



# HEALTHQUEST

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FOCUSING ON  
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

## INSIDE EAP

You may have received an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) brochure in the mail or attended an orientation session or heard about the EAP through Human Resources, a co-worker, your manager, union representative or a family member.

For many people, when they first hear about the EAP, they are not in immediate need of the service. Others may be in the midst of personal or work-related problems and could benefit from the professional counselling available through the EAP.

So whether the need is immediate or sometime down the road, many people who will decide to use the service have not used the EAP before, nor have they been to a professional counsellor previously. It is our experience that most people who use the service for the first time are hesitant or somewhat nervous or apprehensive and this can be expected. Not having been to a counsellor before, it is natural to wonder what the experience will be like to question whether the concern is appropriate to bring to counselling to speculate about what happens inside the counsellor's office to wonder if EAP is for me?

### IS MY PROBLEM APPROPRIATE FOR THE EAP?

Sometimes people are feeling out of sorts and can't put a finger on what is troubling them. Other times, there is an identifiable area of life that is not running as smoothly as we would like. In our rapidly changing world there is a wide range of issues that we can be confronted with - marital or relationship concerns, family and parenting difficulties, work-related issues, stress, financial and legal problems, alcohol and drug issues.

It is important for people to be aware that it doesn't matter how minor or complicated they feel their concern is, it is appropriate to bring their situation to EAP. Even if you think your problem is minor, we encourage you to call in order to prevent your concern from increasing, says Peter Crawford-Smith, a Toronto counsellor for Warren Shepell Consultants. Clients have said that taking action - picking up the phone and calling the EAP service - helped to relieve some of their concern immediately.

We prefer that people do not second guess their need for assistance. Our point of view is that anything that is creating

confusion, worry, concern or distress for an individual is appropriate to bring to EAP - no matter how big or small.

So knowing that any personal concern is appropriate to bring to the EAP, it is still possible that some people will be hesitant about seeking professional help. Sometimes people will struggle with the belief that they should be able to solve their problems on their own; and if they can't, that they are somehow not in control of their lives.

It is a myth that people who seek out professional counselling for personal problems are somehow weak or incapable.

For people struggling with this belief, we offer another point of view. Seeking counselling is actually a healthy, positive step in problem solving. For other needs in our life, many of us will easily seek out the opinion or help of an expert - for our gardens, for our physical health, for fitness and for our finances. The list is endless. Therefore, seeking out a neutral, unbiased perspective and direction on our personal problems from a professional counsellor reflects resourcefulness. This is a strength and not a weakness.

## INSIDE THE COUNSELLOR'S OFFICE

For people who haven't been to a professional counsellor or spoken to someone who has, they are often left with their imagination or media images of what happens in counselling. Many of the images of counselling and counsellors that are presented in movies or on Talk TV are extreme or exaggerated for dramatic purposes.

In considering to use the EAP service, it is very common for people to wonder what it would be like to meet with a counsellor.

The counselling relationship is unique. A counsellor recognizes that even though people have similar problems, no two individuals experience them alike. Counsellors are trained to attune themselves to your needs - combining a genuine concern for you and your well-being with skill, objectivity and a strict code of professional ethics.

An essential feature of counselling is confidentiality - a counsellor's professional code of ethics dictates that they will

hold the information that a client shares with them in confidence. Exceptions are those situations where a person is at risk of harming themselves or another individual - here a counsellor's professional code of ethics and the law requires they involve appropriate authorities.

Often times people will feel as though they don't know where to start in discussing their issues. Your counsellor will help you feel comfortable discussing your situation by asking questions that will help draw out information regarding your personal situation. You do not need to come to the counselling session with a total grasp and explanation of your issues. That is why we are there for you. We understand that talking about private matters is difficult and that some people find it hard to begin, says Montreal counsellor Brigitte Lavoie. In such cases, I encourage people to take their time and begin anywhere they like. I am here to listen in order to understand their situation correctly and we will approach the situation one step at a time.

When we are in the midst of a personal problem, it is often hard to see things clearly. It can feel as if everything around us is falling apart. Through actively listening to you discuss your situation, the counsellor will ask further questions to gain more specific information and will provide feedback. Through this process, your EAP counsellor will help you clarify or see more clearly all of the things that are surrounding your concerns and that need your attention.

Personal problems are usually accompanied with a range of emotions. Part of the counsellor's role may be to help individuals acknowledge and express some of the painful feelings that are preventing them from dealing with their situation constructively. One client recalls, "my counsellor was empathic and compassionate just what I needed at a crucial point in my life."

## COUNSELLORS DO NOT CRITICIZE NOR DO THEY MINIMIZE YOUR PROBLEM

In helping people to resolve their problems, a counsellor draws upon a variety of techniques and resources depending on the nature of the problem and the individual they are working with. These may include methods for reducing stress or ways to develop communication skills that produce effective and satisfying results, says Peter Crawford-Smith. Counsellors may also recommend community resources that will provide additional support to the client. For example - support groups for those dealing with the loss of a loved one, assertiveness training workshops, parenting groups.

There are times when people are in crisis or life threatening situations. In these situations the counsellors will provide specific advice, or if necessary, take appropriate action to prevent anyone from coming to physical harm.

In most situations - those that are not life threatening - counsellors do not tell the client what they should do in a given situation. This is often a surprise to people who have not been to

a counsellor before. The EAP counsellor's primary task is to help people recognize and develop their own understandings and solutions to their issue. Your counsellor will help you establish or clarify goals for yourself; identify the possible steps to achieve them and support and encourage your progress. One couple notes, "we were very impressed by the counsellor's skill in leading us to a point where we could solve the problems ourselves. We now have ownership of the solution!"

In most cases your concerns can be addressed within the EAP Program. As each situation is unique, the counsellor will discuss with you the number of sessions required to resolve your particular situation. In those cases requiring highly specialized or long-term counselling, we will assist in connecting you with appropriate specialists in your community.

## IS EAP FOR ME?

One of the givens in life is that we will all have personal problems from time-to-time. There are times and situations where any one of us could benefit from working with a professional counsellor to resolve our problems. Contemplating the use of EAP is a terrific first step in deciding to act on those things that are troubling you. The next step is meeting with an EAP counsellor.

Having some information about the EAP counselling process helps many people feel more comfortable about taking that next step. It is our sincere wish that giving you a view of what happens inside EAP will encourage you to meet with an EAP counsellor when you are in need.

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your EAP counsellors to arrange a telephone or in-person counselling session.

All contact between you and your counsellor is completely confidential.

**English Service: 1-800-387-4765**  
**French Service: 1-800-361-5676**  
**General Information: 1-888-814-1328**