

Substance Abuse at Work: Who Wins, Who Loses

Whose concern is it when someone in your office is abusing alcohol or other drugs? What are the signs of substance abuse? Should you even get involved? Consider the following.

How Substance Abusers Affect Your Job

Chances are that the abuser's activities are lowering the productivity and morale of your entire department. When productivity drops, all employees may face the loss of raises, additional benefits, profit sharing payments and job security. Substance abuse may actually endanger the safety of some people. Your company may face a decline in profits from increased insurance premiums and sick pay, dissatisfied customers, and lowered productivity in employees who must take up the slack for a substance abuser.

Signs of Substance Abuse

If you notice some of these signs, a coworker may be abusing drugs or alcohol:

- Absenteeism, arriving late work or taking frequent long breaks
- Decreased job performance
- Changed or unpredictable behavior
- Poor personal care or appearance
- Difficulties with other workers

Of course, other factors, such as grief, family difficulties or depression, can cause these behaviors as well.

Your Response

If you suspect that a coworker is abusing drugs or alcohol, you have a right to protect yourself from the effects of abuse. Your department will benefit, as will the abuser in the long run.

- Avoid joining an alcohol abuser for a drink at lunch or after work, even if others do it.
- Refuse to cover up for a substance abuser by lying or doing extra work. This only enables the behavior to continue without consequences.

Talk to the abuser, expressing your concern, or ask someone close to the abuser to talk to him or her. Support efforts to quit and offer to help if you can.

There's no need to feel guilty about reporting an abuser's poor performance or safety violations that interfere with your ability to do your job. Rather than accusing the person of being a drug user, simply express your concern about your coworker's performance.

Taking Care of You

It's hard to confront a fellow worker with an addiction, but facing such a problem in yourself is even harder. If you're concerned about your substance use, chances are your coworkers are, too. There are many resources available to you. One excellent starting point is your company sponsored Employee Assistance Program. CONCERN: EAP is available to help employees *confidentially* identify and address these situations. Call CONCERN at 1-800-344-4222.

Understanding the Recovery Process

It takes courage to face substance abuse and begin recovery. If you work with a recovering abuser, remember that there will be good days and bad days. Coworkers in recovery can be unreasonable, touchy or depressed. Reassure your coworker that he or she has your support. When a coworker faces an addiction and has the courage to begin recovery, everybody wins. If you are the one in recovery, understand and take care of yourself.

Material for this document gleaned from the U.S. Department of Labor and CONCERN: EAP websites.



Call 800-344-4222
employees.concern-eap.com