

Substance Abuse Prevention: For Employees

Signs and symptoms of substance abuse are apparent but often ignored...



Alcohol and drug abuse are serious issues that create hazardous workplace environments. Not only does substance abuse impair the ability to make decisions, it also creates physical dangers that can possibly lead to accidents and injuries. Given that nearly 70% of current drug users are employed, becoming familiar with the signs and symptoms of substance abuse is important to promoting a safe workplace.

What are the signs and symptoms of substance abuse?

Many signs and symptoms of substance abuse are apparent, but often overlooked. It is important to recognize subtle changes in behavior before it is too late. If you are concerned that a coworker may be abusing drugs, below are warning signs to look for:

Emotional Signs:

- Burnout
- Anxiety, paranoia, fearful, with no apparent reason
- Aggression
- Depression
- Denial
- Unexplained change in personality or attitude

Behavioral Signs:

- Slow reaction time
- Impaired coordination
- Irritability
- Excessive talking
- Limited attention span
- Poor motivation and lack of energy

Physical Signs:

- Sweating
- Chills
- Smell of alcohol
- Eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal
- Frequent nosebleeds
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance
- Shakes and tremors
- Jumbled or slurred speech

What impact does substance abuse have on the workplace?

Employee Health

Substance abuse impacts how employees will function at work and influences their job performance. Drug users are more likely to have:

- Higher health benefit usage
- Increased use of sick time
- More absenteeism and tardiness

Safety Health

Employees under the influence of drugs or alcohol can create unsafe work environments. Employees under the influence of drugs create safety hazards, leading to:

- More accidents
- More workers compensation claims
- Increased insurance costs

Productivity

Employees who abuse alcohol or drugs can be physically and mentally impaired on the job. This interferes with productivity, and leads to lower levels of performance including:

- Increased errors
- Reduced creativity
- Poor daily and strategic decisions

Employers can use drug testing to determine if employees or job applicants are using drugs. Drug tests can identify recent use of alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, amphetamines, opiates and PCP. Testing can be done post job offer, post-accident, at reasonable cause or at random.

Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) are available to employees as a resource to deal with the challenges associated with substance abuse. When addressing someone on drugs, remember to be straightforward and serious about the problem. Show them that you care, and encourage them to follow up with the EAP or seek outside help.

References: Workplace Drug Abuse. (2014) Drugabuse.com. Retrieved April 14, 2014 from <http://drugabuse.com/library/workplace-drug-abuse/>
Signs and Symptoms. (2014). Ncadd.org. Retrieved April 14, 2014 from <http://www.ncadd.org/index.php/learn-about-drugs/signs-and-symptoms>



SafetyConnection: Substance Abuse Prevention: For Employees

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