

HOW TO RECOGNISE ALCOHOL AND/OR SUBSTANCE MISUSE

Behaviour and work performance should be the concern of managers and supervisors. Expert knowledge about the misuse of alcohol and/or substances is not necessary, but managers and supervisors should remain alert to changes from the normal work pattern and/or behaviour of employees.

Listed below are various warning signs that may indicate some consequences of alcohol or substance misuse. It is impossible to list all relevant behavioural and work pattern signs. They can appear singularly or in combination. They may also signify problems other than alcohol or substance misuse. For example: diabetes, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, psychiatric disorders, emotional problems and certain heart conditions all share some of the same signs. It is important to remember that unusual or odd behaviour may not be connected in any way with alcohol and/or substance misuse. The role of managers and supervisors is to recognise and document changes in accordance with the policy, without making any moral judgment or taking the position of counsellor or doctor.

Professional resources within the occupational health service should be used to help evaluate the manager's observations.

General signs

- misses deadlines
- misses appointments
- makes mistakes due to inattention or poor judgement
- wastes more material than usual, has to re-do work
- makes bad decisions - errors in judgement, does not accept assigned responsibilities
- gets complaints from customers and work colleagues
- improbable excuses for poor job performance
- attributes poor performance to poor health
- fails to follow instructions
- does not respond to training
- mood fluctuations
- loss of personal esteem

Absenteeism

Monitoring the frequency and reasons given for absence can be an indicator of alcohol or substance misuse problems:

- a pattern of absence following weekends, holidays, etc.
- late for work or appointments
- illness with no medical certificate

On the-job absenteeism

- frequent trips to toilets
- poor time keeping

Prone to incidents

- repeated incidents on the job
- frequent trips to first aid
- incidents off the job
- repeated violation of safe working practices

Confusion and poor concentration

- difficulty in understanding and recalling instructions, details, etc.
- cannot carry out sequential assignments

Erratic work patterns

- fluctuating periods of very high and very low productivity and quality of work
- work is not planned properly; shifts from one thing to another without reasons

Unwillingness to change

- Changing jobs or duties may present a threat that would uncover an alcohol or substance misuse problem that has been carefully hidden.

Coming or returning to work in an obviously abnormal condition**Problems with other employees**

Friction in relationships, including supervisor/employee relationships, usually results in decreased performance and efficiency:

- over-reacts to real or imagined criticism
- borrows money from colleagues
- colleagues complain about behaviour
- express unreasonable resentment and rebellion against authority
- avoids associates/colleagues
- talks louder than usual, or talks when should be listening
- lies chronically
- disruptive behaviour, causing unrest among other employees
- gets others to take over own work responsibilities for no good reason; does not accept work assigned

Personal appearance and demeanour

- grooming deteriorates, weight loss or gain
- dress becomes sloppy or inappropriate
- appears withdrawn or preoccupied

- smells of alcohol/breath sweeteners/mints/strong perfume or aftershave
- inability to follow or participate in conversation
- reports of marital/family problems
- increasing financial problems
- co-ordination problems such as unsteady walk, eyes uncoordinated
- memory gaps
- tremors
- eyes red or bleary; pupils dilated or constricted; wears sunglasses
- extreme sensitivity to mentioning a possible alcohol or substance misuse problem
- excessive denial of a problem