

KNOW YOUR BENEFITS



5 Facts and Myths About Using an EAP



Many employers offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) to support employees through personal and professional challenges, but how these programs actually work is often misunderstood. While an EAP can be a valuable resource, there are common misunderstandings about what they provide that could prevent you from getting the help you need. Knowing what an EAP offers, how it differs from other benefits and how confidentiality works can help you decide when and how to use it.

This article explains how an EAP works, dispels common myths and helps you make informed decisions about using this benefit.

What Is an EAP?

An EAP is a workplace benefit, typically provided at no cost to you, that offers confidential short-term support for personal and work-related challenges. An EAP is not health insurance; it's a separate resource designed to help you manage stress, relationship issues, grief, substance use, legal questions, financial concerns and other life challenges that can affect your well-being and job performance.

EAPs are typically administered by a third-party provider rather than your employer directly. This separation is part of what allows the program to operate independently and confidentially, offering services such as counseling sessions, referrals to longer-term care and resources you can access by phone, video, chat or in person.

5 Myths About EAPs

Because an EAP can seem similar to other workplace benefits, it's easy to misunderstand how it works or when to use it. The following are some of the most common myths about EAPs, along with the facts that clarify them:

- 1. Myth:** Using your EAP costs money or counts against your paycheck.
Fact: Employees do not pay out-of-pocket or use health insurance copays for allotted short-term sessions.
- 2. Myth:** EAPs are just an old-fashioned phone line.
Fact: Many EAPs now offer text- and chat-based counseling, video sessions, self-guided apps and 24/7 access, in addition to the traditional phone and in-person options for people who prefer talking with someone directly.
- 3. Myth:** EAPs are only for mental health emergencies.
Fact: EAPs handle a wide range of everyday challenges, including childcare and eldercare questions, legal issues, financial stress, relationship problems and navigating your health plan. Counselors are trained to recognize when practical and emotional issues are connected, and can help with both.
- 4. Myth:** Calling an EAP means you will end up in therapy indefinitely.
Fact: Most cases are resolved by the EAP provider in several visits or sessions. However, the EAP provider may recommend a referral to longer-term therapy for some cases. When counseling is the right fit, EAPs are typically built around short-term, focused support and will help connect you to additional care if more is needed.

5. **Myth:** What you say to an EAP gets back to your employer.

Fact: EAP counselors are bound by confidentiality standards and healthcare privacy laws, and outside vendors run most EAPs to maintain this separation. Your employer generally only sees anonymized, aggregate data, such as how many employees used the program overall. The main exceptions are the same that apply to any licensed counselor, including an immediate safety threat, suspected abuse of a child or vulnerable adult, or a legal order, such as a subpoena.

Conclusion

An EAP can be a valuable resource for managing everyday personal and professional challenges, but it works differently from your health insurance and other benefits. Understanding what your specific EAP offers and how confidentiality works can help you decide when and how to use it.

Talk to your HR team or benefits administrator to learn more about the specific services, access options and confidentiality policies included in your employer's EAP.

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