

Suicide Threats

If you become aware that an employee has made a suicidal statement or threat, it is important to take this threat seriously. Whether the threat is stated explicitly or in passing, at work or away from work, it is important to deal with this difficult and sensitive issue directly. Below are some steps to help guide you through this employee issue:

If you are speaking with the employee when the threat is made:

- **You may wish to get HR involved right away.**
- **Find a private place to talk.** This could be in HR or in a manager's office or in a conference room.
- Tell the employee that you take this very seriously, and that you are not personally trained to help them. Therefore, say that **"We have the Employee Assistance Program where there are trained counselors who can help you and help us understand how we can help you. I'd like you to talk to someone at the EAP. It is confidential."** Take them to the available office and call the EAP.
- When an EAP counselor answers, tell them your name and the company you work for. **Tell the counselor that you are with an employee who needs immediate assistance.**
- Tell the employee that you would like permission to speak to the EAP Counselor after he/she is done so that you can understand what follow up or assistance is needed for the employee. Then, put the employee on the phone to speak with the counselor. **If the employee would prefer that you leave the room at this point, please do so.**
- When you get back on the phone with the EAP counselor, ask what the next steps are. The counselor will then tell you whatever the appropriate next steps would be, and whether or not the employee should go home. **Please note – the EAP counselor has to protect confidentiality. You will not get personal information about the employee.** However, if the employee has given permission, the EAP counselor will give you some next steps to take. Or, if there is immediate risk, the counselor can break confidentiality to protect people's safety.
- If the employee hangs up without you speaking with the EAP counselor, ask the employee what the counselor told them to do. If the employee does not wish to discuss this, **don't push it too hard – respect his/her privacy.** (You can also call the EAP back and ask for whatever information and direction the counselor can give you.)
- Depending on what the counselor or the employee says, ask the employee if they are going to go home. If the decision is for the employee to go home, ask if they would like you to call someone – especially if the employee lives alone. Before the employee leaves the premises, ask them **(1) to call you when they arrive at home; and (2) to give you the name and telephone number of a friend or family member you can call to check on them.** Also, suggest that they call the friend or family member for support.

If you learn of a threat from a third party:

- **You may wish to get HR involved right away.**
- Ask the employee, who you were told made the threat, to speak with you in a private office.
- Ask the employee if they indeed made the threat.
- If the employee says "no," then tell him that someone thought they did, and remind them about **the Employee Assistance Program as a resource that can assist them if they are in need of support.**
- If they say "yes," then follow the procedure in the previous section.
- **You can always call the EAP** and request a consultation about the situation.

If the employee is threatening suicide right away or if you feel that the employee presents an imminent danger to others:

- **Call 911, and they will send emergency help.**
- Try to keep the employee calm in a private office or conference room to respect their privacy.
- **Keep the incident as low-key as possible** so as to not disrupt or alarm

In all cases:

- **Involve HR,** even if it is simply notification that the incident has happened.
- **Do NOT** make any judgments concerning whether or not the threat is "real." **All threats are to be taken very seriously.**
- **Call the EAP.** The counselors are trained to help with 'people problems', including mental health problems. They can help with the immediate situation, and also consult about how to handle the impact on other employees, and how to manage the employee in the workplace ongoing.