

Would Counseling/Treatment Cost Me My Security Clearance?

Some employees have the misconception that if they seek professional counseling, they will jeopardize their security clearance eligibility. This concern is not based on fact or policy.

Everyone tangles, from time to time, with stress- or depression-causing influences, such as grief or divorce. Usually people can cope with such feelings and recapture a general sense of well-being. At other times, someone may want to seek expert advice and counseling when a problem becomes particularly troubling or long-lasting. In such instances, counseling is a good course of action to take. In fact, delaying or failing to seek assistance may cause feelings of despair or stress to get worse.

The mere fact of counseling or therapy will not, by itself, result in the denial or revocation of an access authorization. To the contrary, the act of seeking help is seen as a sensible step and evidence of good judgment. Therefore, such counseling will not damage one's access authorization eligibility. An exception will occur when there is evidence that a person is suffering from a severe mental illness that may negatively impact that person's behavior, judgment or reliability. Such serious situations are very rare. However, people should know that, in order to determine whether a person has a severe mental or emotional health condition that warrants such concern, they may be asked relevant questions by the investigator conducting their background investigation and/or by DOE personnel security professionals. Such questions should never be taken as implying that there is a "problem" with the person, or that their chances of maintaining their access authorization are necessarily in jeopardy.

If any of us is confronting stress or depression that just seems unmanageable and wants to get help, any good professional source, such as the DOE Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or a family physician, can provide advice on what help is available. Headquarters employees may obtain referral assistance from the DOE EAP, Office of Human Resources, HC-33, <http://humancapital.doe.gov/resources/Website-Info-Employee%20Assistance%20Program.pdf>. To contact EAP at other sites, please call or visit your occupational medical clinic or human resources office. Many DOE personnel have sought such assistance and have retained both their access authorization and professional reputation - no one should feel that they have to suffer in silence.