

**A Training for Consumers:  
Learning the Ropes:  
Discovering Employee Assistance Programs as a Benefit**

**GOAL:**

The goal of this training is to help people with mental health conditions explore the possibility of EAPs as a support resource in the workplace.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- § Understand the role of EAPs in the workplace
- § Identify EAP activities that might help people with mental health conditions sustain work
- § Develop strategies to partner with EAP professionals to help sustain work

**Target Audience:** This training is targeted to people with mental health conditions who are actively involved in securing or retaining integrated, competitive employment.

**Facilitator:** The training should be facilitated by a mental health care provider who offers vocational assistance to people with mental health conditions who are seeking integrated, competitive employment. Co-facilitation with a consumer is encouraged. In preparation for the session, the facilitator should be familiar with basic workplace organizational structures including EAPs, the Americans with Disabilities Act, issues around disclosure and the process of accommodation. This session is intended to be integrated into existing career club or job club units.

**Training group size:** The group should not exceed 12-15 participants.

**Needed materials:** Copies of training handouts for all participants and a dry erase board or flip chart. There are 4 handouts.

**Estimated Time:** Total time is 100 minutes. This training is planned to be broken into 2 career club sessions.

**Leader Notes:** **Your directions are in bold type and italics. The material to share with training participants is in regular type.**  
**Introduction (5 minutes)**

**Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and indicate your connection (expertise) with today=s content.**

**Introduce purpose of the session.**

§ Sometimes, once you are on the job, you might need some extra support.

§ Because of your mental health condition you might need help

§ meeting job requirements or

§ working out things between you and your supervisor or co-workers.

§ Or, you might need help with other parts of your life in order to make sure that you can continue working - things like

§ help getting to work

§ child care or

§ making sure that you continue to have the time to meet with your psychiatrist or attend group.

§ Along with the services available from this agency (**Leader can interject name of the provider agency**) there might be resources available to you at the workplace. Today we are going to talk about Employee Assistance Programs or EAPs, or in union settings, the Member Assistance Programs or MAPs, sometimes referred to as the Personal Services Unit. We will talk about this form of support in the workplace and how it might be able to help you on the job.

§ Before we get started lets make sure we all know one another.

**§ Leader: Have participants introduce themselves.**

### **What EAPs Do (15 minutes)**

We are here to talk about Employee Assistance Programs or EAPs. Some of you may have worked in a place where there was an EAP or have a relative or friend who has had that experience. **Ask, *Is anyone already familiar with Employee Assistance Programs?***

**§ Leader: If there are people who say "yes," they are familiar with EAPs, elicit their input. Ask what they know about EAPs or ask them to share their experience working with an EAP. Do not spend more than 2-3 minutes. The goal is to get the group involved and to find out if people have familiarity with EAPs. Summarize group=s experience and continue:**

§ EAPs are important because:

§ They are a benefit that is provided by many large and medium-size companies.

§ They help workers stay productive and try to help them keep their jobs.

§ Employers understand that anyone at the workplace, at any time, can experience problems in their lives that interfere with doing their jobs. They recognize that they need to be responsive to these problems so that a productive workforce can be maintained.

§ EAPs are a response of employers to this understanding.

§ EAPs are designed to be a help without hassles in that they are staffed by people who know the workplace, they are easily accessible to employees, and they can provide assistance quickly through direct counseling or referral.

§ In other words, EAPs are the normal way all employees can obtain help for problems that affect work. Like all other employees, EAPs should be available to those with mental health conditions.

§ Let's add to what we already know and learn some new information by doing an activity together. Imagine you are a new employee and you go to your benefits orientation and you are given this brochure.

**§ Leader: Distribute Handout 1, Mock Brochure.**

§ Take a few moments and look over the brochure. Then we'll talk about what you learned about the EAP from this brochure.

**§ Leader: Allow the participants a few minutes to look over the brochure. Then debrief with the following questions.**

§ *Who is eligible for the EAP?*

§ *What kinds of help does the EAP provide?*

§ *How do you contact the EAP?*

**§ Leader: Generate a discussion with the group. Use the information below to raise points if they are not raised by the group.**

§ All employees of ACME and their family members are eligible for the EAP.

§ EAP services range from helping with problems at work to parenting issues. EAPs are different one from the other. It is hard to tell exactly

what the EAP at your workplace will offer, but you will receive a similar brochure about the EAP at your workplace. We can be sure that the EAP will offer a different range of services. Typical services often include:

§ Assessment

§ Referral to providers for substance abuse services

§ Short term counseling

§ Trauma debriefing services

§ Referral to providers for mental health services

§ Follow up with clients after EAP consultation

§ Case management

§ Consultation in job jeopardy proceedings

§ Contacting the EAP is usually done by using an 800# to call and make an appointment. At ACME there is also a crisis line if you are in immediate need.

§ Sometimes a supervisor may refer someone to the EAP if someone is having trouble at work.

§ EAPs can be set up differently. Some might offer hours of operation for walk-ins and appointments. Others can only be contacted by phone or the internet.

§ Now you have more idea of what an EAP is and the kind of things that EAPs provide. It is important to remember that all EAPs are different. Depending on the size of the company, what kind of business it is and many other factors, EAP services will vary.

§ You should always ask about what services are available to you.

### **How to Work with an EAP (15 minutes)**

**Ask,** *What if you wanted to ask for help from the EAP at your next job or at the job in which you*

*are currently working?*

**§ Leader: Encourage a few comments. Then use didactic material below.**

§ First, you need to know if EAP services are offered.

§ At larger companies, you may get this information at a new employee orientation or at a benefits orientation, or you may hear other employees talking about the EAP.

§ Your supervisor could suggest the EAP if you are having problems at work.

§ You or your case manager can also call Human Resources to ask if there is an EAP.

§ Once you know that there is an EAP, the next step is to PLAN.

**§ Leader: Distribute Handout 2, Plan to Work with the EAP. Ask consumers to think of their own present work situation or to think theoretically about a situation they might experience.**

§ Together with your counselor, or on your own, you need to consider:

§ Step 1: What do you want to accomplish by contacting the EAP? Be as specific as possible. These are some examples of goals for contacting the EAP:

§ Do you want to find out what services the EAP provides?

§ Do you want advice from the EAP about family issues that are affecting your work?

§ Do you need help in thinking about how to approach your supervisor with your concerns?

§ Do you need help understanding the workplace=s policies?

§ Step 2: What information will you share with the EAP personnel?

§ Talking with the EAP is CONFIDENTIAL.

§ It is not required to disclose your mental health condition but it may help you better explain your needs and concerns.

§ The EAP person does not need to know your diagnosis or the details of your treatment.

§ You only need to share

§ Information about your condition that is relevant to the problems you are having meeting job requirements or in relation to other services you need, e.g., handicap parking space or a chance to sign up for training.

§ Step 3: Think about how to specify your concerns in relation to your job tasks, the people you work with, the work environment, or your routine. What might you say?

§ Identify your symptoms of your mental health condition or the side effects of your medication and think about the ways that they interfere with you getting your job done. How do they interfere with tasks? Routines? Relationships? Environment?

§ Be specific when explaining this to the EAP.

§ For example, AI have a mental health condition which causes me to have difficulty concentrating for long periods of time. This makes it difficult for me to do the data entry for the entire morning. I think it would help if I could have more breaks in the morning and I could skip my afternoon break when I am doing less focused work. Would it be possible to take a shorter lunch and add an extra break and my afternoon break to the morning hours to see if that helps?@

§ This statement names the symptoms and how they interfere with the person=s job tasks. It also suggests a solution that would not cause undue hardship on other workers or change the essential functions of the job.

§ Step 4: What will you ask the EAP to do? Give advice? Intervene with the workgroup? Make a referral?

§ This will depend on your situation and your concerns. At one point, you might go to the EAP just to gather information about the services that it provides or to get a referral for childcare. Later in your employment, you may need different services from the EAP.

§ As we have discussed previously, you can find out about EAP services by asking other employees or a supervisor. You could also call Human Resources for information or go to the company website. There may be an

800# that you can call to request information about the EAP, or the EAP itself may have a website. Remember, EAPs provide services on a situation by situation basis, so sometimes you have to identify your concerns in order to receive the services that you need.

§ Step 5: Identify who will make the contact with the EAP.

§ Will you contact the EAP yourself?

§ Your involvement in this process is important. It shows your commitment to your job and your desire to keep the job. You can explain in your own words the difficulties you are having and what ideas you have to deal with your concerns.

§ Will you ask your counselor to help you make contact?

§ Having a counselor approach the EAP with you or for you may be a good option. An advocate can support you in this process if it is difficult for you to present your ideas clearly. Having your counselor there shows the employer that you have the ongoing support of the agency behind you.

§ Did you provide written informed consent?

§ If you want someone to advocate for you at the workplace, you will probably need to give written informed consent concerning what information you are willing to share.

§ Do you know what your counselor will say?

§ Make sure that you plan ahead and clarify who will say what at the meeting. Will you do most of the talking and your counselor will just be there for support, or vice versa?

§ Step 6: When will you contact the EAP? How will the contact take place? Who do you want involved? Your counselor? The supervisor? Coworkers?

§ Commit to a time frame. Decide when you will contact the EAP. You must determine when the EAP hours are and what your employer's policy is regarding release time for EAP appointments.

§ Most problems at the workplace affect more than just the worker. You may ask the EAP to help educate your work group or your supervisor around the changes that you need to help you perform your job to the best

of your ability.

### **Contacting the EAP: An Example (20 minutes)**

**§ Leader distribute Handout 3, Jane=s Situation.** Let's do an activity together to look at how a person might plan to go to the EAP. I am going to read the example out loud.  
**Read Jane=s Situation out loud.**

Jane works as a Customer Service Representative at ACME Airlines. Jane has a mental health condition but she has not told anyone at work. She has had this job for three months and she thinks things have been going well. Then Jane=s supervisor tells her that she needs to step up her pace. Jane tries to work faster but because of her mental health condition, this makes her feel confused and forgetful. The quality of her work is getting worse instead of better and Jane is afraid she might get fired. Jane goes to see her Case Manager to talk about what she can do. They decide to make a plan to involve the EAP.

*§ What is the first step?*

§ From the brochure Jane knows that ACME has an EAP.

§ Otherwise, Jane or her provider can call Human Resources, or Jane could look through her benefits information from her new employee orientation or talk to co-workers, etc.

§ Now we are going to work together in pairs to complete a plan for Jane to begin contacting the EAP.

**§ Leader: Break the group into pairs and complete the plan. Give pairs 5 - 10 minutes to complete the plan and debrief. Make sure discussion includes the following points :**

§ In this initial call, Jane should

§ be specific

§ identify her concerns

§ speak in relation to her job

§ She might say, "I work in the Customer Service Department. I have been working there for several months and everything has been going well but recently my supervisor asked me to work faster. I have a mental health condition and this request has made me feel confused. I would like to talk to someone about my

concerns."

§ Jane wants to

§ focus on her strengths and abilities

§ be specific about issues related to her job

§ leave out personal information that is not relevant to the reason she is calling the EAP, e.g., diagnosis, medication, or treatment history

§ state what action she wants (to talk to someone)

§ If Jane has decided to disclose that she has a mental health condition, she will have the advantages of

§ ADA protection

§ formal accommodation

§ her mental health care provider can more easily act as her advocate

§ Jane can also decide to ask the EAP to keep her information confidential. She can discuss with the EAP the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure in relation to solving the particular problem she is facing.

**§ Leader: This is the appropriate place to stop if you are presenting the material in two separate sessions.**

### **Putting the Plan into Action (35 minutes)**

**§ Leader: Start by reminding the group about last week=s discussion of EAPs and of Jane=s situation. Reread Jane=s situation to remind group of her needs. Then:**

EAP Professionals are trained in social services and they know about mental health issues. They also know about the workplace. With your consent, EAP professionals can partner with the you, your supervisor, your case manager, and even your co-workers to improve your work situation.

§ To finish up our discussion, we are going to learn about what you can expect from the EAP once you ask for help.

§ Remember that every circumstance is different. All EAPs are different in the services that they offer AND there are many possible solutions for different

concerns. Making changes to job requirements to help someone perform his or her job better usually happens on a situation by situation basis. It is a process of negotiation. It is important to keep an open mind.

§ Let's see what happened to Jane. I am going to hand out a summary of what happened to Jane when she went to the EAP. We are going to work in groups to discuss how the EAP was able to help her. Then we'll come back together and discuss it as a large group.

**§ Leader: Break into groups of 3 or 4 and distribute copies of Handout 4, What Happened to Jane and Questions. Suggest that one person be the scribe for each group. Read What Happened to Jane out loud. Then ask them to fill in the questions. Give the groups about 15 minutes to work on this activity. Debrief question by question or cull the main points, asking for feedback from each subgroup on what they drew out from the case. Use the debrief notes below to add to the discussion.**

§ ARRANGING A MEETING - Jane calls an EAP professional at the EAP at ACME Airlines and explains that she has been having trouble meeting job expectations. Jane discloses that she has a mental health condition. The EAP professional schedules an appointment for Jane.

§ DESCRIBING HER SITUATION - Jane describes her work situation to the EAP professional in relation to her mental health condition. The EAP professional asks Jane if she would be willing to involve her supervisor in a plan that might help her perform her job better. Jane agrees but asks if her mental health care provider can help too.

§ MAKING A PLAN - The EAP counselor, mental health care provider and Jane meet to discuss a disclosure plan to the supervisor and accommodations that might be helpful. They agree that the EAP professional and Jane together make the disclosure to the supervisor. The EAP counselor arranges a meeting with Jane and the supervisor.

§ WHAT'S IN A PLAN - They disclose the mental health condition and the need for a more gradual increase to her productivity. The supervisor has been concerned about Jane. She has also been irritated with Jane because her work seems to be getting worse. She had thought Jane was not interested in her job. She is relieved to learn why Jane's work has changed. They work out a plan where Jane works to slowly increase her productivity. The supervisor will write out the things Jane needs to do and a suggested time frame for doing each task so that Jane won't get confused.

§ FOLLOW-UP - Jane will try out the schedule to see if it works. If not, the supervisor will help to adjust the schedule. The EAP counselor and Jane also discuss asking the supervisor to check in with Jane more frequently to provide feedback on how well she is doing.

§ *How does Jane get to the EAP?*

§ Jane self refers by calling an EAP professional at the ACME EAP.

§ *Does Jane disclose that she has a mental health condition?*

§ Yes. First Jane discloses to the EAP. Later, she discloses to her supervisor with the help of her mental health care provider.

§ *Is Jane protected under the ADA?*

§ Yes. Because Jane discloses that she has a mental health condition, she is protected by the ADA.

§ *Why does Jane go to the EAP?*

§ Jane is having trouble meeting job requirements. Her supervisor increased her work load, and because of Jane=s mental health condition, she is feeling confused and overwhelmed. Her work performance is getting worse and Jane is worried that she won=t be able to keep her job.

§ *What kinds of solutions do the EAP and Jane come up with?*

§ Jane agrees to disclose to her supervisor with the support of the EAP and her mental health provider.

§ After disclosing, Jane, her supervisor, the EAP professional, and Jane=s provider negotiate and come up with some accommodations to try out:

§ Increase Jane=s workload slowly.

§ Give Jane more feedback so she will know how she is doing.

§ The supervisor will schedule tasks for Jane and a time frame for completing them.

§ Jane will report back to her supervisor on how she is doing, or if any adjustments are needed.

§ The supervisor will check in with Jane more frequently.

§ Jane will continue contact with the EAP.

§ *Who are the people involved in putting this plan in place to help Jane?*

§ This was a team effort!

§ Jane participated by expressing her needs and identifying her concerns. Consumer input is crucial. Because disclosure took place, formal accommodation could take place. Jane was specific about her concerns in relation to her ability to do her job, and this helped to put support in place for her.

§ Her supervisor was willing to negotiate and keep an open mind.

§ The mental health provider partnered with the workplace to support Jane.

§ And the EAP coordinated all of these efforts and guided the process.

§ Jane felt secure because

§ she had a plan,

§ she had support in the workplace and

§ she could get more support if necessary.

§ It helps a lot to have a professional at the workplace involved. That=s what the EAP is.

### **Wrap-up (10 minutes)**

We have covered a lot of information today. You have learned what an EAP is and how to plan to access an EAP for support in the workplace.

§ *How many of you think you will ask if there is an EAP at the next place you get a job?*

§ *How will you go about that?*

§ **Facilitator: Encourage participants to call Human Resources or ask Benefits about the EAP at the next place they work (if it is a medium/large company). Give participants feedback praise for their participation.**