



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
April 2022

Fitness for Duty (FFD) Assessments: A Guide for Supervisors

By Julee Clark
Contact at: jclark@fchn.com

There are times at work when an employee's behavior is alarming or unusual enough that it sets off a serious alert with supervisors and staff. The behavior in question may seem dangerous, scary or cause grave concern for the employee, as well as co-workers.

If an employer is looking for a guarantee of safety and competency regarding an employee's mental health or physical ability to work, then a Fitness for Duty (FFD) evaluation may be warranted.

Initially, it is important to rule out possible substance abuse as a source of behaviors, especially if there is reasonable suspicion of chemical dependency. If policies are in place, employers can require someone to submit to an immediate drug test. This will help discern whether the behaviors may relate to possible substance abuse, medical conditions or mental health issues.

During the FFD process, an employee is usually removed from their job role temporarily, until they are stabilized and cleared to work again by the evaluating professional. It may also be prudent to consult with your legal team before proceeding, depending on the topic of concern.

Employee behaviors that may call for FFD assessments:

- Direct verbal or physical threats of violence, aggression, or harm toward others. Threats become more lethal when there are known means or weapons available, recent work conflicts, disagreements, job losses, or serious personal, health, financial, relationship stressors.
- Communicated thoughts or threats of suicide or self-harm. The employee may communicate with words, text, social media, or notes. Even if the employer hears through a third party, it is important to follow up on the information and take it seriously.
- Sudden or prolonged no-call no-show attendance problems, with no response to outreach calls by employer. Police welfare checks may be warranted at times.
- Deteriorating mental health behaviors with psychotic symptoms such as: delusions (irrational or paranoid beliefs), hallucinations (seeing things or hearing voices that are not real), erratic, unpredictable or unusual behaviors that cause alarm, or severe mood swings that are disruptive.
- Severe lethargy, falling asleep at their desk, unpredictable crying, flat or depressed mood, not focusing, not following instructions or performing work tasks sufficiently.
- Performance and liability concerns for safety sensitive regulations or DOT driving duties.

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Who conducts the FFD assessment?

FFDs require a high level of evaluation typically provided by a medical doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist. This level of assessment is beyond the scope of EAP providers. A medical professional conducts an in-depth mental and physical assessment to address the recent workplace concerns.

Assessment results will address the employee's work competency, timeline for return to duty, appropriate task abilities, and shift hours. The provider also provides any necessary medication prescriptions to the employee. Post-evaluation, the provider may further recommend an employee attend follow up medical appointments, individual mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, or special support groups.

Employees should sign a consent for release of information with all providers involved in their assessment and follow up care. This allows everyone involved in the case to provide information directly to the employer. At times, the FFD assessment provider determines that it would not be prudent to return an employee to work immediately. The medical provider and Human Resource team then work together to determine the next steps in the process. Employers should discuss options for arranging leaves of absence and job status, on a case by case basis with each worker.

EAP consultation and support:

As you move forward, First Choice Health EAP Clinicians are available 24/7 for consultation to help guide your decision making process. We can provide coaching for when and how to discuss your concerns with the employee, as well as how to address the Fitness for Duty requirement. Employees may consult with their health-care and medical insurance programs for assistance with referrals. Financial costs vary and are managed case by case between the employer and the relevant health insurance plan if available. The EAP can assist in directing clients to resources for FFD providers.

Contact our EAP experts at (800) 777-4114 and ask for a Clinical Account Executive to initiate a consultation. We are here to assist you with any of your employee concerns.