



# Your Employee Assistance Program

by MARIE WALL

**H**ave you ever had a time when you felt it would have been useful to have someone objective to speak with? Or do you remember a time when a colleague needed more help than you could offer and you wished you knew someone to call? Many teachers do not realize there is a program that can be of assistance to them or their colleagues. It was for these reasons that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for Teachers was developed. This program has been in existence since 1986 and its mandate is twofold – to support teachers (including counselling referrals), and Wellness Promotion, a pro-active measure to encourage health and well-being. Thousands of teachers have benefited from this program over the years either through individual contact or through one of its many workshops which have been conducted throughout the province.

---

**“Whether a teacher is troubled by financial strains, addictions, overwhelming stress or adjustment to a new workload, the EAP is a resource to aid in finding the supports necessary to make adjustments in one’s life.”**

---

The EAP is beneficial to teachers when they require assistance in maintaining or regaining their health. The Program was developed for teachers due to concern for people needing assistance for personal or professional issues. Initially the focus was on workplace issues that were interfering with a teacher’s ability to perform their classroom duties. This expanded over the years to include all life issues that directly or indirectly influence a teacher’s ability to perform their work. Whether a teacher is troubled by financial strains, addictions, overwhelming stress or adjustment to a new workload, the EAP is a resource to aid in finding the supports necessary to make adjustments in one’s life. It is clear that

personal concerns and difficulties that go unaddressed can have a negative impact on the teacher and consequently, on the classroom. Knowing there are supports in place to assist a teacher if an issue arises is very useful, whether it is for yourself or a colleague. Your EAP is a resource made available to you and it is a service essential to the continuing health of our educators.

The EAP for Teachers is a confidential program that provides counselling support throughout the province through assessment, referral, and financial assistance. We refer teachers to local counsellors to provide the counselling service they request and we provide financial aid for payment of the professional fees. Teachers have available \$2,000 for counselling service over the lifetime of their career. For each session the program will pay 50% of the fee up to a maximum of \$40. For teachers who have to travel to attain services, the program provides a travel allowance of 5.6¢/km. For teachers who live in small centres that may not have private counselling services available, phone counselling is made available through the two EAP coordinators, at no cost to the teacher.

It is believed that being a service devoted solely to the aid of teachers experiencing trouble is not enough. The Wellness Promotion is a key component to this program in promoting health and awareness of balanced living in a pro-active manner essential to the continued health of teachers. This component of the program was implemented eight years ago and is responsible for providing workshops, developing materials and creating awareness of the issues, which are important to teachers’ health. As you know, a teacher’s focus is on children, lessons and all the concerns and duties in the school community. The emphasis of the Wellness Program is health promotion to encourage teachers to take stock of themselves and foster decisions and action to develop healthy habits in various aspects of their personal and professional life.

There is a lot of concern about stress, about where it comes from and what to do with it. While stress is a

given, learning to manage the stressors and cope with stress in a healthy manner is very important. Balance in the demands of work and home life is of utmost concern for all of us. As an employee there are responsibilities to the employer, yet we have to meet our obligations to our families and community. Creating a healthy balance of work and home, therefore, is a prerequisite to healthy living. Taking care of both is possible. It takes awareness and commitment. Wellness Promotion works to develop the awareness and create strategies to find a healthy balance in life, one that is essential to us both personally and professionally.

Your EAP is continuing to grow. Strategies are being considered on how to reach more teachers in a meaningful way. We have been participating in the School District Conferences, having already worked with approximately 150 teachers during the first week of September. Over the next two months we will participate in four more such conferences. Other activities that we are developing are enhancing the EAP information on the NLTA website, creating ways to promote wellness as an ongoing part of the culture of teaching, and finding ways to have an ongoing presence in teachers' lives. Our hope is that our working together will help you make decisions early, which will inform you about how you proceed throughout the year in creating a healthy balance. Our aim is to encourage positive teacher health, both mental and physical.

The EAP for Teachers is a tri-party program. The NLTA, the Department of Education and the School Boards Association are all partners in this program and support its continued success. In its creation, parties saw the wisdom in having a program available to teachers to provide support and promote health and wellness. There are two coordinators who work with teachers throughout the province. If you would like further information or if you have any suggestions or comments, please feel free to contact us. We would like to have your input. You may reach us at 726-3223 or 1-800-563-3599 (toll free) – Marie Wall (ext. 265) or Kathy Taylor-Rogers (ext. 242).