

IT'S OUR BUSINESS

Someone at work has a problem

- **ALCOHOL**
- **DRUGS and**
- **GAMBLING**

in the Workplace

When you work with others, you often get to know them well. You and your co-workers may notice changes in each other that might indicate a personal problem with alcohol, other drugs or gambling. Sometimes, you may see these changes long before your co-worker's job performance is affected. Other times, poor job performance may be the first sign of trouble.

Because you care, you might choose to intervene by expressing your concern and pointing your co-worker in the direction of assistance.

You might also choose to take action because your co-worker's behaviour (which may be due to gambling or use of alcohol or other drugs) is endangering you and others at work.

Read on to learn how you can support a co-worker when you've noticed changes that suggest he or she may be experiencing problems with alcohol, other drugs or gambling.

How will I know if my co-worker has a problem or not?

If you think there is a problem, it's likely because you've seen some indicators that your co-worker has changed. These changes might be in behaviour, attitude or activity at work. Trust your instincts. If you think there is a problem, chances are you're right.

The most important thing to understand is that it is not your role to diagnose or counsel your co-workers. Leave that to the professionals.

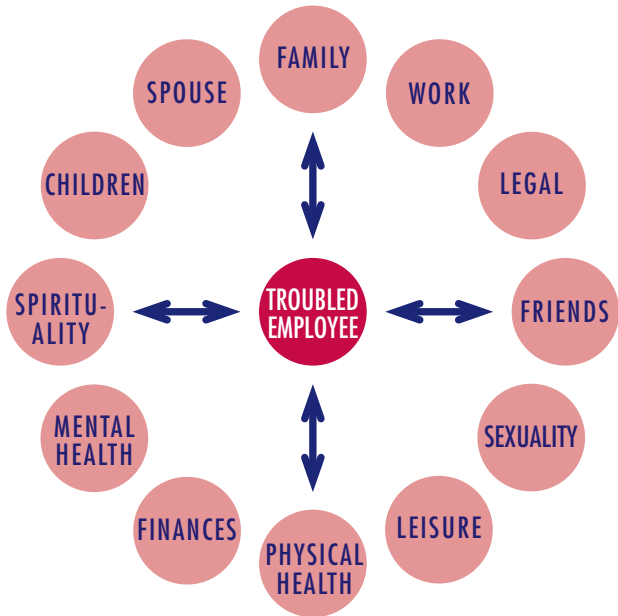
Here are some common indicators that a co-worker might be experiencing a problem with alcohol, drugs or gambling.

WORKPLACE INDICATORS

- changes in attendance
- absences from the work area
- higher number of illnesses, ailments, injuries
- policy violations
- safety violations
- accidents at work
- being sent home because he or she is not fit for work
- mood swings
- conflicts with others
- complaints from customers, co-workers, others
- making excuses for poor performance
- missed deadlines, sub-standard work
- changes in amount or quality of work
- changes in ability to concentrate

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PERSONAL INDICATORS



If your co-worker has a problem with alcohol, drugs or gambling, he or she is likely experiencing difficulties in some major life areas like the ones listed above.

For example, your co-worker might be experiencing problems getting along with others, with finances and with the law. Maybe work performance is declining. Sometimes your co-worker will experience medical problems or strong feelings of guilt, remorse and depression because of gambling or use of alcohol or other drugs.

The signs that indicate a co-worker may have a substance use or gambling problem are the same signs that can arise when someone is experiencing other life problems, such as marriage or family difficulties, depression, or health issues. Remember,

your job isn't to diagnose the underlying problem but to take action when someone you care about is showing signs of distress.

It's very important to intervene early if you are concerned. The earlier a problem is identified and treated, the better. When a problem goes undetected or untreated, it usually only gets worse.

If you have noticed some of these indicators and changes in a co-worker, there's a lot you can do to help your co-worker recognize a problem and get help.

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HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION:

- Get some advice. Before talking to your co-worker, you might find it helpful to talk to your employee and family assistance program (EFAP) provider, someone in human resources, an occupational health professional or a supervisor. You can also call a community service provider like AADAC. In most cases, you can discuss your co-worker's situation confidentially and get advice about how to proceed most effectively.
- Watch out for good intentions! It is a common reaction to think that when someone has a problem you should give him or her a break, cut them some slack or try to make things a little easier for them. In the workplace, this might include doing a co-worker's work, fixing their mistakes, covering up for them or making excuses for their poor performance. This is called *enabling*. Even though your intentions are good, by covering for your co-worker, you actually help him or her to avoid the problem. And, the problem usually gets worse.
- It is helpful to tell your co-worker that you are concerned about him or her.
- Link your concerns to the changes that you have noticed.
- Be clear that your intent is not to pry, but simply to let your colleague know that you care.
- Refrain from trying to diagnose the problem or attempting to counsel your co-worker. Offer support and encouragement, not advice. What worked for your Uncle Charlie or your sister-in-law Sue may not be what your co-worker needs.

- Focus on being a bridge between your co-worker and the appropriate sources of professional help. Remind your co-worker about the EFAP or other sources of assistance available. You might even want to provide a telephone number or brochure, if you have one.
- Encourage your co-worker to call but leave it up to him or her to decide.

Your co-worker's reaction to your remarks could range from gratitude to denial to open hostility. The outcome is difficult to predict. Your expression of concern might result in that co-worker deciding to seek help, or it might be one of several messages that eventually motivate your colleague to get help. Or, it may have no noticeable effect at all. Whatever your co-worker chooses to do, you have provided him or her with essential information and support.

● **Focus on being a bridge between your co-worker and the appropriate sources of professional help.**

“It’s easier to deal with an angry co-worker than it is to live with the guilt when he hurts or kills himself or others.”

– Rob, 22,
roughneck on a drilling rig

When safety is at risk

Sometimes your co-worker’s personal problems will put safety at risk. These situations call for immediate action to safeguard your colleague, yourself, those in the workplace, your customers or service recipients or the general public.

YOU MUST TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION WHEN

- you have observed a co-worker using alcohol or drugs.
- a co-worker is at work and you suspect that they have been using alcohol or drugs, even if they didn’t actually use the alcohol or drugs at work. For example, a co-worker comes to work feeling the effects of a hangover or still high from the night before.
- a co-worker is not fit for work. This could be because he or she is drunk or stoned, but it could also be because your colleague is very stressed, emotionally upset or distracted because of personal problems.

In these situations, you don’t have to diagnose the *reason* that your co-worker is not fit for work or unsafe. You do have to report it to a supervisor and allow him or her to take appropriate action.

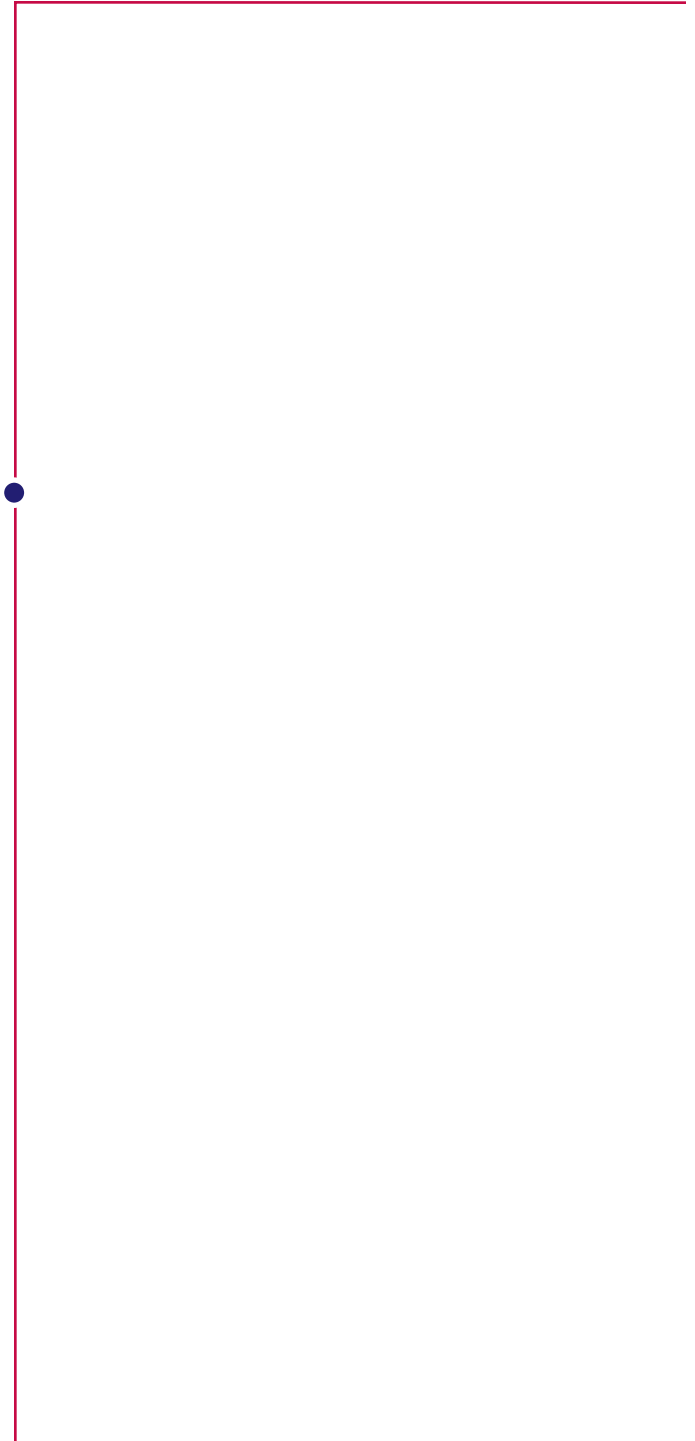
This can be a tough step to take. You may feel like you’re ratting on a friend. On the other hand, remember that your decision can save lives. Think of your actions as being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Where to get help

AADAC offers a full range of confidential services to those who are concerned about their alcohol use, drug use or gambling. For more information, contact your local AADAC office or call 1-866-33AADAC or visit our Web site www.aadac.com.

You can also get help from the following places:

- the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) at your workplace
- health professionals – your doctor, an occupational health nurse, a health and wellness representative
- workplace resources such as human resources personnel, managers, supervisors, union representatives or workplace peer support team members
- 12-step support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Gamblers Anonymous (available in most communities, listed in your telephone book)









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