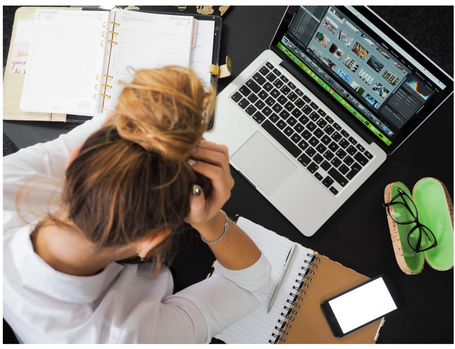
An Employers Guide To Addressing Substance Abuse In The Workplace

Handling substance abuse in the workplace is not easy. However, as an employer, there is no telling when you may have to handle an issue like this. This is because substance abuse issues are common, and no one is immune to the different triggers that can result in these sorts of problems. Knowing what to do when one of your workers is suffering from substance abuse problems can be difficult. Read on to discover some advice that can help you.

Employers Must Know What Substance Abuse Looks Like First



Addiction is a type of disease of the brain, which disrupts the mechanisms that are responsible for social, emotional, and cognitive behavior. These changes can result in drug-seeking and use that is compulsive and uncontrollable. While a lot of addicts want to stop using substances, they can find it very difficult to do so. It can feel impossible. Rather than viewing these individuals as weak, it is the neurological changes that are linked with the addiction that make it incredibly hard for them to make conscious decisions about whether or not they use drugs.

The first step when it comes to dealing with these sorts of issues in the workplace is knowing what sort of problems you should be looking out for. There are issues relating to performance and behavior. Performance issues you may notice include the likes of:

- Early departures
- Extended lunch periods
- Needless risk-taking
- Errors in judgment
- Mistakes and carelessness
- Unexplained disappearances
- Increased absenteeism
- Lowered productivity
- Poor concentration

In terms of behavioral issues, some of the things you may notice are as follows:

- Excuses and complaints of an illness that they vaguely define
- Deterioration in their personal appearance
- Complaining about issues at home
- Blaming other people for their own shortcomings and problems
- Avoidance of colleagues and friends
- Frequent financial issues

It is important to stress that these signs do not automatically indicate that someone has an issue with drug addiction. It could be that they are going through some other issue, so don't assume that this is the case.

What To Do When An Employee Is Fighting an Addiction

If you are worried that one of your workers has a substance abuse issue or they have confided in this with you, starting with a conversation is always important. Express your concern, but think carefully about how you do this. You need to make sure you do not patronize the individual or make them feel inadequate. You want them to feel comfortable, rather than backing them into a corner. Rather than accusing someone of drinking, for example, you could say that you smell alcohol or that you have noticed that they have been absent more frequently and wanted to find out if something was going on and how you could help.

Make Note of the Employee's Behavior

It is also a good idea to document any behavior that you feel is relevant, including job performance, safety, attendance, and punctuality. While you can note any significant interactions with colleagues, you are not advised to go around and speak about your suspicions with other employees. When you are keeping this log, you should make sure you document how this differs from how the employee would typically behave.

Put a Plan Together to Ensure You Address The Substance Abuse as Successful as Possible

Put together a plan. It can be very difficult for people with substance abuse issues to see the light at the end of the tunnel. If they were able to get out of the position they are in, they would do it, right? Having a plan can help. For example, you may decide that you're going to allow the employee time off work to enter rehab and once they complete their course of treatment they can be hired back on a trial basis.

While you want to think about your business and you care about the bottom line of your company, it is also important to think about the individual in question and how your decision impacts them. Yes, all of your actions must be in a line with the company policy. However, you should consider doing everything that you can to help the person in question. In a lot of cases, the person who is suffering has simply been waiting for someone to help them because they can't help themselves.

Know the Employer's Actions Play a Big Part in Substance Abuse Recovery

To conclude, there is no denying that dealing with substance abuse issues in the workplace can be difficult and challenging. However, by having a plan in place, you can feel more prepared should this problem happen at your business. It can be frustrating to see one of your workers go on such a downhill spiral, yet your approach can make a massive difference and you may play a bigger role in recovery than you think.

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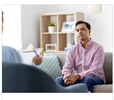
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