

# IT'S OUR BUSINESS

Addressing addiction and mental health in the workplace

*Information for Leaders*



## Performance management: Frequently asked questions

### Should the employees on my team intervene when they notice changes in each other?

Absolutely. But your team will likely need training in how to intervene effectively.

### Should the employees on my team tell me when they notice changes in a co-worker?

That depends. If colleagues notice changes in an employee that they have worked with for a long time, and their co-worker's performance has not been affected, they may choose to make a peer referral without your knowledge. Employees will likely be more inclined to talk with you if they are concerned about a teammate whose performance is suffering. It is important that all team members understand the importance of alerting the manager if they are concerned that someone on the team is not fit for work. Approaches to intervention are most effective when everyone on a team shares responsibility for safety and wellness. When everyone shares responsibility for the team's safety and wellness, these approaches to intervention will be most effective.

### If my company doesn't have any formal policies, do these guidelines still apply?

Even when a company doesn't have clear policies, it's important for leaders to focus on safe and effective work performance from

all employees. When you notice changes in performance, you can still intervene effectively.

The difference is that you will likely need to consult with others in your company for guidance about how to best handle the situation, rather than referring to a policy. Regardless, it's important for leaders to rely on the assistance of others when they are in doubt. The leader can consult with their manager, a member of the human resources team, an internal or external occupational health professional or an internal or community-based service provider.

As a leader, you can promote employee fitness for work by keeping yourself informed and by influencing your workplace to educate leaders and employees.

Ask your workplace to build a comprehensive addictions and psychological health strategy that covers policy, enforcement and staff training. You may also consider implementation of a voluntary psychological safety standard. Information and examples can be found at <http://www.psychologicallysafeworkplace.ca/standards.html>.

### For more information

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

For mental health related information, and to find a mental health clinic near you, please call the 24-hour Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-303-2642.



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## Tips for performance management

Keep your knowledge of workplace policies up to date and attend training events offered by your workplace. Even if you do not have any performance problems on your team now, you never know when employees will experience personal difficulties that will affect their work.

Ask your workplace to organize a training session for leaders on confidentiality. A company representative can outline how to deal with personnel records, and your employee assistance program (EAP) or employee and family assistance program (EFAP) representative can provide guidelines on how to handle confidential situations.

Promote familiarity with the EAP/EFAP program by inviting your EAP/EFAP provider to meet with you and other team leaders to talk about the services they offer.

Provide training on mental health, mental illness, enabling behaviour and peer intervention to the employees on your team. Check with your local community mental health association, addictions agency or EAP/EFAP provider to see if they provide this training.

For more information and tips on successful methods of intervening with employees, ask your provider to recommend or lend you resources. Other sources include local agencies like the Canadian Mental Health Association or your local Alberta Health Services, Addiction and Mental Health office.

### For more information

Alberta Health Services, Addiction and Mental Health offices offer a range of prevention and treatment services to assist businesses in managing workplace addiction and mental health concerns. For more information, and to find an addiction and mental health services office near you, please call the 24-hour Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322 or the 24-hour Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-303-2642. For more workplace-specific resources, please visit: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/2672.asp>



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## Performance management: How to tell that employees need support

Early warning signs of distress	Early warning signs of short- and long-term performance decline	Early warning signs of absenteeism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• withdrawal, isolation or avoidance</li> <li>• tardiness</li> <li>• mood swings</li> <li>• irritability and impatience</li> <li>• relationship issues</li> <li>• conflict with others</li> <li>• anxiety, fearfulness or a lack of confidence</li> <li>• confusion, reduced concentration or forgetfulness</li> <li>• overreactions to negative feedback</li> <li>• complaints of unexplained aches and pains</li> <li>• frequent physical illnesses (e.g., colds, influenza and headaches)</li> <li>• high rate of accidents on or off the job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• missed deadlines</li> <li>• reduced quality of work and frequent mistakes</li> <li>• longer turnaround times</li> <li>• difficulty recalling instructions</li> <li>• erratic work patterns</li> <li>• coming or returning to work in an unacceptable condition (e.g., impaired by substance or fatigue, vomiting, unkempt appearance or body odour)</li> <li>• increased excuses for underperformance</li> <li>• mistakes due to inattention or poor judgement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frequent unscheduled short-term absences</li> <li>• frequent Monday or Friday absences</li> <li>• peculiar and increasingly improbable explanations for absences</li> <li>• excessive tardiness and leaving early</li> <li>• continued absences from the work area (e.g., long coffee breaks)</li> </ul>

If an employer observes changes in an employee's behaviour, attitude and activity on the job, it's important to look for patterns or combinations of indicators, rather than focusing on single incidents.

*Managers are not addiction and mental health experts, nor do they have to be for their role in the fit for work and performance management process. However, having some basic information about common signs and symptoms will help increase a manager's confidence and comfort. During performance management discussions, employees may disclose underlying addiction or mental health issues; it can therefore be helpful for managers to know where to refer an employee for further support. Performance management can be a positive, effective and successful process.*



## For more information

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## When performance management is required

Some human resources professionals say that managers should always be managing employees' performance: actively, passively, proactively or reactively, as the situation demands. This type of management may help the employee grow professionally, but it may also help the employee meet performance expectations. In the latter case, there are three basic situations that call for an employer's intervention.<sup>1</sup>

**Performance management is required when:**

**An employee is not fit for work.**

**An employee's performance has deteriorated over time.**

**You are concerned about an employee, even though their performance has not yet been affected.**

### When an employee is not fit for work

There are some instances in which a manager has an obligation to take immediate action to ensure that a worker who is not fit for work does not remain on the job. If there are alcohol, other drug or fit for work policies in place, the manager should review these prior to taking any action and refer the employee to them during discussions. Some examples of situations that require immediate intervention are

- a worker is seen drinking or using other drugs at work, just prior to work or while on a break
- a worker is slurring their words, staggering or unsteady, which may be the result of the employee drinking, using other drugs, taking a new medication that is causing adverse effects, having a stroke or having (or having just had) a seizure or other medical symptom
- a worker is very upset, emotional or irritable on more than one occasion

For each of these situations, behavioural clues can be used to guide the manager's decision to request an assessment; however, these clues should not be used to attempt a diagnosis. In these instances, it is unlikely that the worker is fit to perform their duties safely. As a result, the manager must decide on an immediate course of action:

- If the manager thinks the worker has been using alcohol or other drugs and is met with resistance or denial, request an immediate fitness for work assessment from a medical professional. However, if the assessment cannot be done immediately, let the employee know that they cannot return to work until they have documentation from a physician that they are fit for work.
- If the worker does not participate in a fitness for work assessment, ensure that the worker is removed from the work site immediately and escorted home, either by someone from the work site or a friend or family member of the employee. Remember, if the worker is not fit for work, they likely are not fit to drive, either.<sup>2</sup>
- If the worker requires medical or psychological assistance, the employer needs to make arrangements to transport the person to a medical professional, employee assistance program (EAP) or employee and family assistance program (EFAP), or involve the occupational health nursing team. If the worker does not think they need medical assistance, the manager may wish to request a fitness for work assessment.
- If the worker has just received bad news, the manager should suggest they go home for the day. Most employees will do so without argument. In this case, the manager should also have someone drive the worker home. It is also helpful for the manager to remind the employee of the EAP/EFAP or community services available to them, along with a pamphlet and the phone number to call.

The following guidelines will help a manager get an employee who is not fit for work to a place where they will be safe:

- Obtain a witness, if possible. In a unionized

environment, the manager will probably call a steward or other union member. Rely on the company's policies for guidance.

- Take the worker aside, and tell them that they do not appear able to work and that they need to leave the work site.
- Listen to their response, but do not attempt to reason or negotiate with them. Assure the worker that there will be an opportunity to discuss the incident when they return to work.
- Document the date, time and details of the incident. Make sure both the manager and the witness sign it.
- Meet with the employee upon their return. Advise them of the consequences at that time.

## When an employee's performance has deteriorated over time

Working effectively with an employee whose performance has deteriorated over time is a learned skill. It is based on a planned approach to performance management that includes five key steps.

These steps allow leaders to focus on job performance and help them avoid becoming personally involved in their employees' problems.



### Step 1: Watch and listen.

This skill is largely observation. At the first sign of a change in an employee's usual behaviour, attitude or activity, managers should start to watch and listen. Sometimes managers will notice these changes themselves and other times they will hear reports or rumblings from co-workers.

Managers should look for patterns or combinations of indicators, not single incidents. Patterns may also be observed in absence from work, attitude, behaviour, activity or a combination of these factors. To identify these patterns, co-operation between human resources, occupational health and safety and the manager will likely be required. Some typical patterns that are seen include sick days before or after weekends, on the first day of a shift, or on the day of a shift rotation; changes in behaviour after the lunch break; frequent lateness or even changes in mood and behaviour that appear to be out of the ordinary.

The manager should watch and listen for changes in behaviour, attitude and activity:

#### Behaviour

- attendance
- absences from the work area
- number of phone calls or visits
- incidence of illness, ailments, injuries and accidents
- safety violations
- policy violations
- the ability to keep promises for improved work performance

#### Attitude

- mood swings
- conflicts with others
- morale problems within the team

- complaints from customers, co-workers and others
- rationalizing or making excuses

#### Activity

- pace of work
- concentration
- reliability
- the ability to meet deadlines
- quality or quantity of work

Look for patterns or combinations of indicators, rather than single incidents.

### Step 2: Record what you observe.

It's important for managers to document what they see and hear. Good documentation helps managers stay focused on job performance when they meet with the employee. It also allows them to talk openly with the employee about changes in their performance.

The manager's notes must reflect observable, verifiable facts, rather than their thoughts or opinions about the situation. Two examples are given in the table on the next page. The poor example does not describe the specific situation or behaviour observed. The better example does the opposite by providing specific, factual, descriptive information about the situation and action taken.

	Poor documentation	Better documentation
<b>Situation 1</b>	“January 13—Mitch was at it again! He was not getting along with the team.”	“January 13—Mitch appeared agitated at the morning dispatch meeting. He was speaking loudly and became very angry when he was assigned to the clean-up crew. He swore at two other team members—Jill and Glenn—and told them he ‘wouldn’t ride with them because neither of them should have a licence anyway.’”
<b>Situation 2</b>	“January 15—safety infraction.”	“January 15—Mitch showed up on the job site without a hard hat or safety glasses. When I approached him about this, he told me to ‘mind my own business.’ I explained that he would have to leave the job site if he refused to wear the gear. He told me I was ‘much too picky about stuff that was a waste of time,’ then went to his truck, got the gear and put it on.”

When writing down these observations, it is important for managers to be fair, objective and consistent so that the employee is clear about what specific changes they need to make. Managers will also need written documentation, should they need to discipline or terminate an employee.

Documentation should also include written notes of any actions that a manager has taken to assist an employee. For example, managers should record each time they meet with an employee, remind them about the EAP/EFAP or other sources of help, or provide training or coaching to assist the employee in meeting performance standards. The manager should record what is observed.

Records should be

- factual
- objective
- verifiable
- complete
- accurate

Good documentation helps a manager:

- avoid counselling the employee
- show the performance picture over time
- demonstrate that they are serious
- support corrective action
- record their efforts to assist the employee
- be objective, fair and consistent



### Step 3: Prepare to meet with the employee.

When the manager has observed a change in an employee's performance and made a written record of it, the next step is to prepare to meet with the employee. This allows the manager to make a plan for the meeting and to anticipate how the employee might respond.

Here are some tips to make sure the manager is prepared for the meeting:

- Review all documentation. Choose the entries that are most factual, verifiable and objective to demonstrate how the employee's performance has changed.
- If employee attendance is an issue, review their attendance records. The company's payroll or human resources department will likely be able to provide these. When examining the records, the manager should look for patterns in the employee's absences.
- Review the employee's past performance records. Has the employee's performance been similarly affected in the past? If so, what actions were taken?
- Review relevant company policies and programs (e.g., alcohol and other drug policies, disability management policies, EAP/EFAP and peer support programs).
- Get direction and/or support. If the manager is unsure how to proceed, they should consult with someone who can provide guidance (e.g., an immediate supervisor, a member of the human resources team or an EAP/EFAP service provider).

### Step 4: Meet with the employee.

It's important to schedule a private meeting to discuss the employee's performance rather than talking with them in front of their co-workers.

In a unionized workplace, the employee may wish to have a union steward present. In some instances, the managers may also want to involve their supervisor or a human resources (HR) representative. The manager should

pick a time when they are most likely to be uninterrupted and when both the manager and employee are calm.

Here are some ideas that may help the manager stay focused on performance and keep the meeting on track:

- Discuss the employee's current performance. Rely on information that has been observed and documented.
- Get input from the employee. Rather than telling the employee what should change, ask for their ideas about how their performance can be improved. Discuss solutions, rather than focusing strictly on the problem. The employee must be very clear about the objectives and what they must do to fix the performance problem.
- Advise the employee of the corrective action that must be taken. The goal here is to highlight the changes that you see in the employee's behaviour, attitudes and activities and to focus on improving their future performance.
- Set timelines. It's important that the employee understand the timelines in which improvement should occur. Otherwise, the manager might think that performance should be improved within a few days, while the employee thinks that he or she has months.
- Be clear about consequences. These must be clearly spelled out in advance so that both the manager and the employee understand what steps will be taken if the employee's performance does not improve.
- Get commitment from the employee. One way of doing this is to record the action plan that has been developed during the meeting. This should clearly specify the actions that both the manager and the employee have agreed to take, the timelines for completion and the consequences if success is not achieved. Set a date to review progress. The employee and the manager both need to sign the action plan. A copy is then provided to the employee, the manager and human resources, if the employer has a formal HR department. In some cases it may also be necessary to share a copy with the union.

- Anticipate the possibility of the employee admitting to having an addiction or illness. If this happens, the manager will likely need to involve their supervisor, the EAP/EFAP co-ordinator, the occupational health representative or an HR representative. This is especially true if the employee works in a safety-sensitive position.

Success breeds success—recognizing improvements in an employee’s job performance is a good way to get more of it!

### Step 5: Follow up to ensure success.

It is important to follow through with scheduled performance reviews. These reviews allow the manager and the employee to ensure that any agreed-upon action plans are being carried out. If improvement is not occurring, the manager can plan additional actions and follow through with the consequences that you agreed to during your first meeting.

It’s a good idea to schedule a follow-up meeting within two or three weeks of your first meeting. This gives the employee enough time to start making improvements and the manager enough time to recognize changes the employee is making. If you wait too long to follow up, smaller changes may not be noticed, or they may be forgotten. It’s also a good idea to schedule regular performance reviews as the employee is working to bring their performance up to expected standards. These can taper off over time.

Follow-up meetings are also a great opportunity to recognize improved performance and provide encouragement. Employees often work very hard to fix their performance problems, especially if personal difficulties are involved. It can be very disheartening to employees when nobody notices the improvements in their performance.

For more information, visit  
<http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca/Employers/faq/Talking-to-employee/approach#prepare>

## When an employee’s job performance has not yet been affected

Sometimes you will be concerned about an employee on your team, even though their work performance has not yet been affected. You may notice changes that could be an indication of a personal problem. Perhaps they are looking tired or have become withdrawn. You may notice changes in their behaviour or attitude. Other times, you may see your co-worker outside of work and become aware of a personal issue.

When you have these concerns, you do not have to wait until there are job performance problems to take action. As a leader, you can take action informally, with a simple expression of concern or an encouraging word about the availability of assistance.

### References:

1. Bender, A., & Kamkar, K. (2011, Winter). Mental health and workplace functionality. *Moods Magazine*, 27.
2. Shepell-fgi. (n.d.). *The employee and family assistance program resource guide for managers, supervisors and other people leaders*. Toronto, ON: Author. Retrieved from <http://insite.albertahealthservices.ca/Files/hr-whs-efap-manager-resource-guide.pdf>





## For more information

Alberta Health Services (AHS), Addiction and Mental Health offers information, prevention and treatment services through a province wide network of offices, facilities and funded services. Services include a toll-free helpline, prevention and education, detoxification, outpatient counselling, opioid dependency programs and residential treatment.

AHS, Addiction and Mental Health has counsellors with specific training in workplace issues. This allows us to better meet the needs of employees and supervisors, and to respond readily to referrals from the business community. Other specific services for the Alberta workplace include

- addictions-related information and prevention resources for the workplace
- addictions education, employer consultation and supervisory training
- the Addiction and Mental Health Business & Industry Clinic, which offers residential treatment for employees who have problems related to alcohol or other drugs

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Addiction Helpline at 1-866-332-2322 or the 24-hour Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-303-2642. For more workplace-specific resources, please visit: <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/2672.asp>



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## Enabling in the workplace

Enabling refers to protecting someone from experiencing the consequences of their behaviour. For example, it is common for employers to accept excuses from employees who are not performing up to their usual standards. Sometimes the team even makes excuses for someone else's behaviour. It is also common for team members to cover up for those who are experiencing problems. Some leaders will repeatedly give people breaks or choose to ignore or avoid the problem.

Enabling is usually done with good intentions. Often, people who enable others think they are helping an employee with a problem by cutting them a little slack or taking on some of their workload. However, enabling employees increases the risk of their situation getting worse. The earlier an employee gets help for an addiction or mental health issue, the more likely they can get the support they need to get better.

There are many reasons why you might enable someone else. Sometimes it's to avoid conflict or because you are not sure how to intervene. It may also seem easier to do nothing than to deal with the embarrassment of having a poor performer on your team. The key to resolving personal problems successfully is early intervention. If you find yourself thinking any of the following thoughts, you may be putting off intervening with someone on your team and enabling their problem:

- If I wait long enough, the problems may fix themselves.
- I'm afraid my boss won't support me.
- I have too much work as it is!
- I do not want to hurt anyone's feelings.
- I am afraid the employee will quit.
- I do not want to get involved in anyone's personal life.
- I do not have enough authority.
- I hate arguing with employees.
- My company doesn't have any policies in place to deal with this.
- I'm afraid of the employee.
- I do not know what to do about a substance use problem.
- It will reflect badly on our whole team.
- The problem is too big.
- If I take action now, my boss will wonder why I didn't take action sooner.

Peers should refrain from counselling one another or attempting to diagnose problems experienced by their fellow employees.

If you do not feel confident in addressing performance problems, get help from your own supervisor. You might also benefit from some training in supervision or performance management, especially when working with employees who are distressed.

## Enabling behaviour in the workplace

We enable another person when we protect them from experiencing the consequences of their behaviour by

- accepting excuses
- making excuses for their behaviour
- covering up for them
- giving them unnecessary breaks
- ignoring the problem
- avoiding the problem

Enabling is usually well intentioned.

Reasons for enabling include

- avoiding conflict
- feeling helpless
- avoiding embarrassment or stigma
- feeling that the person's problem is somehow a reflection of our own competence

## For more information

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