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

How to manage an office romance

With people spending 40 plus hours per week at the office, relationships are an integral part of our work environment. Though you may prefer them to be purely professional, office romances are a fact of life.



In fact, 39% of employees said that over the course of their career they had dated at least one co-worker. The survey found that most office romances begin outside of the office when co-workers bump into each other elsewhere.

Are office romances a potential problem?

No question, they can be problematic; especially given that most office romances last just a few months. Potential concerns include:

Distraction and lost productivity
- Charges of favouritism
- Anger and antagonism if the relationship goes sour
- Office gossip and jealousy
- Sexual harassment allegations

Implement a policy before an office romance develops. Because office romances are common, the ideal time to deal with this sensitive issue is by establishing a clear policy about office dating beforehand. With a policy in place, office romances can be managed rationally and proactively, without emotion. A policy can also reduce confusion and address concerns about favouritism.

Develop an office romance policy to suit your workplace culture. What's appropriate for your company may be unacceptable for another. With this in mind, collaborate with senior management to draft an office romance policy that's best for your specific situation. For example, is your organization large enough to facilitate a transfer so that romantic couples won't have to work side-by-side or with one partner reporting to the other? Should you ban office romances completely or would a professional code of conduct be a better choice? When developing a policy on office romance, keep the following ideas in mind:

- **What's acceptable and what's not?** For example, you may tolerate relationships between co-workers but not between managers and subordinates or between employees and clients.
- **Sexual harassment.** Now would be a good time to revisit or develop your company's sexual harassment policy, as well as provide sexual harassment training for all staff.
- **Relationship disclosure requirements.** Some companies require disclosure if relationships become romantic or serious.

Manage an office romance as it develops. As it becomes apparent that an office romance has blossomed, early discussions with the couple may be necessary to keep workplace disruptions to a minimum. Refer to your policy for guidance and work with the couple to ensure each person understands how it applies to their situation. While your awareness of the budding romance may prompt these discussions, it is essential to respect the couple's privacy by focusing on concerns about work performance and not details of the romance.

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