

EAP matters

Choosing your supervisor



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If you provide counselling to an employee, through an employee assistance programme (EAP) or a counselling service provider (CSP), then you need a supervisor who understands the workplace context.

Worryingly, because private practitioners work from their own setting, too many will take EAP referrals without understanding that they are actually part of the workplace sector. It's worth thinking about your current supervision arrangement. Do you need to make adjustments? Or do you need to arrange an additional supervisor to assist you with the complex organisational dynamics in your work?

Searching for an appropriately skilled supervisor can be challenging. You will want to give consideration to their therapeutic approach, training and find out about their workplace experience. The following areas are all worthy of exploration.

Boundaries and conflicts of interest

Does your supervisor understand the varying possible conflicts of interest that could arise when you are an affiliate counsellor? Can your supervisor help you face the challenges to ensure confidentiality is maintained at all times?

Working with groups

You might be involved in training events, facilitating teams, mentoring and coaching. Conflicts often arise at work

and you will no doubt wish to discuss and develop these skills within supervision. It's important your supervisor can work with you and support your development, while understanding the need for boundaries which are both robust and flexible.

Complexities

You might find yourself aware of financial issues within the employee's company and/or the EAP/CSP or even have access to the direction of the company, which might compromise and overshadow the client's needs. These competing needs have to be carefully balanced in the therapeutic triangle between company, client and counsellor. Working with a supervisor who has experience in these settings, will help you to be as aware as possible.

Balancing your caseload

You might find you are having to manage a heavy case load. This balance can be difficult, so having a strong challenge from your supervisor is vital, to help you build a balanced 'internal supervisor' and to assist with making decisions based on good practice.

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Managing the employer and the EAP

Understanding the varying accountabilities and boundaries that exist between the needs of the employing organisation and that of the EAP or CSP can in itself cause conflict within the client/counsellor relationship. It's essential that your supervisor has an understanding of these different levels of responsibility and can help you respond.

Ethical issues

You may become aware that an employee is telling you something that may not be illegal but may be in direct conflict with the employer's policies. What do you do? Working with an experienced supervisor with a good knowledge of your accountabilities will help support you in making decisions about the balance between duty of care to the client and duty of care to the employer/EAP/CSP.

Keeping notes

When you work in private practice, your notes are your own. However, this might not be the case if you are working in house or with an EAP/CSP. This is something to give consideration to and supervision would be one place to explore this.

Workplace environment

If the employer provides a service that means there is a heightened risk of injury, eg fire service, then it might be that you will be required to provide trauma support. Knowing that your supervisor is available out of hours and has a good understanding of trauma is essential if you are working in this environment.

Interestingly, I discussed this column with my supervisor (which felt only fitting, given that it is all about supervision). My supervisor raised some interesting points which I had initially missed, citing both the workplace environment and the exposure to trauma as being factors to consider. I would like to acknowledge her here, and also say 'thank you' to her. ●

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