



UNDERSTANDING YOUR EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit provided by your union that gives you access to a wide variety of resources for many of life's problems. Although EAP's are staffed by professional counselors, EAP counselors help with much more than the typical counseling issues like depression and substance abuse. EAP's help with relationship problems, grief issues, financial counseling, eldercare, and can also provide resources to address legal issues, health problems, and a variety of ordinary concerns.

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU CALL THE EAP

Each call to the EAP is unique but all begin with the member explaining their problems and concerns to the EAP counselor. Depending on the nature of the problem, the initial call may last anywhere from a few minutes to over an hour. Therefore, it is always helpful to call the EAP at a time when you can plan to talk without interruption for a reasonable time.

Once the counselor has an understanding of the problem and needs of the caller, the counselor will make recommendations to the member. While counseling may be one of the options, there are usually a number of other helpful resources, such as:

- ◀ Reading suggestions such as web sites or specific books.
- ◀ A CCI "Life and Living Series" brochure that would address the caller's specific issue.
- ◀ Contact information for local support groups.
- ◀ Class Locations and Information (anger management, parenting, substance abuse).
- ◀ Counseling Options. If appropriate, the EAP counselor will help locate a counselor that specializes in the area of concern.
 - ◀ Counseling may be covered by employee, personal, parental or spousal health insurance benefits.
 - ◀ Counseling services may be available on a sliding scale based on the employee's income and situation.
 - ◀ In limited circumstances, the staff may find pro-bono services.

CCI

Employee Assistance Program

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A TYPICAL CALL

Because the EAP counselors work with so many different issues and each caller has specific and individual needs, it is difficult to specify how an individual call would be handled. However, the following example should help the caller understand the process.

The majority of calls received at the EAP involve relationship problems. The relationship may be a partnership (married, engaged or dating), or the problem may be between family members or even co-workers. For this example, we'll use a caller, Joe, who is engaged to Ann. Joe is concerned because Ann has a four year old son by a previous marriage. Both Joe and Ann are in their mid-twenties. Three months ago, they decided to move in together. Since that time, they have had repeated fights about the discipline of the four year old (he feels that the child is not disciplined enough). In addition, they are also arguing about money as they are both in debt and having trouble making it each month. He had proposed prior to her moving in but now he is very concerned.

As with many calls to the EAP, there are a number of issues here. In this situation, an EAP counselor would probably offer input on several of the problems presented and suggest that the caller get help from a variety of resources.

The EAP counselor would help the caller develop a plan to work on the varied aspects of the relationship problems. This couple is dealing with two of the most problematic situations in a relationship – money issues and step parenting issues. (Money problems are cited as one of the main reasons for divorce and a large percentage of step families fail because of parenting disagreements.)

- ◀ To begin, the counselor might forward educational material to the caller on blended families, the role of each parent, and the guidelines for establishing discipline.
- ◀ The counselor might also recommend pre-marital counseling for the couple and offer to help them find an affordable counselor in their area.
- ◀ The EAP counselor may then suggest that they make an appointment with a consumer credit organization to get their finances on the road to recovery.
- ◀ If needed, the counselor might offer to set a telephonic appointment to talk with the fiancé.
- ◀ The counselor could also recommend specific relationship books that could be found at the local library.
- ◀ If the caller agreed with the recommendations, the EAP counselor would then find the recommended resources and call the member back with specific book titles, telephone numbers, etc.

OTHER SERVICES FOR EMPLOYEES

EAP counselors also help employees find information on a variety of other topics. While counselors are not attorneys or medical personnel, they often assist employees by helping them find the right low cost agency, website or phone number.

- ◀ Callers who have health and disease concerns, may be given information on resources like websites and support group information.
- ◀ Callers who were facing eviction or foreclosure have been directed to legal assistance, community help agencies or information sources that will help them make the best choices.
- ◀ While CCI does not have access to cash assistance or loan programs, staff counselors are often able to direct employees to community resources that may provide a variety of services. Callers in desperate financial situations have been directed to shelters or food pantries. In one special situation, a sponsor was found to provide Christmas presents for children after their home was destroyed by fire.