

RESPONDING TO EMPLOYEE DRUG USE

Drug use can be classified as experimental or circumstantial, and as progressing toward casual, intensive, compulsive, and addictive. There are no general rules that explain the misuse of alcohol and other drugs for every individual.

Many studies have documented how one's personal background and work environment can help in predicting the likelihood of substance use in the workplace. Issues related to misuse can include an individual's biology and external issues such as stressful working conditions. Many issues can be attributed to a combination of internal and external factors. In the workplace, however, a safe, healthy, productive employee is the expectation.

Do not wait for a crisis. Being aware of potential issues before they become problems goes a long way toward creating a safe, healthy, and productive workplace.

There are at least six signs of possible substance use problems in the workplace. These signs alone do not indicate substance use. They do, however, indicate that perhaps the employee is experiencing personal issues that may affect job performance.

1. A change in work attendance or performance;
2. An alteration of personal appearance;
3. Mood swings or attitude changes;
4. Withdrawal from responsibility or associate contacts;
5. Unusual behavior patterns;
6. A defensive attitude concerning any problems.

HOW SHOULD A SUPERVISOR HANDLE A CRISIS IN THE WORKPLACE?

All supervisors should be prepared to deal with a crisis. These situations are not common, but it is important to know what to do in case of emergency. Such highly charged situations might involve alcohol and drugs, so it is important to remember that an impaired person is not a rational one. Some crisis situations that organizations have had to face include:

1. Violent, unpredictable behavior;
2. Threatening words and actions;
3. Illegal activity;
4. Possession of alcohol or other drugs.

HOW TO APPROACH AN EMPLOYEE IN A POSSIBLE DRUG OR ALCOHOL CRISIS SITUATION

1. Ask the employee to come to a private area with another supervisor, an HR representative, or security – or some combination of these.
2. Inquire, in a nonjudgmental tone, about the behavior, rumor, or report. Stick to the facts and do not involve the names of other employees.
3. Express concern. Keep in mind that this is about a specific employee and his or her behaviors related to the workplace.
4. Actively listen to the explanation, and repeat the employee's explanation to ensure that nothing is misunderstood.
5. If there is reason to believe that there may have been a violation, notify a department head or labor relations representative as appropriate.
6. If there is evidence or suspicion of recent use, follow the guidelines of the drug-free workplace policy, which will detail how to handle the event.

Some approaches include:

1. Referring the employee to the EAP;
2. Placing the employee on suspension pending an investigation;
3. Providing for the employee to be escorted home;
4. Escorting the employee to a laboratory for analysis;
5. Calling local enforcement if the situation is dangerous or illegal activity (such as distribution, possession, sale, or transportation of illegal substances) has been witnessed.

