Workplace Counselling

Workplace Counselling Works!

At Mediation & Counselling NI we work with employers to develop workplace counselling programs that suit your business needs and the needs of your employees.

Workplace counselling is one of the key factors to organisational success!
Why do organisations offer workplace counselling?

Benefits of Workplace Counselling

From his studies Friery (2006), found the following reasons why organisations offer counselling to their employees:

- Provide additional support for workers
- Duty of care
- Support employees through major changes
- Stress alleviation
- Enhancing welfare package
- Support work of HR
- Protect from litigation
- Improve retention
- Improve sickness absence

Workplace counselling reaps many benefits and can also provide a helpful way of addressing issues and diffusing situations. Workplace counselling can also help to enhance or improve the image of an organisation as one which offers workplace counselling to its staff is perceived as being concerned with the well being of its employees.

In his reviews McLeod (2001) obtained evidence to support the success of workplace counselling and found the following traits among staff.

- Sickness Absence was reduced by 25%
- Happier attitude towards work
- Fewer accidents
- Better Performance
- Improvements in depression and anxiety

Give Your Staff a Morale Boost!
Friery (2006) conducted a survey on 6,000 employees and found that providing additional support was the most popular reason for providing counselling to employees. The next reason was duty of care or the organisation’s responsibility under a host of employment laws to provide a safe and healthy working environment. Jenkins (2006) cites workplace counselling as a ‘shield against litigation’ and a ‘weapon fighting for duty of care’.

Millar (2002) carried out qualitative research studies and discovered that the majority of participants felt counselling helped them to overcome their personal issues. Some participants said that the learning process they underwent during counselling was helpful.

Guidelines for Counselling in the Workplace
BACP 2007

"Many of the sickness absence surveys are now suggesting that work-related stress and mental health are the leading cause of long term lost working days, as well as a major source of invalidity claims at work. There is mounting evidence that counselling at work can provide the social support that many need when they are not coping with the excessive pressures. We hope that these guidelines will make a difference and help ‘the many’ who suffer silently."

Professor Cary Cooper, CBE, Professor of Organisational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University and President of BACP
What is Workplace Counselling?

Workplace counselling is the provision of counselling services to employees by their employer.

Workplace counsellors are expected to work within a short-term framework. Employees accessing counselling normally have a limited number of sessions available to them, usually between two and six sessions. If further support is required, counsellors may refer employees onwards to alternative primary care resources, which may not necessarily be funded by the organisation. Workplace counsellors are expected to have an understanding of organisational cultures and workplace factors that might impact on their work. They should be mindful of the different stakeholders involved and be aware of potential conflict between the needs of the client, the organisation, the counselling provision and additional parties. Although counselling is a major component of an employee support service provision, the provider needs to develop an understanding of, and expertise in, a number of related activities including coaching, mediation, trauma-management services and practical information (e.g. debt management, legal advice or benefits information).

Service providers should be able to conduct routine stress audits. This will help purchasing organisations meet their legal obligations to carry out risk assessments. Whilst service providers can provide support to employees to increase their coping resources through counselling, stress management and mental health awareness training, the organisation has a duty of care to ensure a safe and healthy working environment is provided.
How do employees access the counselling service

Self Referrals & Referrals from Managers

Self Referrals

Self-referrals (where the employee chooses to refer themselves for counselling) are most commonly made available to employees, and these are strictly confidential. Even the fact that an employee has made contact with the service provider is protected. The advantage of this is that employees can take responsibility for themselves and get support freely without anyone in the organisation being aware of their referral. It should be noted that in some circumstances the self-referred client has an option to inform management and obtain time off from work to attend counselling. Alternatively they may wish to keep counselling confidential and go in their own time. Some purchasers may wish to concentrate their efforts on those employees who are in most need, such as those absent from work, particularly those with ‘stress’.

Referrals from Managers

This type of referral is used when a manager is concerned about an employees sickness absence often associated with anxiety or depression. Counsellors can provide management with information on presented issues which can be used by organisations to conduct analysis and identify trends. It also means that employees who may not have referred themselves can make use of the counselling service.

On the other hand employees who are referred by their manager may feel forced which may adversely affect the potential benefits of counselling. In these cases, counsellors at Mediation & Counselling NI are trained and experienced in writing confidential reports and alleviating employees concerns. The counsellor can also act as a mediator between the employee and the employer to address issues to reach resolutions.

Will Employees Use the Counselling Service?

At Mediation & Counselling NI, we develop a program which includes information on how the service can be introduced to staff and promoted within the workplace. The service is presented in a professional and approachable manner and staff are assured of our confidentiality policy. An organisation can elect to facilitate access to the service using one of two methods.

1. Employees who wish to participate in the counselling service telephone Mediation & Counselling NI directly to make an appointment and we inform the organisation that an employee (who remains anonymous) has availed of the service.

2. Employees contact HR to participate in the counselling service. HR then contact Mediation & Counselling NI to make an appointment on behalf of the employee.
Employees who avail of workplace counselling often speak to their counsellors about work related issues. The revelation of these issues provide organisations with essential data and information which can be used to identify problems within the business or among staff, or areas of the business processes that require attention. The disclosure of such information does not compromise confidentiality and maintains anonymity for the employee.

In 2011/12 the Health & Safety Executive reported that 40% of work related illnesses were attributed to work related stress. The education sector was among the industries which reported the highest rates of total cases of work related stress. Teaching and Educational professionals were among the occupations that reported the highest rates of total cases of work related stress.

The main work activities attributed by respondents as causing their work-related stress, or making it worse is displayed in the diagram below.
Personal Issues can be addressed during workplace counselling sessions

When employees are experiencing issues at home and in their personal lives, these experiences can adversely affect their work. Issues such as bereavement, relationship difficulties, financial worries, sleep deprivation and addiction can impact on work manifesting themselves in affects such as deterioration in performance, lack of motivation, reduced patience or tolerance, increased accidents and higher sickness absence rate. In comparison, negative experiences at work such as harassment, bullying and work related stress can have adverse affects on employees personal lives.

How do you know if you have work-related stress?

If you have work-related stress, you may find that you:

- often rush to get things done
- try to be in too many places at once
- don’t take breaks or miss lunch
- take work home
- don't have enough time for exercise or relaxation
- spend less time with your family
- don’t take your full holiday entitlement
- work longer hours

According to a study by The Work Foundation, nearly a third of men agree that the demands of their job seriously interfere with their personal life. A quarter of men feel that they have neglected their family commitments.