



Investing in Your Workforce with Peer Support Services

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Numerous industries and professions understand the taxing nature of delivering necessary services in demanding environments: Education, health care, emergency response and social services, to name a few.

Yet, responsibilities within these careers are sometimes burdened with such extreme emotional, behavioral and/or physical weight that they can lead to unhealthy amounts of stress and eventual burnout. In worst-case scenarios, employees succumb to secondary traumatic experiences.

It's also believed that the best care and support often comes from inside the trenches. A first responder may be wary of talking with a human resources representative or the promise of confidentiality promoted by a counseling benefit. However, if a peer has had the opportunity to train in methods of support and offers aid in that first responder's time of need, he or she may be more likely to seek help.

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A Deep Dive into Peer Support

To clarify, peer support is neither counseling nor therapy. Rather, it's a way with which organizations can contextualize the need for familiar employee supports in high-stress workplaces.

Peer support services have long been linked as a core competency of effective employee assistance. Engaging employees well-versed in their workplace culture has frequently helped serve as a bridge between co-workers and available resources, such as an employee assistance program (EAP).

Akin to psychological first aid—assisting people in the immediate aftermath of a crisis in order to reduce initial distress and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning (see [After the Crisis: Providing Psychological First Aid to the Traumatized](#))—peer support capitalizes on an organization's ability to invest in its human capital, a rich resource unequivocally qualified to understand the challenges faced daily by staff.

From addressing compassion fatigue to coping with vicarious trauma, training employees in peer support practices enables them to provide an empathetic outlet for their fellow professionals, nullifying concerns of “outsiders” who don't necessarily comprehend the day-to-day realities of a specific workplace, industry or field of business.