



Substance Abuse in the Workplace

Every day, across this country, in towns large and small, from small businesses to large corporations, the problems of substance abuse are hurting the workplace.

And that means a major business problem for employers, managers, and supervisors. Because substance abuse affects the bottom line, it costs you money. How? Look how substance abusing workers compare to drug-free workers:

More...

- Workdays missed
- Likely to injure self or others
- Workers' compensation claims filed

Less...

- Productivity

That means **Real Dollar Costs** to your organization in all these areas:

- Absenteeism
- Overtime Pay
- Sick Leave
- Insurance Claims
- Tardiness
- Workers' Compensation

But there are also **Hidden Costs** that drive up the bill for substance abuse:

- Friction among workers
- Poor decisions
- Personnel turnover
- Damage to the company's public image
- Diverted supervisory and managerial time
- Damage to equipment

(Source: *An Employer's Guide to Dealing with Substance Abuse*; U.S. Department of Labor, 1990)

What happens in a family when one member has a drug or drinking problem? Everyone in the family is affected in one way or another, and everyone can help determine whether the situation gets worse or better.

Everyone's Problem

You might think that a drug or alcohol problem belongs to the person who is drinking or taking drugs. But if someone you love has a problem, you probably do, too. Because you love them, the way they act affects how you feel, and may affect how you behave. Perhaps you have felt suspicious about "where the money is going," or angry and disappointed when someone's intoxication caused long-awaited activities to be cancelled. You may have covered up when someone missed an appointment, broke a promise or couldn't go to school or work.

Physical or sexual abuse might even be present. Perhaps you wish the "problem person" would change, and fear for the whole family if the problem continues. But, believe it or not, your best chance for rebuilding a happy family life is to start by changing yourself.

Harmful "Help"

Many times, whole families have unintentionally made it easier for the abuser to rely on drink or other drugs. This is called enabling, and it is often done with the



best of intentions. Here are some examples of enabling:

- Denying that there is a problem, or dismissing the problem as a small one.
- Taking over the abuser's responsibilities.
- Rescuing the abuser from the consequences of his or her drug use, such as by "calling in sick" or lending money.
- Reinforcing drug use by participating in occasions where it is used.

All of these behaviors allow the abuser to keep using drink or other drugs in destructive ways and hurt the enablers as well.

Suggested Steps

If someone in your family has a



One family member with a drug problem can affect the whole family's feelings and behaviors.

drug or alcohol problem, here

are some suggested courses of action:

- Learn more about the drug being used, and about drug abuse patterns. Chemical dependency is not caused by lack of willpower or moral decay. It is a treatable disease.
- Get help for yourself from a health professional who specializes in chemical dependency issues. Ask your employee assistance program for a referral, or look in the yellow pages under "drug abuse" or alcoholism.
- Join a self-help group for families of drug abusers, such as Al-Anon, Coke-Anon, or Nar-Anon.
- Stop rescuing the abuser from the consequences of his or her actions.
- Work with a health professional to plan a way to intervene in your family member's drug use. Get him or her into treatment and build healthier family habits for the future.
- Take good care of yourself, and expect a difficult period.

Becoming a drug-free family takes time and patience.

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Definition of Alcoholism

Alcoholism is a primary, **chronic disease** with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is **often progressive and fatal**. It is characterized by continuous or periodic: **impaired control** over drinking, **preoccupation** with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite **adverse consequences**, and distortions in thinking, most notably **denial**.

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (February 3, 1990)

Twelve questions to help you decide if you have a problem with alcohol:

1. Have you ever decided to stop drinking for a week or so, but only lasted a couple of days?
2. Do you wish people would mind their own business about your drinking – stop telling you what to do?
3. Have you ever switched from one kind of drink to another in the hope that this would keep you from getting drunk?
4. Have you ever had an eye-opener upon awakening during the past year?
5. Do you envy people who can drink without getting into trouble?
6. Have you had problems connected with drinking during the past year?
7. Has your drinking caused trouble at home?
8. Do you ever try to get “extra” drinks at a party because you do not get enough?
9. Do you tell yourself you can stop drinking any time you want to, even though you keep getting drunk when you don’t mean to?
10. Have you missed days of work or school because of drinking?
11. Do you have “blackouts”?
12. Have you ever felt that your life would be better if you did not drink?

Did you answer **YES** four or more times? If so, you are probably in trouble with alcohol and should find out more about the disease of alcoholism. The early signs of alcoholism should not be dismissed, any more than one would ignore the signs of any other major health problem. Alcoholism is a progressive disease and guaranteed to worsen without treatment, but help is available and should be sought.

Source: The A.A. Grapevine; adapted from *Is AA for You?* 1998; www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Recognizing the Signs of Drug and Alcohol Addiction

You may have noticed lately that something seems wrong with one of your coworkers. Could it be a personal problem or a sign of substance abuse? Often, a good indicator of substance abuse is a sudden change to unusual behavior. Common behavior changes in a coworker who's addicted to alcohol or other drugs include:

- Taking frequent sick days
- Increased absences or patterns of absences, such as after payday, before or after a holiday, or every Monday or Friday
- Showing up late or leaving early often
- Taking long breaks
- Making several personal phone calls
- Being involved in accidents at work or outside work
- Acting carelessly when handling dangerous equipment or materials
- Damaging property or equipment
- Deteriorating relationships at home
- Change in friends or social circles
- Borrowing or stealing money from coworkers or the company
- Drowsiness
- Showing less concern for personal appearance and hygiene
- Talking excessively or with slurred speech
- Shaky hands and movements and clammy palms
- Breath that smells like alcohol
- Red eyes or dilated pupils
- Noticeable loss or gain in weight
- Impatient or violent behavior
- Being suspicious of others
- Acting emotional or depressed



about substance abuse and about resources that can help you and your friend. Here are some places to seek help:

- *Alcohol Hotline* – 1-800-ALCOHOL
- *Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)* – 1-800-662-HELP
- *Families Anonymous* – 1-800-736-9805
- *Parents Resource Institute for Drug-Free Education (PRIDE)* – (404) 577-4500
- *Toughlove* – 1-800-333-1069

Or, look in your telephone book for your local Alcoholics Anonymous, Alateen, Al-Anon, ACOA, Narcotics Anonymous, Nar-Anon, drug treatment center, county-state addiction or mental health agency, or the county/ victim/ mental health hotline.

Alcohol Hangovers

An alcohol hangover is characterized by fatigue, tremulousness, nausea, diarrhea, and headache, combined with decreased occupational, cognitive, or visual-spatial skill performance. In the United States, related absenteeism and poor job performance cost \$148 billion annually (average annual cost per working adult,

\$2000). Although a hangover is associated with alcoholism, most of its cost is incurred by the light-to-moderate drinker.

The way total alcohol consumption affects a hangover is not clearly understood, many people believe that hangovers are punishment for alcohol consumption and therefore prevents subsequent alcohol use. Hangovers have not been shown to effectively deter alcohol consumption.

Individuals with a hangover may pose substantial risk to themselves and others despite having a normal blood alcohol level. Hangovers may also be an independent risk factor for cardiac death.

Although a hangover may be interpreted as merely uncomfortable, an individual with a hangover is at increased risk for injury and poor job performance.

If you suspect that someone you know has a substance abuse problem, you may feel ill-equipped to help. The first step to intervention is to learn more

Information regarding Alcohol Hangovers provided by Annals of Internal Medicine. The Alcohol Hangover, 6 June 2000. 132:897-902.