

How can I help my employees manage stress, both on and off the job, while still being an effective supervisor?

Supporting employee well-being is part of effective supervision today, especially as work and personal stressors increasingly overlap. The key is to lead with compassion while still keeping expectations clear and work moving forward. Good supervisors acknowledge that stress is real, encourage healthy coping, and connect employees with support, without trying to take on a counseling role. One practical way to do this is by promoting the EAP's new **My Stress Tools**. These free, confidential resources give employees easy, self-guided ways to manage stress, reduce burnout, and improve focus and resilience. Encouraging employees to use these tools helps address stress early, before it shows up as absenteeism, disengagement, or performance concerns. Creating a culture of care is a leadership responsibility. When supervisors show awareness, normalize the use of support resources, and encourage small, manageable steps toward stress reduction, employees are more likely to stay engaged, productive, and well, benefiting both the individual and the organization.

How can a supervisor effectively implement a structured debriefing after a workplace incident? Or should we rely on the EAP/PAP to help manage these types of events?

EAPs and PAPs are available to help organizations communicate with workers and address the emotional impact of traumatic events. Call upon the EAP/PAP when a serious accident, an assault, a robbery, the death of a coworker, or exposure to such events and the resulting secondary trauma affect your workplace. Secondary trauma means that even employees who were not directly involved may experience anxiety, irritability, sleep problems, and changes in work performance. Early EAP/PAP involvement helps employees normalize reactions and reduce long-term impact. In the meantime, consider talking with the EAP/PAP about your role and your work unit's needs in advance of an incident. Also review your organization's critical incident policies and procedures, if available. (Don't wait for an incident to occur before diving into this material.) A tragic incident may require you to take a leadership role in managing a workplace response, and having clarity about expectations, resources, and procedures beforehand will help you step in to manage the situation appropriately and bridge the response until EAP/PAP assistance can be arranged.

We have an employee who visited the EAP/PAP. She shared with us her struggle with anxiety and burnout and requested time off for a couple days. Can the EAP/PAP help verify whether the work she is doing is too much for her nervous system? She wants to keep her job but we need expert input.

Although the EAP/PAP can work with your employee to address her mental health challenges, it cannot render an opinion regarding her ability to perform essential functions of her position. That determination rests with management, in consultation with Human Resources and, when appropriate, occupational health or medical providers whom they may want to consult. The EAP's or PAP's role is supportive, focusing on helping employees and connecting them with community resources. It does not assess fitness for duty, certify disability status, or recommend job restrictions. These functions are managerial in scope. EAPs or PAPs that involve themselves in such roles potentially undermine the program's ability to attract employees. If this happened, word of it would spread fast among employees.



Q What strategies help increase EAP or PAP use when employees are hesitant because of confidentiality concerns or fear of being judged?

A Employees are most likely to use the EAP or PAP when they trust it. EAPs and PAPs are effective because they are professional, confidential, convenient, free to employees, and nonjudgmental. These core qualities should be consistently reinforced by supervisors and visibly supported by leadership. Confidentiality is the concern employees raise most often, so it must be emphasized regularly. When confidentiality is not talked about, doubts can quietly grow over time. Clear, repeated messaging helps prevent that erosion of trust and reassures employees that their privacy is protected. Promoting the EAP/PAP is similar to promoting any valuable workplace resource. It requires ongoing, meaningful communication rather than one-time announcements. When supervisors talk about the EAP/PAP naturally, when leadership models support, and when materials are visible and accessible, employees are more likely to see the EAP or PAP as a safe and trusted option for help.

Q How can managers tell the difference between performance problems caused by skill gaps and those related to unmanaged mental health concerns?

A The good news is that supervisors do not need to make this distinction in order to take appropriate action. Your role is to focus on performance, not diagnosis. Pay attention to observable factors such as attendance, quality and quantity of work, attitude, conduct, and availability to perform the job. When performance issues appear, address them through normal coaching and corrective steps. If concerns continue, fluctuate, or reappear over time, a referral to the EAP or PAP may be appropriate. Follow your organization's established procedures or the guidance provided by the EAP/PAP, especially for a formal Supervisory Referral. EAP/PAP Supervisory Referrals should always be based on job performance and workplace behavior, not assumptions about an employee's mental health or personal circumstances. By staying focused on performance and using the EAP or PAP as a support resource, supervisors can address concerns effectively while respecting employee privacy and boundaries.

EAP/PAP Challenge for the top 1% of Supervisors, Managers, and HR Professionals:

Your organization is receiving new EAP/PAP brochures with a Company Passcode to access **My Stress Tools** – a new suite of helpful tools on our website to manage stress. **Your homework:** (1) Register for My Stress Tools; (2) Take the Stress Profiler and discover what small thing(s) you could do to reduce your stress this year; (3) Start doing that; and (4) Promote this to your employees so they reduce their stress and burnout and have a better year!

Old and New Words of Wisdom...

**Lawe i ka ma'alea a
kū'ono'ono.**

Take wisdom and make it deep.

Mary Kawena Pukui ‘Ōlelo No ‘Eau

“Gaining more knowledge equates to having more confidence and belief in one’s ability and capacity to learn, and having more of that self-belief empowers you, liberates you and releases a creativity you may not have even realized you possessed. You constantly give birth to new possibilities in this creative process; you create your own destiny seeking your best possible life (‘Imi ola).”

Rosa Say, Managing With Aloha