

PRESENTER'S GUIDE

"DEALING WITH DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE... FOR EMPLOYEES"

Part of the General Safety Series

OUTLINE OF MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

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The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the program. The outline can be used to review the program before conducting a classroom session, as well as in preparing to lead a class discussion about the program.

- **Most people have had too much to drink at least once in their lives.**

But they often don't realize the real danger that drinking alcohol, or using drugs, can present.

- They start out thinking that they're in complete control, only to find themselves ruled by the substances that they use.
- **The term "substance abuse" can mean:**
 - Drinking too much alcohol.
 - Misuse of over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs.
 - Use of illegal drugs.
- **It can also involve inhaling or "huffing" chemicals, such as solvents, lighter fluid and glue, or eating things like "magic mushrooms" and other toxic plants.**
- **Substances that produce a "high" affect how the central nervous system functions.**
 - Depressants such as alcohol, marijuana and tranquilizers, slow down brain activity.
 - Stimulants including cocaine, crack and methamphetamine, speed it up.
 - Narcotic analgesics and other "painkillers" such as heroin, morphine and OxyContin numb the senses.
 - Hallucinogens like LSD alter the way that the brain processes information.
- **Some drugs can affect users in multiple ways.**
 - Ecstasy, for instance, is both a stimulant and a hallucinogen.

- **A substance abuser's personality and ability to function is directly affected by the drugs that they take.**
 - Cocaine or other stimulants can make people overconfident, hyperactive and even reckless, which significantly increases the risk of them having an accident on the job.
 - Alcohol, marijuana and other depressants create a dangerous "sedating effect" that can slow a person's reaction time and prevent them from thinking clearly, which are also potential workplace problems.

- **Since people frequently feel "good" when they are under the influence of alcohol and drugs, they often don't recognize that they are actually dangerous to themselves and others.**

- **The "residual" effect of a substance can also cause a person to have an accident hours or even days after they last used it.**
 - What a substance abuser does on their "own time" can still affect them and their coworkers on the job.

- **When people think of substance abuse, they often picture an addict living on the street... but the fact is that most abusers have jobs.**
 - They are frequently able to conceal their problem from their employers, coworkers and even their families.

- **Alcohol is by far the most commonly abused of all drugs. In the United States alone:**
 - There are over 38 million binge drinkers.
 - Nearly half of all serious workplace accidents are caused by people drinking on the job.
 - Ten thousand people die each year in alcohol-related automobile accidents.

- **Impairment starts with the first drink, making it extremely dangerous to operate vehicles or machinery.**
 - If a coworker who appears to be "under the influence" is attempting to drive, notify your supervisor.
 - If you aren't on the job, call the police.

- **You should be careful because a person who is drunk may act irrationally, have emotional outbursts, even become violent.**
- **Marijuana is the second-most frequently abused drug is marijuana.**
- **Once illegal throughout the country, marijuana has now been approved for medical and even recreational use in a number of states.**
 - Changes in the drug's legal status do not make it any safer.
- **Like alcohol, marijuana is a depressant that:**
 - Impairs short-term memory.
 - Reduces the ability to concentrate.
 - Affects coordination.
 - Slows reaction time.
- **All of these effects increase the risk of accidents and injuries in the workplace.**
- **Marijuana use also has a cumulative effect that can cause long-term users to:**
 - Lose their ambition.
 - Suffer from paranoia.
 - Develop negative personality traits that can hurt their chances for career advancement.
- **People who smoke marijuana also often drink alcohol to increase their "high."**
 - Being "doubly impaired" increases their likelihood of being involved in an accident as well.
- **Combining drugs can also lead to an overdose.**
 - Consuming alcohol with strong depressants such as barbiturates and tranquilizers can be fatal.

- **The most commonly overlooked depressants in the workplace are fumes from paint, aerosol cans, glue, gasoline and similar products.**
 - Breathing in these "inhalants" not only affects your brain, but can permanently damage your lungs and respiratory tract as well.

- **One of the problems that drug and alcohol abusers have is that abused substances can be very "seductive".**
 - Even when their negative effects are well known, people can still be drawn to them.

- **Extremely addictive drugs with terrible side-effects include substances such as:**
 - Illegal stimulants such as cocaine and crack (a concentrated form of cocaine).
 - "Crystal meth" (methamphetamine).
 - Narcotic analgesics such as heroin.

- **Methamphetamine is made from highly toxic materials, including anhydrous ammonia, red phosphorus and lithium.**
 - This mixture is so powerfully corrosive that people who regularly smoke it have had their teeth disintegrate.

- **Someone who uses crystal meth can have a tremendous amount of energy, which they can put into their work, but they also lose the ability to think rationally and act safely.**

- **People who use narcotics like heroin experience persistent drowsiness and "fuzzy" thinking.**
 - In the workplace, where everyone needs to be alert, a heroin user can put themselves and others at serious risk.

- **People who use illegal stimulants and narcotics are playing a dangerous game.**
 - Unless they clean up their act, they're likely to end up in jail, a mental institution or an early grave.

- **In recent years, it has also become popular to abuse prescription and over-the-counter medications.**
 - Many people wrongly assume that if something is a "medicine", it must be safe.
 - Medication abuse can be just as addictive and deadly as using illegal drugs.

- **Commonly abused prescription drugs include:**
 - Stimulants, such as amphetamines and Ritalin.
 - Narcotic analgesics, such as OxyContin and medications containing codeine.

- **Some people even use over-the-counter medicines, such as cough syrup containing dextromethorphan (DXM), to get "high".**

- **Substance abuse of any kind is dangerous. It can:**
 - Take away a person's job, savings, friends and family.
 - Land them in jail.
 - Destroy their health.
 - Cause severe mental problems
 - Even kill them.

- **Worst of all, what a substance abuser does while under the influence can endanger coworkers and anyone else that they come into contact with.**

- **When the risks are so obvious, why do intelligent people allow themselves to "get hooked"?**
 - Few people set out to become substance abusers.
 - Most alcoholics start as casual drinkers.
 - Many hard drug users get hooked through experimentation.

- **People who are addicted to medications may even consider themselves "teetotalers," because they don't drink alcohol or use illegal drugs.**

- **Stress, depression, anxiety and personal tragedy can all drive a person to use alcohol or drugs as a way to "escape" from their problems.**
 - Chronic physical pain and mental illness can also lead a person to "self-medicate."
- **People are particularly vulnerable to becoming substance abusers when they go through traumatic events in their lives.**
 - Deaths in the family, broken relationships, getting laid-off and serious financial difficulties are just a few of the things that can start a person drinking or using drugs.
- **But alcohol or drugs never really provide a solution to our problems... in fact, they will only make the situation worse.**
- **One thing that is common to many substance abusers is that their use "escalates" over time.**
 - A "heavy" abuser can eventually build up a tolerance to alcohol and most drugs, so that they need to use more of them to get the same effect.
- **This "tolerance" may make the person feel that they're in control of their substance use.**
 - It's actually a warning sign that they're becoming dependent on their drugs or alcohol.
- **"Psychological dependence" comes first.**
 - This is when someone can't help wanting a substance.
 - Getting it and using it increasingly becomes the focus of their lives.
- **"Physical dependence" occurs when the person's body becomes "addicted" to the substance.**
 - At this point, if the user doesn't get their daily "fix" they'll begin to feel physical symptoms of drug "withdrawal".
- **Abusing any substance can lead to psychological dependence.**

- **Physical dependence usually results from using cocaine, heroin, prescription pain relievers or alcohol.**
 - People who have developed a dependency often can't or won't see what is obvious to the people around them. This is called "denial".

- **If anyone expresses concern about your drug or alcohol use, listen to them.**
 - If you were really in control, they probably wouldn't be talking to you about it.

- **As you may have guessed, substance abuse doesn't "play favorites".**
 - When the circumstances are "right", anyone, of any age, can become an abuser.
 - To prevent that from happening, we need to monitor our own behavior and be honest with ourselves.

- **To prevent substance abuse from "sneaking up" on you:**
 - Never use illegal drugs.
 - Remember that just because a drug might be legal, that doesn't mean it's safe.
 - Only take prescription medicines that have been prescribed by a reputable doctor.
 - Follow the directions for all of the medications that you use.
 - If you drink, "monitor" yourself, and don't overdo it.

- **Addiction to alcohol and drugs is a disease, and as with many illnesses, a person's heredity can play a part.**
 - If there is a history of substance abuse in your family, you need to be especially careful.

- **There are no known cures for drug addiction or alcoholism.**
 - With effort, and help from others, a person can stop their harmful behaviors.
 - But a sip of beer or a hit off a joint is all it can take to send someone back to a vicious cycle of self-destructive behavior.

- **Keeping substance abuse out of the workplace should be a top priority for all companies.**
 - Many of them implement formal drug and alcohol policies to address the problem.

- **Your company's policy can help to keep you and your coworkers safe by providing simple guidelines for all employees to follow.**
 - Workers are expected to be completely drug-free and sober when they report for work, and must remain that way throughout their shift.

- **Employees should also follow their company's drug and alcohol policy when they're:**
 - Representing the company at social gatherings.
 - Attending company sponsored recreational events.
 - Are "on call", awaiting assignment.

- **In addition to listing behaviors to avoid, your company's drug and alcohol policy will outline the steps that you should take if you are having a substance abuse problem.**

- **It will also contain information on what you should do if you suspect that a coworker may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.**
 - Keeping quiet about substance abuse in the workplace is dangerous!
 - Unless an abuser is reported, they'll never receive the help that they need, and will continue to be a threat to the health and safety of everyone at your company.

- **When substance abuse is brought to management's attention, the company will investigate the situation.**
 - Workers who are suspected of being "under the influence" will immediately be removed from any tasks that could endanger themselves or others.
 - They will then be interviewed by someone who is trained to handle substance abuse problems.

- **When confronted, some substance abusers immediately ask for help.**
 - If a suspected abuser denies that they are under the influence, a "reasonable suspicion" alcohol or drug test can be given.

- **A company can also perform periodic alcohol and drug tests to uncover substance abuse problems that might otherwise go unnoticed.**
 - Government regulations require random substance abuse tests for truck drivers, pilots and other transportation industry employees who have "safety-sensitive" jobs.

- **Failing a substance abuse test will not necessarily result in disciplinary action, but the employee will be required to enter a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program**

- **OSHA does not allow a company to conduct drug tests on employees as a form of retaliation when the worker has complained about unsafe work conditions.**

- **When an employee has a substance abuse problem, the situation will typically be handled like any other serious illness.**
 - A leave of absence can often be arranged, or in some cases the employee can be assigned alternate work while they are rehabilitating.

- **Your company's objective is to get rid of substance abuse... not its employees.**
 - In most cases only people who refuse treatment or have caused a serious accident will face suspension or termination.

- **Some companies have "Employee Assistance Programs" (EAPs) that provide resources to help workers combat substance abuse problems.**

- **You can also help a coworker overcome substance abuse by being understanding and encouraging their rehabilitation efforts.**
 - People who are trying to recover from drug or alcohol abuse need as much support as they can get... from family, friends and coworkers.
- **It's also crucial for them to seek help from people who have been down the road of addiction themselves, and have found another path to follow.**
 - That's why groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are so important.

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- **Never underestimate the danger of drugs and alcohol.**
- **Know your company's drug and alcohol policy, and follow it.**
- **Inform your supervisor immediately if you suspect a coworker is "under the influence".**
- **If you drink, do it in moderation... and don't drive.**
- **Use proper respiratory protection when working with "inhalants".**
- **Never use illegal drugs, and remember that even legal drugs, including marijuana, can be dangerous.**
- **Follow the directions for all of the medications that you take.**
- **By doing your part to ensure that you and your coworkers are drug-free and sober, you can help to create a safer and more productive workplace... for everyone!**