

Employees—  
Your Most  
Valuable  
Resource

May 2021

# Frontline Supervisor



Brought to You By **SAVE** 805-962-5387 [www.save-eap.org](http://www.save-eap.org)

■ **During supervisor training for drug and alcohol awareness, I discovered that I am probably an alcoholic. (Actually, I have suspected it for years.) I have referred many employees to **SAVE**, so I feel too embarrassed to bring my own problem to them. Should I seek help elsewhere?**

You should seek help from a credible resource that can provide you with a proper assessment and recommendation for appropriate treatment. Feeling embarrassed is associated with shame, which is driven by stigma for the disease of alcoholism. This is not uncommon for those who seek treatment. You have likely spent many years in denial while also seeking to prevent others from noticing your excessive drinking. The motivation you feel now to make a move toward treatment is positive, but not likely to last very long, so don't delay. **SAVE** is completely confidential, so don't hesitate to reach out to them as a first step. It takes a lot of courage to admit that you are an alcoholic. You are on your way to a healthier and longer life. You will discover surprising relief and acceptance if you contact **SAVE** to seek help.

■ **When I make a formal referral to **SAVE**, should I try to reduce the tension associated with constructive confrontation by having the meeting outside of my office? Would the employee's office be better, or perhaps a quiet spot in a more neutral area?**

It is important to recognize that having one's work praised and/or one's lack of satisfactory performance corrected is a normal, healthy, and essential part of managing worker productivity. These activities should not be viewed as regrettable or disadvantageous. Referring employees to **SAVE** is likewise a complementary step in this process, periodically, and one designed to help workers address personal problems that may be preventing change. None of this is to say that meetings to correct performance can't be successfully held in other locations. Be aware that your concern about having the most accommodating location, and that this element is essential to the meeting's success, may be motivated by your fear of conflict along with your desire for acceptance. It's great that you are willing to be accommodating, but remember it is the employee's responsibility to change, no matter where the meeting is held.

■ **Can I ask **SAVE** to give me an opinion on the likely impact of a certain type of disciplinary action on an employee's psychology? My concern is that the employee might "go off" and become violent.**

You can meet with **SAVE** concerning any matter that you view as a personal or professional problem. This includes worry or anxiety you experience concerning a decision to dispense a disciplinary action. It would be inappropriate however to ask **SAVE** to render a clinical judgment regarding the psychological or behavioral effects of such an action on a specific employee. Being able to predict the outcome of exercising disciplinary action would be beyond the scope of **SAVE**. However, if you feel there is a potential for violence, be sure to take the appropriate measures to keep yourself and other staff members safe. One good first step would be to have another

person present for the meeting and have clear access to a door that will allow a safe exit if necessary. Follow the emergency procedures in your employee policy and procedures manual for how to handle violence in the workplace.

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■ **We referred our employee to **SAVE** on a supervisory referral because of behavior and attendance problems. He entered detox at a hospital, but the rumor is that he was discharged from treatment for conduct problems. He wants to come back to work. How should we proceed? What is the role of **SAVE**?**

First, keep in mind that the information you received was hearsay and may not accurately reflect the reason why your employee was discharged from treatment. That said, the release that was signed along with the supervisory referral allows for limited information to be shared. It will allow you to discover whether your employee is still participating in **SAVE**, but you won't be able to learn about hospital treatment or clinical issues. Work closely with your Human Resources department and consult your employee policy and procedure manual to determine how best to proceed. HR may recommend a fitness for duty evaluation before the worker can return. Such an evaluation would assess key issues and further treatment needs. Finally, have a back-to-work conference among yourself, the employee, and **SAVE** to establish expectations going forward.

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■ **I have a superstar employee. He earns outstanding performance evaluations yearly. My concern is his gambling. After hours, he reportedly plays poker. I've heard that there is a lot of domestic conflict as well. Is it improper for me to comment, inquire, intervene, or involve myself in this situation?**

**Employees who** perform well certainly can have serious personal problems, and symptoms may never be visible or demonstrated at work. A rumor or secondhand information does not justify making an inquiry into your employee's personal life unless the issue appears to be life threatening. So, you are not behaving irresponsibly by remaining focused only on performance. Remember, you know about this employee's problems only because of hearsay. Other employees could have personal problems that are even worse. Frequently remind employees about **SAVE**. Remind employees about it during review periods, after a crisis, and by using reminders in workplace wellness literature. Remember also that this employee's personal problems may not have been accurately portrayed by the source, which is not unusual for secondhand information.

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## NOTES