

Alcohol and Problem Drug Use (and Problem Gambling)

This OSACH Fast Fact is intended to help workers, supervisors and managers become aware of the implications of addictions in the workplace. It explains some ways we can help people that we think may have a problem with alcohol or drug use. Problem gambling is also discussed because it shares many of the same characteristics as problem drug and alcohol use.

Many of us know someone who may have problems coping with life stresses. Some people may turn to alcohol or other drugs.

General Information

- Impairment due to substance use can lead to accidents and injuries both on and off the job.
- If the situation is ignored, eventually other workers or patients/clients/residents may be put at risk.
- When a person uses a drug frequently, the body compensates for the drug's effects. As tolerance grows, the person needs more of a substance to feel the same effects.
- Very few people with addictions have a "skid row" lifestyle. A number of people with addictions have jobs, families and seemingly "normal" lives.
- Be aware of the effects of addictions, and understand that they can have a major impact on an individual's health, relationships, social interactions, finances and work performance.
- Understand that inappropriate use of alcohol and drugs causes physical and psychological changes and dependence.
- Tell and show the other person that you are concerned and encourage him/her to look for help.
- Know where help can be obtained.
- Do not cover up for the person. While you may think you are helping or protecting your friend or co-worker, covering up actually feeds the illness and makes the situation worse.

Workers

- Be aware of stresses in your life. If you are attracted to drugs, alcohol or gambling to "feel better," "relax" or "try to forget", you may be heading towards a problem.
- Take care of yourself emotionally and physically. Eat a balanced diet. Get adequate rest and exercise. Learn and practice ways to reduce stress. Discover what makes you feel good about your life.
- If you think you may have a problem, consider approaching your occupational health service or employee assistance program (EAP), if available, for counseling or a referral. Alternatively, discuss the situation with your family doctor.
- Be alert for early warning signs that a co-worker may have a problem. Remember that workers are required to report workplace hazards to their supervisor according to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA). A hazard can include the unsafe behavior of a worker.

Supervisors

- Do not ask workers about their health or personal problems — this information is confidential.
- If you suspect an employee may have an addiction, focus on the problems in his/her job performance. Do not attempt to diagnose.

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- Emphasize that workers must meet performance standards and encourage them to get help to do this, if necessary.
- Let your staff know that you care about them and will be fair and firm.
- Be aware of signs of an addiction, including:
 - > changes in an employee's productivity and/or reliability
 - > increasing absenteeism or late arrivals to work
 - > a gradual decline in work quality and/or quantity
 - > missed deadlines
 - > unreasonable excuses for not getting work done
 - > complaints from other workers or customers about the quality of work or attitude
 - > an increase in physical complaints
 - > an inability to concentrate
- Recommend your occupational health service, if present, or the EAP for counseling or a referral.
- Where employees can see them, post the names and telephone numbers of treatment centres such as an EAP, self-help groups and treatment information centres, so that workers can seek help confidentially.

Resources

Self Help Groups

Here are some of the anonymous, self-help groups available for people whose lives are affected by addictions. For numbers in your community, check your telephone directory (Yellow Pages under "Addiction-Information & Treatment Centres").

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
- Al-Anon (for spouses of people with alcohol problems) — Toll Free: 1-800-443-4525
- Narcotics Anonymous
- NAR-ANON (for families of people addicted to narcotics)
- Women for Sobriety (self-help for women with alcohol problems) – Toll Free: 1-800-333-1606

The contact person for the group you call will give you the meeting times, locations and the number of a person to call anonymously when you need to talk.

Addiction Information

- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Information Line — Toll Free: 1-800-463-6273
- Drug & Alcohol Registry of Treatment (DART) – Ontario Information Line — Toll Free: 1-800-565-8603 or on the Internet at: www.dart.on.ca/~drctry.
- Agency for Problem Gambling – 1-888-230-3505

Other

Ask your family doctor for a referral to a treatment centre.



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