



*SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE*

*eSource Newsletter*



**August 31, 2020**

### *Substance Abuse in the Workplace*

Although it's important to respect the privacy and personal time of your employees, what someone does on their own time can sometimes affect their work performance—especially when it comes to addiction-related issues. Studies have shown that substance-abusing employees function at about two-thirds of their capability and that employees who use drugs are three times more likely to be late for work.

Identifying and confronting suspicions of substance abuse is an awkward and often complicated task in any relationship, but can be particularly challenging in the workplace. Not only do you lack the deep emotional connection of a personal friend or family member, but there are matters of professional liability at stake on both sides of the conversation.

Regardless of the difficulties, being a good leader includes supporting people in a way that empowers them to be the best version of themselves. Doing so benefits you as an employer, a business and a person. Be willing and prepared to handle suspected substance abuse issues in the workplace in a way that

demonstrates both professionalism and compassion.

### *Substance Abuse Policies*

Substance abuse issues affect the work environment on many different levels, not only in terms of the performance of the affected employee but also the productivity of those around them. Encouraging a healthy company culture has wide-reaching ripple effects that benefit everyone involved. Aside from the obvious liability issues involving accidents, theft or injuries, substance abuse-related behaviors can contribute to absenteeism, loss of production, tardiness, poor decision making, interpersonal problems between employees and a higher turnover rate—all situations that can cost your company both money and morale.

Being open, upfront and proactive about your expectations is the best bet. Start the conversation before it's necessary by maintaining an open dialogue about drug and alcohol abuse. Company policies, procedures and resources vary by industry and company size, but regardless of how many employees you have, the rules and repercussions should be explained clearly. **(Continued, Page 2)**

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Consider including the following as you create and implement your substance abuse policy:

- The definition of substance abuse
- The purpose, intention and/or objectives of the policy
- Who is included in the program
- Circumstances for drug or alcohol testing
- How to maintain confidentiality when dealing with the issue
- Resources to educate employees on substance abuse
- Training and reporting systems for identifying signs of substance abuse
- Plans for assistance or disciplinary actions for violations

Once the initiative is complete, spread awareness by including the substance abuse policy in employee manuals and training sessions. If you offer company wellness or employee assistance programs, make sure those resources are well-publicized and include substance abuse-related education and information.

### ***Recognize Signs and Symptoms***

The most difficult part of maintaining a drug-free workplace is recognizing and confronting signs of substance abuse. Not only is it a sensitive subject, but employees may be fearful about answering honestly or addressing their own suspicions about a co-worker due to potential disciplinary actions. Also no one wants to accuse an eye out for common signs of substance abuse, which can include:

- Negative changes in work attendance or performance
- Alteration of personal appearance
- Mood swings or attitude changes
- Withdrawal from responsibility or associate contacts
- Unusual patterns of behavior
- Defensive attitude concerning the subject of addiction
- Slurred speech
- Sleeping on the job

If you suspect one of your employees has a drug or alcohol-related problem, schedule a private meeting as soon as possible.

From a professional perspective, it's best to frame your concerns around job performance. That keeps the conversation relevant and less personal. Focus primarily on performance issues like missed work, tardiness and low productivity. Before you meet with your employee, gather information including attendance records, performance reports and observations of managers, and invite another supervisor to act as a witness and to provide support.

Set the tone for the conversation by making sure your employee knows that you value and respect them as a person. Reiterate that they are a valuable asset to the company and that their potential is worth the investment of effort. Be cautious to avoid judgmental language while issuing your concerns, and give the employee an opportunity to explain while also being prepared for denial or defensive behavior. Remember that they fear termination and may not be forthcoming in a judgmental environment.

Conclude by presenting them with your expectations and their options, such as opportunities that allow them to seek treatment without having to fear job loss, and put them in touch with — **(Continued, Page 3)**

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any resources available. If the employee will be taking time off to pursue treatment, draw up a Return-to-Work Agreement to outline expectations for continued employment and document the consequences if those are not met. Create a climate that supports personal growth and encourages transparency by making sure it's clear that your desired outcome is their success.

From a legal standpoint, it's also important to document everything. Hopefully, your conversation will be the beginning of the end of this particular problem, but having a written timeline of events signed by all involved parties may be beneficial if the issues continue or progress, eventually resulting in termination and/or legal trouble.

Although it's uncomfortable to address suspected drug or alcohol-related abuse issues, doing so protects the future growth and development of your employees and your business and demonstrates your capacity for compassionate and courageous leadership. *Written by Author: Dr. Rod Amiri*



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EVENT CALENDAR

October 1, 2020

Human Dynamics (Virtual) Series: Session 1

Featuring Professional Speaker and Author; Erick Rheam

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