



# SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

## INTRODUCTION

In the workplace, being under the influence of drugs or alcohol can be dangerous to not only you, but coworkers as well. Besides safety, drugs and alcohol in the workplace can also lead to low morale, friction between individuals or groups, and low work efficiency. In this lesson we will cover the definition of substance abuse and opiates, types of substances commonly abused, effects of what drugs and alcohol have on the workplace, what to do if you suspect someone to be under the influence, and employee assistance programs.



*Note: The information provided in this lesson should NOT be used to be diagnose an individual with substance abuse. Diagnosis of an individual should ONLY be done by a licensed medical professional because signs and symptoms can be indicators of other medical conditions.*

## DEFINITIONS

**Substance abuse** is typically defined as a pattern of compulsive substance use marked by recurrent significant social, occupational, legal, or interpersonal adverse consequences.

**Opioids** are typically defined as a drug containing opium or its derivatives, used in medicine for inducing sleep and relieving pain. Common opiates include:

- Codeine
- Hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lortab, Lorcet)
- Morphine
- Oxycodone (Oxycontin, Percocet)
- Hydromorphone (Dilaudid)
- Fentanyl

## TYPES OF SUBSTANCES COMMONLY ABUSED

When one speaks about substance abuse, it is usually correlated with the overuse or addiction to certain substances. Common substances that are commonly abused, include but are not limited to:

- Alcohol
- Marijuana
- Prescription medications
- Methamphetamines
- Cocaine
- Opiates
  - Both prescription and illicit
- Hallucinogens
- Inhalants

## Marijuana

While marijuana use has been legalized for both medical and/or recreational use in some states, it is still federally, an illegal drug and can still impact an employee's work performance and its use may not be protected under your company's drug and alcohol policy. If you have questions about your company's drug and alcohol policy, please speak with your supervisor.

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## Opioids

Opioids, like marijuana, can be obtained from licensed healthcare professionals for certain conditions. However, extended use of prescribed opioids can result in an individual becoming addicted. This can happen because a person's tolerance and dependence from extended use can increase, resulting in the person requiring higher and more frequent doses.

If you have been prescribed opioids and have concerns about potential addiction, please speak with your medical provider.

## Symptoms and signs

Whether it is marijuana, opioids, alcohol, or other substances, there are common symptoms and signs associated with abuse. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Increase in aggression or irritability
- Changes in attitude and/or personality
- Lethargy
- Depression
- Dramatic changes in habits and/or priorities
- Bloodshot or glazed eyes
- Dilated or constricted pupils
- Abrupt weight changes
- Problems sleeping or sleeping too much
- Looking unkempt
- Poor physical coordination
- Unusual body odors

*Please note that these signs and symptoms can also be indicators of other medical conditions, so they should NOT be used to diagnose an individual. Medical diagnosis should ONLY be done by licensed medical professionals.*

## EFFECTS OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL IN THE WORKPLACE

When a person enters the workplace under the influence of alcohol or drugs, it does have an effect on the workplace. These effects can include, but are not limited to:

- An increase in absenteeism or tardiness
- Poor decision making
- Lower morale in coworkers
- Loss of efficiency
- Theft
- Increases in the likelihood of division with coworkers and supervisors
- Preoccupation with obtaining and using substances while at work that interferes with attention and concentration
- Increases in workplace accidents
- Illegal activities at work including the selling of illicit drugs
- Higher turnover





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## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT SOMEONE TO BE UNDER THE INFLUENCE

When you have concerns about a coworker and the possibility of substance abuse, you should do the following:

- Don't ignore it.
- Don't act as an "enabler."
  - Enabling behavior may include, but not being limited to:
    - Covering for a coworker
    - Loaning money
    - Counseling the individual
    - Giving their job responsibilities to others in the workplaces
- Document incidents and record times and dates.
- Report your concerns to your supervisor or designated HR personnel.
  - Reports should contain factual observations, not speculation. For example: "John Doe's paperwork has missing elements, which is not normal for him."

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAMS

For employees who may be dealing with substance abuse or other difficulties, many employers now offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) and/or substance abuse programs (SAPs). These are resources that can help any employee with personal or work-related problems that may impact their job performance, health, mental, or emotional well-being. EAPs and SAPs may include the following resources:

- Legal and/or financial services
- Group services
- In-person assessments
- Short-term, problem-solving counseling
- Coaching
- Consulting
- Referrals to community resources
- 24/7 telephone support
- Website resources

If you have questions about an employee assistance or substance abuse program and if your company offers one or both, please speak with either your supervisor or designated HR personnel.

*Please note that many of the services provided with an EAP or SAP are confidential per local, state, and Federal laws and regulations.*

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, substance abuse can happen to anyone and can affect a person's personal and work life. When in the work environment, substance abuse can increase the chances of an accident or fatal incident occurring. If you notice noticeable signs or symptoms or are dealing with substance abuse, please speak with your supervisor and ask about available resources.