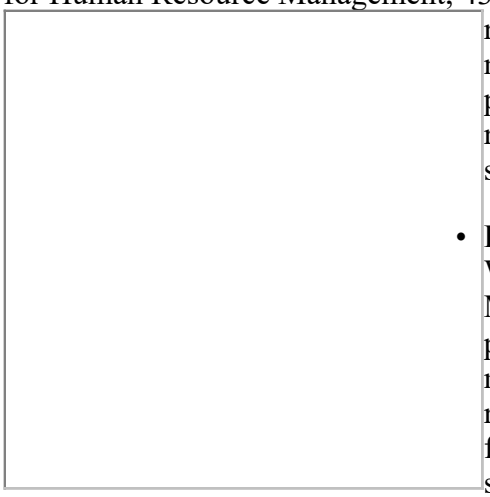
Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Tips for managing the perceptions of relationships in the office

Love is in the air - at work - and it's not likely to go away. According to a recent study by the Society for Human Resource Management, 43 per cent of human resource professionals reported office romances. Of these, 79 per cent reported either an increase in number (12 per cent) or consistent levels of office romances (67 per cent) in the last five years. All of those relationships are sure to raise a few eyebrows. So how do you manage perceptions and squash office gossip?



- **Recognize the benefits of office romance.** A survey by Workplace Options and Public Policy Polling found that most Millennial workers (71 per cent) view workplace romances positively, citing effects such as improved performance and morale. 84 per cent of Millennials say they would engage in romance with a co-worker. In contrast, just 36 per cent of workers from Generation X and 29 per cent of Baby Boomers said the same. If the couple in question adheres to your company's policies on dating and plays by the rules, you'll likely be able to find several beneficial aspects to the relationship if you look for them. For example, the individuals may be more productive or happier on the job.

- **Deal with gossip about those involved in the relationship immediately.** Gossip and rumors can negatively impact productivity, hurt feelings, and have long-term detrimental effects on mental health. Containing workplace gossip is a must. When gossip comes to your attention, you may need to speak with the instigator in order to contain it. Leading by example and clarifying expectations of a gossip-free workplace can also play an important role.

- **Deal with perception of those involved.** Credibility and trust could be at stake. For example, one employee may hesitate to share information with another if the other employee is dating a manager. According to an article on *Psychology Today,* a study about peers who date at work found that employees perceived co-workers who dated superiors as less credible than those who dated peers. In addition, women were deemed as less trustworthy and less credible than men in an office romance situation. As a manager, you may not be able to shape the perceptions of others, but you should be aware of their existence and their potential impact on the rest of the team. Refer to your company's policy on office dating, set boundaries and communicate your expectations of appropriate behaviour.

- **Have a plan for when romances fail.** What happens if the couple breaks up or if a married employee goes through a separation or divorce? While it may seem grim to plan for such an event in advance, your company's dating policy should address this issue. On a positive note, according to Match.com's *Single in America survey*, over half of those involved in a failed office romance reported that it did not affect their professional relationship.

Guess who met at work?

- President and Michelle Obama

- Ozzy and Sharon Osborne
- Bill and Melinda Gates

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