



EAP

help when you need it most —confidentially

Life happens.

Like everyone else, letter carriers must sometimes confront a personal crisis. We may face stress from life-changing events such as a house fire, death in the family, or natural disaster, or maybe we are forced to deal with chemical addiction, depression or suicidal thoughts. We may have an aging parent or a child with a disability who needs additional care. We might run into legal or financial problems, or there could be everyday stresses over relationships or family that haven't led to crisis yet.

So it's great to know that letter carriers have a place to go for help.

The USPS Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is available to any postal employee, or to family members living in the employee's household, to help with life's challenges. It's a free, voluntary and confidential program that offers assessment, counseling, consultation, life coaching, critical response, and training to postal employees and their families.

"Most carriers never need EAP, but for those who do, it can be a lifesaver," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "For all of us, it's a bit like insurance—you may never use it, but it's reassuring to know that it is there for you."

Letter carriers are used to handling challenges and getting things done—it's practically part of our job description. From supporting a charity to saving a postal patron from a burning house, letter carriers are the kind of people whom others in the community rely on. We're usually more accustomed to helping than asking for help, so some of us might not know where to turn when we experience a crisis of our own.

EAP's function is to make sure postal workers have easy, private access to the right kind of help. EAP counselors can assess problems and refer a postal worker in need to whatever resources are available.

Some reasons a postal employee might turn to the EAP include difficulty dealing with family, children, marriage, parenting, divorce, care for the elderly, child care, depression and other emotional issues,

grief or loss, substance abuse, anxiety, job performance and personal or work relationship problems.

During the first EAP appointment, client and counselor work together to help clarify the problem, identify options, and develop a plan of action. The plan may involve short-term EAP counseling or a referral to another resource for longer-term or specialized services. EAP counselors also are available for counseling services by telephone.

"We want you to be successful in the workplace, but we want you to be successful with your family and in your community, too," said Bob McCullough, director and national consultant for the EAP. McCullough works for Magellan Health, the company contracted by the Postal Service to run EAP.

To help achieve those successes, EAP provides a wealth of services beyond direct counseling of a postal worker in need.

EAP staff members don't just wait for people in need to come to them. Wherever a disaster strikes, natural or otherwise, it could cause stress or anxiety among postal workers or overwhelm their ability to cope, so EAP staff go to the location of the disaster to help. For instance, EAP helped postal employees in the Northeast struggling to deal with loss of homes, the lives of friends and neighbors, as well as financial recovery and other stresses caused by Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

"In every disaster, there are psychological effects," McCollough said. "The larger the crisis, the larger the impact." EAP staff members offer help and train postal workers to see the symptoms of stress in others, such as absenteeism or lethargy, and to keep an eye out for these symptoms after the disaster passes, since they can manifest days or weeks after the trouble is over. Looking for signs of stress in others is a form of leadership that EAP emphasizes. In a crisis situation, leadership means being prepared in advance, having a plan and looking out for others, whether it be co-workers or family members.

Even an isolated incident that seems to affect only one person, such as a suicide or assault on a worker, may require help on a larger scale, McCollough said. "There's a ripple effect. Imagine a bull's-eye with one person in the middle, but others are affected at work or in the family."

The people who could be affected, and the way they might respond, can't easily be predicted, either. "Suppose a postal worker has been assaulted," McCollough said. "Most co-workers in the station may say that's sad, that's unfair, but then you may find someone else had also been a victim of assault, and a flood of emotions can come back." That person could need more help than the average person, McCullough said.

EAP also helps postal workers support each other or deal with the repercussions of other people's challenges. "Say you know a co-worker is having some issues," McCollough said. "Something seems to be wrong, but you aren't sure what." EAP counselors will help you to size up the problem, McCollough said, and to decide how to approach that person to offer help, including possibly referring the co-worker or family member to EAP.

In the case of a co-worker who shows the signs of an acute problem, such as suicidal thoughts, a consultation with EAP could save a life. But how do you talk to someone about your concerns if they haven't shared them? "That's a hard conversation to start," McCollough said. A consultation with EAP could help.

EAP even offers life coaching, a service for anyone who wants to achieve specific goals at home or at work. Life coaching is designed to maximize a postal employee's strengths. It could involve removing a barrier toward a career goal, such as improving communication skills on the job. It could be personal as well, McCollough said. "Let's say you have a high school reunion and you want to look better—you want to drop 20 pounds. We'll build a map to get you to that goal," he said.

In addition to direct services, EAP offers on its website, EAP4you.com, a library of information about all kinds of life challenges, including self-assessments, resources for parents and caregivers of the elderly, and tools and calculators for making financial, legal or personal decisions.

Magellan Health's counselors are licensed professionals. When an employee makes contact with Magellan, a counselor there will typically begin to put together an assessment to determine what kind of help the employee needs and provide short-term counseling, in person or on the phone, followed by a selection of referrals that may be needed and appropriate for continued care and follow-up.

Any contact with EAP or counselors is confidential. The confidentiality of conversations with EAP counselors is protected by federal and state laws as well as by professional ethical standards. EAP may not release information without the prior written consent of the client. Only child or elder abuse, or imminent danger to self or others, can supersede confidentiality laws. (Some veteran carriers may remember an older version of the program that did less to assure confidentiality, but that program is gone.)

Remember, EAP services are available to any postal worker or any member of a postal worker's immediate household. "We want families to know they can use it, too," McCollough said.

All of EAP's services, including services to family members, are free.

"Our EAP is a wonderful resource," NALC Director of Safety and Health Manuel Peralta said. "It has changed many lives for the better. I urge anyone who needs help to reach out to EAP."

Consider some anonymous comments from a few postal workers who took advantage of EAP's life coaching, for example:

"I wanted to thank you for facilitating the EAP coaching sessions with me," one client said. "With the overwhelming tasks and e-mails we are

challenged with every day, you helped me to filter through the workload mass and extrapolate the vital few tasks that really move the rock."

"Together, we set and implemented goals and reviewed our success to those goals the following week," another client said. "I found it refreshing to shoulder tough decisions with an advisor to motivate action, since I knew we would discuss our progress the next session. You also made it a point to celebrate success, which we tend to overlook."

EAP is managed jointly by USPS and its unions. The national unions work with USPS headquarters, while on the local level, most postal districts have district advisory committees (DACs) made up of postal workers from each craft and management representatives. DACs monitor the use of EAP services in their districts and publicize the availability of EAP services to postal workers.

"April is EAP Awareness Month, so it's a great time to remember that letter carriers have this great resource available," Peralta added. "Remember, EAP isn't just for the most serious of problems, either. Letter carriers can use it for all kinds of situations where they just need information or a little help, or even to make a good thing better through life coaching. Check out the website and don't be afraid to call."

This month also marks Workers Memorial Day, April 28, a day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job and to renew our efforts for safe workplaces. For more about Workers Memorial Day, check out the AFL-CIO's website at aflcio.org/WorkersMemorialDay.

To get help from EAP, you can start by visiting its website at eap4you.com. The website gives you access to a host of self-help tools and resources, including educational articles, self-screening tools, community resources and recorded webinars.

You can also call EAP's always available service center at 800-EAP-4YOU (800-327-4968; TTY: 877-492-7341). **PR**