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What role should supervisors play in helping employees deal with their emotions and cope with stress? I don't want to take a "hands-off, not my problem" approach, nor do I want to refer everyone to the EAP for everyday stress issues.

Today's workplace has changed. Employees are seeking positive, nurturing, and socially connected environments. This is especially true of younger workers, who appreciate supervisors who are willing to be open about their feelings with them. Given these new expectations and to help retain employees longer, offering guidance on coping with work stress is appropriate for supervisors. This could include: advising employees on taking risks, managing fear and work stress, coping with mistakes, and not regretting missed opportunities. Supervisors could even share information about their personal failures and successes. These discussions help employees build "emotional resilience" to better cope with errors, mistakes, work crises, coworker conflicts, disappointments, upsetting performance reviews, and more. All organizations want lower turnover, and helping employees build emotional resilience clearly has a business rationale. Note of Caution: Separate the above skills from critical issues and the need for professional counseling suitable for EAP.

Is it appropriate to refer an employee with chronic desk clutter and cluttered workspace to the EAP?

It is reasonable for supervisors to request that employees keep a clutter-free desk and workspace, because it has negative impact on personal focus, and productivity. It can also negatively affect co-workers, others in the environment, and an organization's bottom line. Desk clutter is not always because of a personal habit or avoidance of getting things straightened up. It could also be a symptom of other personal problems or psychological issues. Treat an employee's inability to declutter like any other performance issue. Ask, request, encourage, or insist. If there is a lack of results, refer the employee to the EAP. Source: www.paw.princeton.edu [Search "clutter research"]

My employee had severe performance issues some years ago and was almost terminated, but was referred to the EAP and entered treatment for alcoholism instead. Things have been great, but, I was told this employee was drinking again.

Failure by your employee to manage his illness properly is a personal and medical concern for the moment. It is possible that the relapse will not affect his performance again, or problems could return. Monitor his performance as you always have, and if problems return, talk to your EAP provider and follow the supervisor referral process recommended to you. Your vigilance as a supervisor will help you intervene early if needed.