



Are you concerned about a friend or co-worker?

The collaborative nature of the entertainment industry necessitates working closely with others in stressful situations. Often we are the first people to notice the negative consequences that slowly present themselves when a friend or co-worker is caught in the downward spiral of alcohol or substance abuse.

Subtle changes in a friend or co-worker such as attendance problems, difficulty performing work, unsafe behaviors and social withdrawal begin to affect our work environment. We may find ourselves “covering” for someone whose work is affected by their alcohol or substance use. Problems may progress to the point that our own personal wellbeing and safety is compromised. How to handle this situation is unique in every case.

A few basic guidelines:

1. What are the signs that a friend or co-worker may be substance dependent?

Are they preoccupied with alcohol or drugs? Has their use of substances caused problems for them or for you? Do they continue to use after they become aware that problems are/have occurred? Do they show signs of withdrawal symptoms when they have made an effort to stop? Do they have to partake in more alcohol or drugs in order to function or feel good? Have they made multiple attempts to control their intake without long term success? Is there more than one substance involved – such as alcohol and drugs?

2. Are there signs of changing priorities as a result of dependency?

Do personal relationships with coworkers/friends/family suffer? Are they avoiding meaningful social interaction in order to indulge? Is their personal hygiene and healthy lifestyle reduced? Do they have an inability to accept responsibility for actions? Is there a negative progression that impacts their interaction/behavior and/or relationships?

3. Has their use of substances led to poor judgement or irrational behavior?

Have their actions led to: decreased quality and/or efficiency at work, being late to work or poor attendance, behavior that jeopardizes their safety and/or that of others, accidents at work or at social functions, motor vehicle citations or accidents, relationship problems, increased likelihood of committing crimes or being a victim of a crime, legal problems as a result of personal interactions, financial problems, engaging in risky, unprotected sex, showing signs of sexual abuse or date rape, evidence of self-inflicted physical harm, talk about hurting or perhaps killing others, talk about suicide?

4. What consequences have you experienced?

You are uncomfortable around them, you make excuses for or justify their behavior, you have a lack of trust in them, their lack of ability to maintain (or grow) a positive relationship, concern for them causes your mental/physical health to suffer, you experience a sense of powerlessness or insecurity.

5. What is the difference between enabling and intervention?

Enabling behavior includes giving or lending them money, making excuses for them, paying their bills, allowing them to stay with you, lending them your tools when they have lost, pawned or forgotten theirs, cleaning up their messes (physical, social, occupational or legal), tolerating habitual relapses, and setting ultimatums and not following through. Intervention tips include stop denying that a problem exists, don't fear the outcome, set boundaries and enforce them, detach with empathy/concern, help them find recovery support, and show compassion and support when/if they enter recovery.