

A monthly newsletter published by Interface EAP

## Caring for Your Coworker

**B**ecause life is challenging, multitudes of personal problems may be carried into to the workplace. On a daily basis the workplace can host individuals having medical concerns, relationship problems, mental health difficulties, financial stresses, and trauma or grief reactions as a result of historical or current, real or perceived loss.

In an accepting and supportive environment, work can be helpful and therapeutic for the personally and emotionally stressed or troubled individual. A supportive workplace provides structure, routine, social contact and temporary reprieve from personal concerns, worries and problems. Though not a part of our job description or our personal responsibility to support a co-worker who is struggling with personal issues, we frequently find ourselves in the position where we want to be of help or are called upon to help. Frequently we are put in the position where we must choose to help or not to help, and decide upon the kind of help to offer, how much we can/will help, and for how long we can/will help.

Because we each have our own personal and/or work stresses that we face on a daily basis, at any given moment in time we will have different levels of concern for others, as well as ability, resources and energy to offer others. Always, it is important to recognize our own needs and remind ourselves that we have a choice and a right to choose not to help.

The following ideas, considerations and suggestions are offered to those who choose to help a co-worker who is struggling with personal issues:

- Remind yourself regularly that you have a choice to help or not to help.
- Offer emotional support in the form of acceptance, understanding, patience, and encouragement.
- Encourage the person, as needed, to seek treatment and/or to stay in treatment. Always encourage the person to talk about concerns, worries, and feelings with his or her counselor or therapist.



- Engage the person in conversation and be attentive. Resist the urge to function as a counselor or try to come up with answers to the person's concerns or problems.
- Avoid engaging the person in deep discussion of his or her feelings. Focus on talk about the here and now, everyday events and on his or her current thoughts, ideas and activities. Limit deep, personal conversation to break or lunch time.
- Remind the person of his or her personal strengths, contributions, accomplishments, and importance in the workplace.
- Know and respect your own personal and workplace responsibilities, needs, and limits. If you begin to feel imposed upon, frustrated or angry, or emotionally drained by the person, be honest and gently, but firmly set limits on the amount of time you spend with the person in the workplace and/or the content of the conversation. Remind yourself that you can support, offer suggestions and assist the person, but that they are responsible for their emotional health and well being and that it is ultimately their responsibility to solve life difficulties or problems.
- If you have difficulty setting limits on the person and their problems are negatively impacting or interfering with your work or personal life, ask your supervisor for assistance or contact the Employee Assistance Program.



# Generalized Anxiety Disorder: When Worry Gets Out of Control

People with anxiety disorders feel extremely fearful and unsure. Most people feel anxious about something for a short time now and again, but people with anxiety disorders feel this way most of the time. Their fears and worries make it hard for them to do everyday tasks.

All of us worry about things like health, money, or family problems at one time or another. But people with GAD are extremely worried about these and many other things, even when there is little or no reason to worry about them. They may be very anxious about just getting through the day. They think things will always go badly. At times, worrying keeps people with GAD from doing everyday tasks.

## Common symptoms experienced by people with GAD:

- > Worry very much about everyday things for at least six months, even if there is little or no reason
- > Inability to control constant worries and concerns
- > Aware that they worry much more than they should
- > Cannot relax
- > Difficulty concentrating
- > Easily startled
- > Have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep

## Common physical symptoms include:

- > Feeling tired for no reason
- > Headaches
- > Muscle tension and aches
- > Difficulty swallowing
- > Trembling or twitching
- > Being irritable
- > Sweating
- > Nausea
- > Feeling lightheaded
- > Feeling out of breath
- > Having to go to the bathroom a lot
- > Hot flashes



## When does GAD start?

GAD develops slowly. It often starts during the time between childhood and middle age. Symptoms may get better or worse at different times, and often are worse during times of stress.

People with GAD may visit a doctor many times before they find out they have this disorder. They ask their doctors to help them with the signs of GAD, such as headaches or trouble falling asleep, but do not always get the help they need right away. It may take doctors some time to be sure that a person has GAD instead of something else.

## Why do people get GAD?

GAD sometimes runs in families, but no one knows for sure why some people have it, while others do not. When chemicals in the brain are not at a certain level it can cause a person to have GAD. That is why medications often help with the symptoms because they help the brain chemicals stay at the correct levels. Counseling helps by helping to learn and adapt coping strategies for managing GAD.



## Coping with Chronic Pain

We have all heard the phrase, “no pain, no gain.” While this may be true in some instances, chronic pain that lingers on and on is not helpful and disrupts one’s normal life. Dealing with chronic pain has the potential to make one feel powerless, less independent and helpless. Achieving a sense of control is the key.

Try these tips:

- **Get The Facts.** Do all you can to understand your diagnosis, treatment options and prognosis. Get copies of test results and write out questions for your physician ahead of time.
- **Keep a journal.** Learn to recognize your own feelings, worries and anxieties. It may be difficult to talk to others about your pain and admitting how we feel to ourselves can also be a challenge. Develop a “pain scale” to help you track the pain daily.
- **Allow for Grief.** Dealing with chronic pain is much the same as dealing with other losses in that it has stages: Shock, Denial, Negotiation, Sadness, and Acceptance before being able to move on. Acceptance is not about “giving up” or feeling helpless. Rather, it is about having realistic expectations for yourself and developing a commitment to live up to them.
- **Know Yourself.** Be mindful of pain “triggers” and also things that seem to help.
- **Watch Your Mood.** Often, depressed mood and anxiety accompanies chronic medical conditions and pain. Talk counseling and antidepressant medication have been proven to help not only improve mood but also help reduce pain. In fact, some antidepressants act as “pain killers.”
- **Seek Support.** Family and friends may be very helpful. However, pain support groups may offer another avenue for honest and nonjudgmental feedback.
- **Try Mind Imagery.** Although the pain you are experience is very real, your mind through imagery may be a useful tool in coping.

Try this: Start by putting yourself in a relaxed position. Then begin to breath deeply and slowly, thinking the word “re...lax” at each breath. Slowly envision a symbol that represents your chronic pain, such as a loud, irritating noise or a painfully bright light bulb. Gradually reduce the irritating qualities of this symbol, for example dim the light or reduce the volume of the noise, thereby reducing the pain.

For more information and to access free confidential counseling and support services contact your Employee Assistance Program. You can do it, we can help!

Stress

Financial

Legal

Depression

For free and confidential assistance, call your  
Employee Assistance Program and speak with a Care Coordinator:

(713) 781-3364

(800) 324-4327

Se Habla Español

(800) 324-2490

Marital Problems

Family Problems

Alcohol/Drug Problems

Other Referrals

[www.4eap.com](http://www.4eap.com)

Your employer has contracted with Interface EAP to provide you an Employee Assistance Program.