

# Substance Use Disorders in the Workplace



The prolonged uncertainty and circumstances of COVID-19 caused an increase in mental health issues worldwide, with more people reporting feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Recent data suggests that more people are using drugs and alcohol to cope with their challenges.

A staggering 25% of essential workers and 13% of all workers [increased substance use as a result of the pandemic](#). In addition to the usual risks to their physical and mental health, [those with substance use problems are more likely to develop COVID-19 and experience adverse outcomes from the illness](#), including higher risk for hospitalization and mortality.

Substance use issues do not discriminate based on age, race, education, income, or any other factor. Over 20M Americans suffer from Alcohol Use Disorders, and alcohol remains the 3rd leading cause of death among adults.

As an HR leader, it is especially important that you provide support and resources for employees struggling with substance use disorders (SUDs). Although they can affect everyone differently, recovery is possible with quality healthcare and guidance. You can provide both.

## Signs of SUDs in the workplace

None of these indicators of SUDs are exclusive to people suffering with them, so it is best to not assume that an employee exhibiting one or two of these behaviors has an SUD. Instead, view these as indicators that someone may be suffering from a substance use disorder.

- Frequent absence
- Declining job performance
- Accidents and near-accidents
- Poor concentration
- Poor judgment

## How to talk to an employee about an SUD

The stigma surrounding substance use disorders makes it a sensitive subject to surface, and more so in the workplace. Any employee you confront may react negatively. Here are some best-practices for talking to an employee about a possible issue:

### Don't meet with an employee without evidence

Ensure you have documented evidence of SUD-related behavior before you approach anyone you suspect of having a substance use disorder.

### Respect their privacy

Have a one-on-one conversation with the employee in a calm, private place. This can help keep the employee from feeling attacked and give them a safe environment to open up, should they feel comfortable doing so.

### Ask Questions

Lead the conversation with your observations and your concern. Try something like, "You've missed quite a few days of work and I've noticed you aren't yourself lately. Is everything okay?" This gives the employee an opportunity to reach out to you for help, if they're ready.

### Expect and accept denial

It's unlikely that someone you confront about their behavior will admit to having a substance use disorder, especially in the workplace. Don't expect them to do so.

### Be compassionate and reasonable

Even when someone wants to get better, independence from drugs and alcohol cannot happen overnight.

### Offer resources and solutions

Whether the employee actually has a substance use disorder or they are undergoing some other stressor, they may benefit from utilizing any mental health services your company provides. A professional clinician's inherent confidentiality and skillset may be a helpful environment for them to discuss their issues, without fear of jeopardizing their job security.

[Source](#)



### Keep in mind that:

- A substance use disorder can happen with legal or illegal substances
- There's no specific personality type that's more likely to get a substance use disorder
- Using a substance doesn't always mean you have a substance use disorder
- There are many effective approaches to treatment
- Substance use issues impact people of all racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds

[Source](#)



## The Road to Recovery

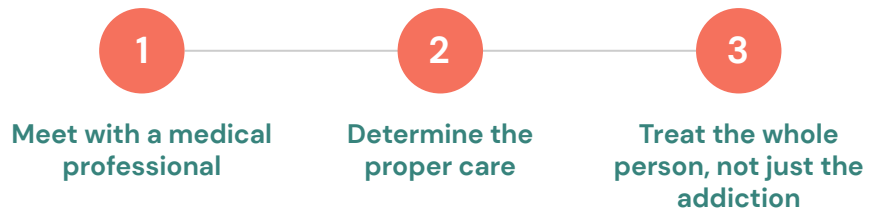
It is important that people with substance use disorders talk to healthcare professionals to determine the right path of care. No single treatment is appropriate for everyone. Treatment for SUD can take many forms, but nearly all of them involve counseling and behavioral therapies. Some treatment programs put emphasis on medically assisted detoxification, but detoxification is only the first stage of addiction treatment, and without supportive counseling and behavioral therapies, it does little to stop long-term substance use. Instead, this is accomplished by treating all the needs of the individual, not just their use of drugs or alcohol, because ignoring these needs may make recovery more difficult.

### More Information:

- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse: Drugs, Brains, and Behavior – The Science of Addiction National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
- [Al Anon](#)
- [Smart Recovery](#)

### Stat Sources and References:

- <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/03/substance-use-pandemic>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/workplace/toolkit/assess-workplace>
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5895963/>
- <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>
- <https://www.acpjournals.org/doi/10.7326/M20-5475>
- <https://www.nsc.org/newsroom/new-analysis-employers-stand-to-save-an-average-of>



Spring Health can make seeking assistance easier. A Spring Health Care Navigator can schedule an appointment with a professional, who will assess the situation, determine the best treatment plan for recovery, and answer any questions along the way. **Any use of your Spring Health benefit is completely confidential. It will never be shared with anyone, including employers.**

Spring Health's treatment plans include:

- Remote/virtual counseling, at-home testing
- One-on-one recovery coaching
- Community group support (where desired)
- Medication services (when needed)
- Recovery Assistance—an enhanced, confidential support program with high quality care options for drug or alcohol concerns