

COVID-19 Conversations

August 10, 2020

ISU Extension and Outreach Leadership and Supervisors

On behalf of the Open for Iowa Committee, thank you for the committed work you have done over the last four months to help our colleagues and the larger system navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. We have valued the opportunity to work alongside you in helping to build a #StrongIowa. As we consider next steps for our committee, we conducted a survey to seek input from our colleagues.

The majority of respondents indicated that they had the information they needed, and it was clear to them. However, some shared concerns that will drive our committee's work going forward. One concern relates to returning to the office and how to navigate conversations with coworkers about personal safety preferences.

Our committee has created an optional guide for supervisors and leaders within our organization to use while holding conversations about returning to the office. Having these conversations within offices, program areas, and other workgroups within the system can allow all employees to be heard and continue to build a #StrongIowa.

Please identify teams and workgroups that would benefit from a regular (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.) conversation about expectations for their work environment moving forward. Identify how to make this conversation a priority at an upcoming staff meeting.

Please consider using this tool to help staff be more confident and supportive of one another as they navigate working together.

Thank you.

ISU Extension and Outreach Open for Iowa Committee

Discussion goal: Open for Iowa survey responses showed many staff are concerned about safety and protocols when returning to the office. This discussion is meant to help work teams set the foundation for how they will work together through COVID-19. Through mutual understanding and productive communication, we can help all people on our team feel more confident in their work environment.

Training: Learn more about the unique stressors that come with COVID-19 by watching this [video](#) from Utah State University Extension.

Discussion Element #1:

We can think about our preferences as fitting two different models. See the descriptions for 'Cardinal' and 'Gold' below. Each person should be prepared to share if they see themselves more closely aligned with Cardinal or Gold. Each staff member's preferences should be shared with the team and all members should honor each other's preferences. This conversation should not include discussion of private health-related information.

Cardinal

- I prefer to exercise a high level of caution. I will wear a face covering when talking to you and will maintain six feet physical distance.
- I will bring my own supplies and tools for collaborative activities or will be prepared to clean the tools available to me.
- I would prefer not to use shared workspaces.
- I am happy to attend virtual meetings.

Gold

- I am being cautious.
- I will remain six feet away and do not expect a face covering if physical distancing is maintained.
- I am willing to share tools and common workspaces if cleaning protocols are followed.
- I am happy to attend virtual or in-person meetings if six feet of physical distance is maintained.

Personal Preference Table Tents

Your staff may want to use these table tents to show their preference as we continue to move through the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Cardinal or Gold Table Tents](#) – on MyExtension under “Face Coverings and Universal Precaution Signs”

Discussion Element #2

There will be times when someone in our work team/office tests positive for COVID-19 and/or lives with someone who tests positive. Review with the team the university [protocol](#), guidance from [Open for Iowa](#), and the [Screening for COVID-19 Training and Guidance](#). Discuss the value of confidentiality and discretion with this information. Assure the team that staff will know if they have been exposed, but otherwise they do not need to be concerned with knowing a colleague's status.

Discussion Element #3

Navigating a pandemic is stressful. Our colleagues are balancing many competing priorities and doing so in a context that is completely unfamiliar to us.

We can be a support to each other and use the resources available to us. Review the Staff Friendly Return to Work document on [Open for Iowa](#) for self-care and wellbeing tips. Discuss with your work team how you can support each other in these areas.

Determine if your county is enrolled in the Employee Assistance Program.

If you do not know your EAP status, contact your regional director or office supervisor.

If your county does not offer EAP, consider these alternatives:

- [Iowa Concern Hotline](#)
- [COVID-19 Recovery Iowa](#)

If staff on your work team have access to the Employee Assistance Program, review the information below.

The [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) is an incredibly valuable resource for staff. EAP eligible participants include all Benefit Eligible ISU employees (faculty, professional & scientific, most county extension offices through [the Iowa Extension Council Association](#), merit and pre/post-doctoral), as well as immediate family members. Immediate family members include family members living in your home, and legal dependents who may live elsewhere. Family members may contact the EAP on their own and receive the same confidential services listed below.

The EAP is a benefit that helps you and your family with issues affecting your day-to-day performance and health, including stress, anxiety, depression, parenting, relationships, substance abuse, and legal and financial concerns. This benefit is provided by qualified professionals at no cost to you. When you call the EAP, a licensed professional counselor will help you decide what steps to take to improve your situation. [Employee & Family Resources](#) offers confidential assistance to you and your family members for a wide range of concerns including life coaching, financial consultation, identify theft resolution, legal consultation, elder care resources, real life solutions, and better living.

What happens when I call the EAP?

An EAP counselor will ask you to describe your concerns. The counselor will spend whatever time is needed with you. The counselor will also connect you with one or more of the many EAP services that can help you.

How much will it cost to use EAP services?

Your employer provides this benefit at no cost to you or your family members. The program covers six free visits with a counselor. If you are referred for additional assistance beyond what is provided by the EAP, the financial responsibility will be yours. Employees should check with their health insurance provider to see if coverage is available for these referral services.

Who will know I used the EAP?

EAP services are confidential. No one will be given any information without your permission within the strict limits of the law.

What are the credentials of the EAP counselors?

EAP counselors have masters or doctoral degrees. They are counseling professionals who have experience in a variety of behavioral health fields and are licensed and/or credentialed in their state of practice.

How can I find out more about EAP?

If EAP coverage is through Employee and Family Resources, contact:

- Call anytime - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800-327-4692 (TTY 877-542-6488)
- www.efr.org/myeap

If EAP is through another vendor, share that contact information.

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