informed of an employee's participation in EAP.

## Formal Referral

A formal EAP referral is recommended when the supervisor has observed a pattern of employee work performance deterioration. Use the following form as a guide when making a formal referral: [EAP Supervisor Referral Form](#).

The following are examples of situations when you may want to consider making a formal referral to the EAP:

- The employee's work performance is deteriorating.
- You have begun to document performance problems.
- The employee has acknowledged an alcohol or substance use problem.
- The employee may face disciplinary action if work performance does not improve.
- The employee has threatened to hurt themselves, someone else, or damage property.
- The employee is demonstrating behavior that could create an unsafe workplace.

If you are uncertain whether an EAP referral is appropriate, you may call the EAP to schedule a supervisory coaching session. You will meet with an EAP Specialist who will assist you in planning your meeting with the employee. In this meeting, you will discuss your concerns in specific behavioral terms, focus on specific areas and time frames for improvement, and refer the employee to the EAP.

# O.D.I.R. - Observe, Document, Inform, Refer

We recommend utilizing the “ODIR” process for formal EAP referrals. ODIR stands for Observe, Document, Inform, and Refer. ODIR clarifies supervisors’ expectations for employees and helps keep everyone accountable. During this process, the supervisor observes the employee’s work performance, documents the work performance problems, informs the employee of the poor performance and the expectation for improvement, and refers the employee to the EAP. If at any point during the process, the supervisor considers disciplinary action to address the work performance problems, it is recommended that they consult with the the MCPS Division of Human Resources and Talent Management.

## Observe

- Inconsistent productivity
- Excessive sick leave
- Wide variation in quality of work
- Neglect deadlines and assignments
- Poor attendance or absences
- Blaming others
- Frequent lateness
- Avoidance of co-workers or supervisor

## Document

- Declines in work performance: missed deadlines; inability to collaborate
- Attendance concerns: absenteeism, tardiness, abuse of breaks/lunch period
- Poor interpersonal skills with you, colleagues, or others

## Inform

- Meet with employee once pattern begins.
- Do not diagnose personal concerns.
- Arrange discussion in a private space.
- Inform employee of any consequences.
- Plan the structure & goals of the meeting.
- Explain help is available through the EAP.
- Focus on declining job performance.

## Refer

- Encourage employee to reach out to the EAP.
- Remind employee EAP is not punitive.
- Share with employee that EAP is voluntary, confidential, not documented in their record.
- Fill out an EAP Formal Referral form.

# Tips for Referring Employees to EAP

- Do not discuss employee's personal concerns. Be as supportive as you can, but maintain your position that performance on the job must improve. If an employee volunteers that a personal concern is at the root of their poor performance, refer them to the EAP.
- Describe — do not evaluate. For example, say, "Pat, I see that you have taken sick leave six Mondays in the last two months. I am concerned about the impact this is having on your performance and on your colleagues." **Do not say**, "Pat, I'm concerned you must be drinking on weekends, since you're never here on Mondays."
- Do not rely on your memory. Have the incident file — days absent, sick leave, mistakes, accidents, etc. — in front of you.
- Stick to what you can document. If the employee thinks your points are based on hearsay or vague reports, they may not be convinced that your criticisms are fair. Specific behavioral observations and documented facts are your most convincing approach.
- Do not try to diagnose an employee's problems. So-called "obvious" problems are sometimes the most difficult to diagnose accurately. Avoid "isms" and labels. Leave diagnosis to trained professionals if necessary, and remember that connecting the employee to support is the primary focus.
- Do not make idle threats. Explain clearly what will happen if work performance does not improve.
- Be honest, be firm—and be respectful. Remember that a "straight-on" approach encourages respect on both sides. Do not ignore the situation! In most cases, it will only get worse, not better.
- Continue to observe and document your employee's performance and provide them with feedback, whether the performance is improving or not. Feel free to call the EAP to ask questions or provide information. If we cannot release information to you due to confidentiality, we will let you know.

# EAP Support for Supervisors

The EAP offers a various types of supports to supervisors. The following are supervisor-specific services we provide. For more information, or to schedule one of these options, please give our office a call at **240-740-6500**.

Professional Development	PDO onsite and online courses related to leadership development.
Supervisory Coaching	One-on-one 30 minute sessions with an EAP specialist related to concerns about an employee, EAP referral, growth as a supervisor, and creating a supportive work environment.
Critical Incident Response	EAP specialists support during any form of crisis that may impact your school staff (e.g., death of a student or staff member, community event, organizational change). This can be provided through onsite support, virtual support, priority counseling appointments, or support groups. An EAP specialist will meet with you to help determine what response is most appropriate for your staff.
Leadership Lounge	A quarterly newsletter with topics related to learning and support for leaders.
4-part Coaching Series	A four part leadership coaching series that combines our knowledge in Human Centered Leadership and solution-focused coaching.

## Contact The EAP

Phone: 240-740-6500

Hours: 8:30AM-5:00PM (Monday to Friday year-round)

Email: [EAP@mcpsmd.org](mailto:EAP@mcpsmd.org)

Website: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/eap/>

