

Staffing Decisions™



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Dealing With Depression in the Workplace

Depression ranks among the top three problems — along with family crisis and stress — for employee assistance professionals. The workplace cost of depression is significant. An MIT study estimated that it costs American industry \$43.7 billion annually — including \$23.8 billion due to absenteeism and reduced productivity, \$7.5 billion in lost earnings due to depression-related suicide and \$12.4 billion in direct care costs.

The issue of depression is important not only from an employee-relations standpoint, but one that you must

consider in terms of FMLA and ADA requirements as well.

What makes the problem especially tough for managers and HR to deal with is that many employees suffering from depression may not even recognize the nature of their problem. And if they do, are often hesitant to tell their employers or even to seek treatment. Clinical depression, common as it is, still carries a stigma in the new century.

Striking a Balance

While employers are obviously concerned with productivity, it is important to strike a balance between the needs of the workplace and being sympathetic to an employee's mental health needs. It's also important to be able to distinguish between employees who are temporarily discouraged by events — everyone gets the blues from time to time — and those who have a serious clinical depression that needs medical treatment. The following tips may be useful:

BE AWARE of how your company's culture may be affecting employee stress. During tough economic times pressure is up on everyone.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES for stress-release for employees, and publicly acknowledge the stress that the workforce may be under.

BE ALERT to the signs of clinical depression. Sudden changes in attitude or mood, productivity, efficiency, absenteeism, energy level or personal appearance may be tip-offs that problems are far more serious than just being a little discouraged.

If you spot any of these changes in an employee, call him or her in for a discussion. Be straightforward and work-focused. ("I've noticed that you have been out a lot lately; is there something wrong?")

Do not provide advice or attempt to diagnose an employee. Refer the employee to your company's EAP program, if you have one. If not, encourage the employee to see an appropriate licensed medical professional.

Be supportive, and follow up on all identified situations. Continue contact with employees you're concerned about. It's important both to signal your ongoing concern and to maintain focus on successful performance of job duties. ▲



For More Information:

Employee Assistance Association

<http://www.eapassn.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>

Managing Employee Depression in the Workplace

http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/97892563_1.html

National Institute on Mental Health – information on depression

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/complete-index.shtml>

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