

# WHAT CAN I DO?

## Substance Abuse Training and Education Project



# INTRODUCTION

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- This substance abuse training program was developed to assist in understanding the impact of alcohol and drug use in the workplace and its effects on safety and health in that environment.
- The purpose of this module, *What Can I Do?*, is to learn when and how to help a co-worker (or family member or friend) who may have a substance abuse problem. The misuse of drugs and alcohol affects EVERYBODY, not just the user. Co-workers can often be a powerful influence on those who are abusing drugs and/or alcohol. By knowing what to do and what not to do, co-workers can make the workplace safer and help their co-workers to get help. This training segment is designed to provide employees with information and tools to help them prevent substance abuse on the job (or at home or in the community), and to provide them with resources for support.

# OBJECTIVES

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- Alcohol and drug abuse can be a problem anywhere, from the work floor to the company boardroom. In the workplace it is a problem that confronts employees, supervisors and employers alike. The objective of this segment is to provide an understanding of the problems of substance abuse on the job and how others' use affects those workers on the job. It will aid employees in recognizing others' substance abuse problems and present options for dealing with co-workers, family members or friends in helping them move toward resolving the problem.
- In this segment, participants will learn:
  - The signs of when substance use is becoming a safety hazard
  - How and when to approach an employee under the influence
  - When and how it is appropriate to involve others
  - Sources of help for co-workers, friends and family of an individual who exhibits signs and symptoms of a substance use disorder

# How do you recognize when a co-worker might have a problem with alcohol or drugs?

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- Although no one wants to believe that a co-worker has a problem with alcohol or drugs, there needs to be a willingness to acknowledge any evidence of a problem.
- Chances are everyone knows or has encountered someone who either currently or in the past has had a problem with alcohol or drugs. Though some of the signs may vary by drug of choice, what is observed and experienced in interacting with such individuals is often very similar. Think of someone you've known and/or worked with who you suspect may have a substance problem or actually turned out to have a problem. What is it like for you to try and work with that person? How does it affect your ability to do your work or get the job done? What does it make you think or feel?

# How do you recognize when a co-worker might have a problem with alcohol or drugs?

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- What are some signs both on and off the job that someone may have a substance abuse problem?

- Examples include:

## Physical

Chills

Smell of Alcohol

Sweating

Weight Loss

Physical deterioration

## Emotional

Increased aggression

Anxiety

Burnout

Denial

Depression

Paranoia

# How do you recognize when a co-worker might have a problem with alcohol or drugs?

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- What are some signs both on and off the job that someone may have a substance abuse problem?

- Examples include:

## Behavioral

Excessive talking  
Impaired coordination  
Irritability  
Lack of energy  
Limited attention Span  
Poor motivation

## Other

Continual missed appts  
Borrowing money  
Excessive & Unexplained  
absences

# Specific signs of when substance use is becoming a safety hazard include:

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- Creating mishaps, being careless and repeatedly making mistakes.
- Damaging equipment or property.
- Being involved in numerous accidents, regardless of whether that individual is the one who is injured.
- Displaying careless actions in the operation and maintenance of potentially hazardous materials or dangerous equipment.
- Being unreliable such as not being where he or she should be when others must count on him or her.
- Showing a lack of detail on performing routine job duties.
- Being unwilling to follow directions and being argumentative.

# Specific signs of when substance use is becoming a safety hazard include:

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- Being a slacker; not carrying one's load.
- Being unresponsive to usual cajoling.
- Taking unnecessary risks.
- Disregarding safety for self and others.

(Remember that some of these signs are indicators of other situations and/or problems such as sleep deprivation or depression and may also be exhibited by someone who may be living with a person who has a problem with substances and, unwittingly, encouraging or enabling substance abuse.)

# What role do you play by accepting behavior that is influenced by substances?

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- It is important that co-workers, as well as supervisors and employers, not tolerate unacceptable behavior by a worker who is misusing drugs or alcohol. Sometimes, though, this is a very difficult thing to do. Often, it seems *easier* to try to ignore behavior than to do something about it.
- What are some of the ways an employee unwittingly excuses such behavior and prevents or delays a person with a problem from getting the help he or she needs?

# What role do you play by accepting behavior that is influenced by substances?

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Examples include:

- ***Covering up*** for a person's behavior by providing alibis, making excuses or doing an impaired co-worker's job rather than letting it be known that he/she is not doing his/her job.
- ***Developing*** reasons why the person's continued use is understandable or acceptable.
- ***Avoiding*** contact with the person with the problem.
- ***Blaming*** oneself for the person's continued use or getting angry at the individual for not trying hard enough to control his/her use or to get help.
- ***Trying to take responsibility*** for the person's use by throwing out his/her drugs or cutting off the supply.
- ***Making idle threats*** to take action (for example, turning the person in), but **not following through** when the person continues to use the drug.

# What role do you play by accepting behavior that is influenced by substances?

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- What happens when someone makes excuses for unacceptable behavior? How does it affect that person?
- Often, he/she ends up feeling:

**Resentful**...for having to take up the slack

**Angry**...for having safety compromised and well-being not respected

**Frustrated**...because nothing is being done to change the situation

**Taken advantage of**...by the person misusing alcohol or drugs or by not being provided with a safe work environment

**Indifference**...about the job

That his/her **right to a safe workplace** has been taken away

# What role do you play by accepting behavior that is influenced by substances?

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- Neither the actions of tolerating unacceptable behavior nor the feelings which are a result of tolerating such behavior make the workplace safer. In fact, these actions and feelings may do the opposite by enabling the dangerous behavior to continue.
- Remember, it is the responsibility of every employee, supervisor, and employer to be aware of their surroundings and to do what they can to make the work environment safe for everyone.

# When and how do you decide to do something about a co-worker who may be abusing substances?

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- Workplace substance use and abuse should not be taken lightly, especially in environments where co-workers rely on each other for safety. While supervisors can confront workers whose drug use behavior affects their job performance, co-workers may be able to help before this occurs. They can do this on or off the worksite and emphasize the benefits of seeking help early.
- It is not an employee's responsibility to diagnose a substance problem. It is his/her job to OBSERVE behavior that is typical of someone abusing substances and to protect himself/herself and co-workers. Ignoring an obvious problem only allows it to continue. Though formal steps such as notifying a supervisor may eventually be necessary, a worker may have more influence than he or she thinks if a co-worker is approached in the right way.

# When and how do you decide to do something about a co-worker who may be abusing substances?

If a worker suspects someone has a problem, he/she can follow these steps:

- 1. **Identify** with your co-worker; show concern for the person. Tell the person you have noticed a change in behavior and express your concern for them and for your own safety and the safety of all others at the workplace.
- 2. **Describe** your observation of specific behaviors, using specific days and/or times rather than using “you always” and other similar phrases.
- 3. **Connect** the behavior to the substance abuse or suspected substance abuse.
- 4. **Urge** the person to get help and give information about how to get it (go to counseling, EAP, family doctor, etc.)
- 5. **Tell** your co-worker you will no longer hide the substance abuse for him or her. Do not make idle threats. Be willing and able to follow through on your threat, whether it is to stop covering up or to turn him/her in or any other threat you have made. Be willing to “draw a line in the sand” and hold firmly to that line.
- 6. **Explain** how your co-worker’s drug use affects you and others at work.
- 7. **Reconfirm** your concern for your co-worker. You do not need to get him/her to admit he/she has a substance problem. You must stand your ground with your co-worker, be consistent with your actions and be willing to follow through on any threats you make.

# Some Do's and Don'ts for confronting a co-worker

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## Do:

- Communicate clearly and honestly
- Talk from your own experiences
- Focus on the facts and the specifics of the behavior and actions
- Present solutions
- Offer help

# Some Do's and Don'ts for confronting a co-worker

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## Don't:

- Take the abuser's drug use personally. He or she is not abusing drugs because of you or something you may or may not have done.
- Get angry
- Be accusatory
- Blame the other person
- Criticize
- Be judgmental
- Humiliate
- Create win/lose situations
- Talk to other co-workers about your concern, as rumors can be vicious.
- Rescue the abuser from the consequences of substance abuse

# Some Do's and Don'ts for confronting a co-worker

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Keep this in mind:

- You must be willing to draw a line with your co-worker and remain firm with that line.
- You must be willing to risk the loss of the friendship. Once a person gets the help he or she needs, the friendship may return.
- Even if you do all the right things, you can't count on the person changing. These actions can eventually lead the way and eliminate the risks of allowing behavior to continue, putting others at risk.
- Your safety and the safety of others in the workplace is the most important thing to protect.

# When and how is it appropriate to involve others?

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- You may have confronted your co-worker, friend or family member, yet that person is still unwilling to accept or acknowledge there is a problem. Then what?
- The time to do something and involve others is when the substance abuser's behavior is such that it directly affects you and your ability to do your job or live your life. When you have done all that you think you can, one of your first lines of defense is to understand what your organization's drug-free workplace policy is. Many businesses have policies and programs in place that prohibit alcohol and drug use that might compromise the safety of their employees and property. Know and understand that policy. It may also dictate who the best person to involve is, such as a supervisor, Human Resources, law enforcement or the EAP.

# When and how is it appropriate to involve others?

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If your concern is about a co-worker, check your drug-free workplace policy to determine who within the organization you should talk with first. Once that is determined, provide that person with the information you used initially to talk with your co-worker about his or her substance problem. That person, usually a supervisor, but not always, has more options available to him or her through the workplace to help your co-worker get assistance. For example, certain personnel may use work performance (including failing to show up, unexplained absences, inability to properly perform job functions, etc.) as a means of getting someone help through an EAP or other source of assistance.

# When and how is it appropriate to involve others?

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A friend or family member with a substance problem can also influence an employee's safety or ability to do a job. Often, a family member or friend who is drinking or using drugs affects one's ability to concentrate and focus on his or her job. Substance use can result in financial problems; marital problems; parenting/ family problems; depression, anxiety or other emotional/behavioral problems on the part of the drinker/user and/or the family member. It can also lead to physical or emotional abuse.

# When and how is it appropriate to involve others?

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If it is a friend or family member you are concerned about, you may need to enlist professional services of a trained substance abuse counselor. There are many techniques that are powerful in helping people deal with substance problems. For example, intervention is the process that confronts the person abusing a substance about the severity of their disease. Family members who influence that person's life, and a trained professional (counselor/psychologist/social worker), get together and present facts and information related to the chemically dependent person's substance problem and the consequences of the problem. The process of intervention, which can take several weeks to prepare for, is designed to break through the dependent person's denial and help him/her understand there is a substance problem.

# When and how is it appropriate to involve others?

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Another option for you is a support group. These groups for family and friends of people with substance problems help you learn to live a healthier life through maintaining appropriate boundaries with that friend or family member. Examples include Al-Anon and Nar-Anon.

# Sources of help

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- There are several sources of help from co-workers, family and friends who may have a substance abuse problem.
- ***Employee Assistance Programs*** (EAPs) are generally the best place to direct co-workers experiencing personal problems, including alcohol and drug abuse. Note that EAPs are legally bound to maintain confidentiality and may not divulge information discussed with an employee without written permission from the employee.

**KEAP=800-445-5327**

# Sources of help

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- ***Substance Abuse Treatment Locator***

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

This Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Web site and toll-free phone line help individuals locate drug and alcohol abuse treatment programs in their communities.

- ***AlcoholScreening.org***

<https://alcoholscreening.org/>

This free, confidential Web site lets individuals privately assess their own drinking habits and receive personalized feedback to help them determine if they need help to change those habits. Individuals can also find out about facilities in their communities that offer drug and alcohol abuse treatment and consultations with qualified health professionals regarding alcohol problems.

- ***Al-Anon/Alateen***

<https://al-anon.org/>

Al-Anon provides information on the effects of alcohol abuse and refers friends and families of alcohol abusers to nearby support groups. Alateen is the organization's program for young people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking.

- ***Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)***

<https://www.aa.org/>

AA offers a way to stop drinking to individuals who feel they have a problem with alcohol

# Recap

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- Substance use is NOT always substance abuse. Having an alcoholic drink on a daily basis is not considered to be substance abuse. Having multiple alcoholic drinks to the point of drunkenness on a daily basis is substance abuse. Getting high before work hours or while on duty or at any time when effects of a substance carry over to work hours is substance abuse. Substance abuse can lead to addiction.
- Regardless of whether someone is an abuser or addict, any time a worker is under the influence of a substance, he or she is a safety hazard. A worker who is drug or alcohol dependent can also be safety hazard, even if that person is not intoxicated at work. In addition, if a co-worker is distracted by a friend or family member who may be abusing substances, he/she can be a safety hazard, a health hazard and can influence getting a job done.

# Recap

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- Be willing to show your concern for your fellow employees, your workplace and yourself. Help your fellow workers get the help they need.
- It is the responsibility of every worker, supervisor and employer to be aware of their surroundings and to do what they can to make the work environment safe for everyone. Implementing and enforcing a drug-free workplace program is one way to help protect and assist employees in dealing with substance use as a safety hazard.
- For all of these reasons discussed, companies have put policies in place to prohibit alcohol abuse and drug use that might compromise safety of workplace Know what your drug-free workplace policy is and help enforce it.