

GROUP LIFE
& HEALTH

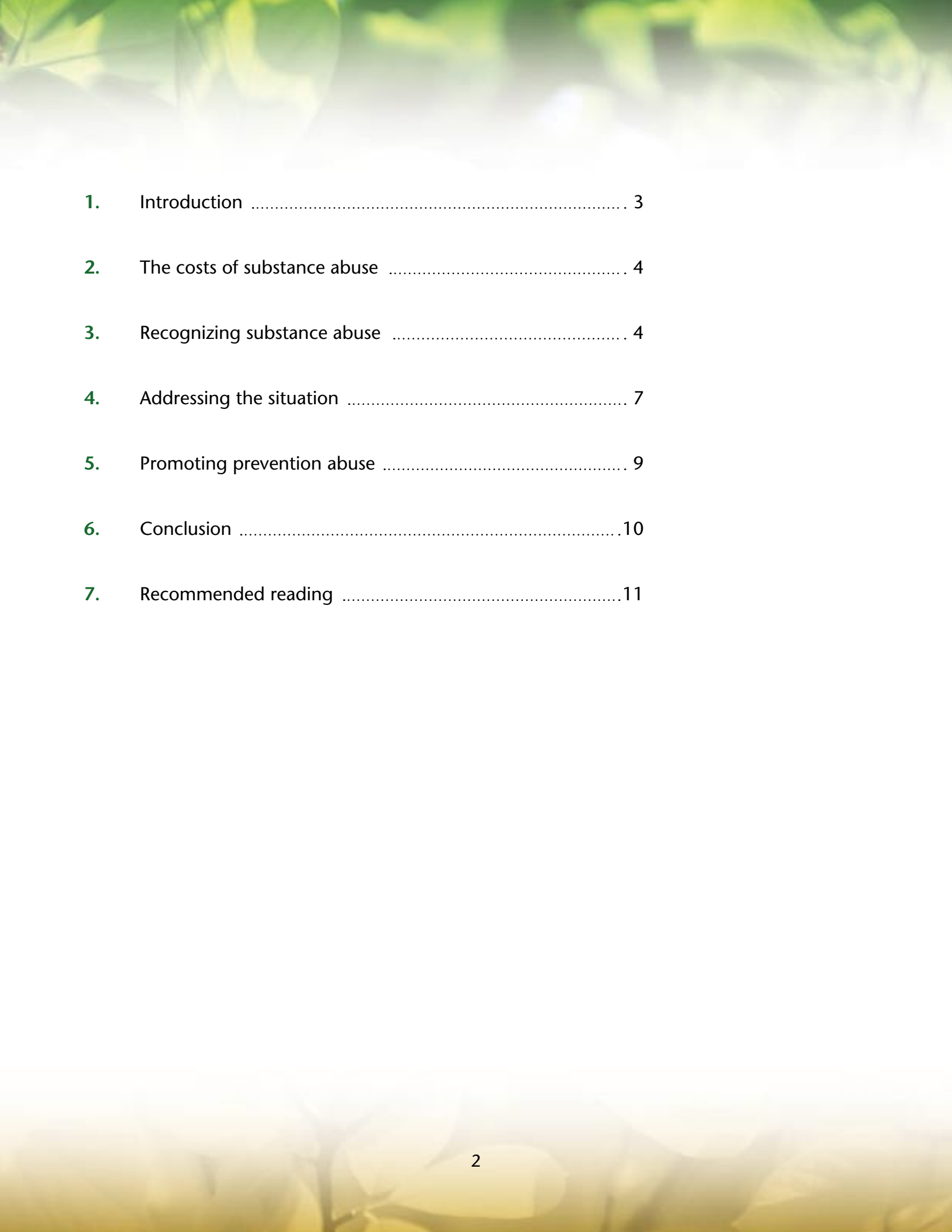
ONLINE EDUCATIONAL BOOKLET

MANAGING SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE

Well.
And well worth it.



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Introduction

Ahhh, a cool beer on a hot summer day or a glass of red wine at dinner with friends – let's face it, alcohol is part of our social fabric. Most of us consume alcoholic beverages in moderation, but for many people, alcohol is no longer just part of social interactions. It's a serious problem affecting every aspect of their lives from relationships to work.

Canadian studies estimate that 80 percent of all workers consume alcohol – most of those occasionally or moderately. Those who drink too much or too often, or people with an alcohol addiction, however, usually exhibit poor job performance and impair the ability of their colleagues to function at their best. If operating equipment, substance abusers can also place themselves and others in danger. A 1991 Alberta study found that among fatal occupational accident victims, 10.7 percent had alcohol in the bloodstream, while urinalysis showed that 8.5 percent had prescription drugs present, 8.5 percent tested positive for marijuana and 6.7 percent had consumed non-prescription drugs.

Those Alberta figures also point to another growing problem – the abuse of prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications and illicit drugs. Drugs such as amphetamines or cocaine immediately spring to mind, but drug abuse by workers includes prescription drugs such as Valium and over-the-counter medication such as codeine. According to the U.S. drug statistics, the abuse of prescription drugs ranks second only to cocaine usage. Indeed, almost 30 percent of drug abusers rely on prescription drugs to satisfy their habits.

As managers, it is essential we understand the implications of substance abuse in the workplace, recognize the signs that may indicate a problem and resolve the issue in a fair, impartial and timely manner.

More information and assistance is available through Expert-Aide, a service that offers professional coaching and consultation for managers to help them deal with employees who are facing difficulties. Orientation sessions and online booklets are also available, as are referral services for employees who are facing difficulties that effect, or could effect, their job performance. Contact Expert-Aide at 1 866 314-9533 (English service) or 1 866 314-9534 (service en français).

The costs of substance abuse

Substance abuse costs the Canadian economy more than \$18 billion annually -- alcohol abuse adds up to more than \$7.5 billion annually and the economic toll of illicit drugs in Canada is estimated at \$20.1 billion.

A 1996 report by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse stated that the highest per-capita costs of alcohol abuse were in Alberta at \$285 per capita. The lowest figures were in Newfoundland at \$199. Among the other provinces, per-capita alcohol costs range from \$243 in Quebec to \$283 in Prince Edward Island.

The per-capita costs of illicit drugs range from \$31 in Newfoundland to \$60 in British Columbia. It was estimated that illicit drugs cost the British Columbia economy \$207 million in 1992. Relatively high economic costs are also attributed to illicit drugs in Alberta (\$135 million), Ontario (\$507 million), Quebec (\$333 million) and Prince Edward Island (\$4.7 million.) Studies show that drug abusers cost their employers twice as much in medical and worker compensation claims as their drug-free co-workers.

This means that across Canada, in large corporations and small business alike, substance abuse is taking a toll in both real and hidden costs.

Real dollar costs include:

- increased absenteeism
- an increase in overtime pay for other staff having to pick up the slack
- an increase in sick leave
- more insurance claims
- greater benefit costs
- more disability claims
- more workers' compensation claims
- the costs of replacing damaged equipment
- litigation

But there are many other costs to an organization, hidden costs such as:

- a rise in employee turnover
- poor morale
- increased workplace conflicts
- decreased productivity
- an increase in mistakes and errors
- reduced customer satisfaction
- damaged corporate reputation
- a rise in on-the-job accidents
- more disciplinary problems
- presenteeism

Substance abusers don't have to indulge on the job to have a negative impact on the workplace. Compared to their non-abusing coworkers, they are:

- 10 times more likely to miss work
- 3.6 times more likely to be involved in on-the-job accidents (and five times more likely to injure themselves or someone else in the process)
- five times more likely to file a worker's compensation claim
- 33 percent less productive

How to recognize substance abuse

Substance abuse cuts across gender, race and nationality and nearly one in 10 Canadians report having problems with drinking.

A U.S. report notes that 70 percent of illicit drug users aged 18 to 49 are employed full-time. But it's the growing abuse of prescription and over-the-counter medication that's causing concern – prescription drugs like Valium, Vicodin and OxyContin and over-the-counter cold medications are the most often abused.

Most substance abusers tend to display classic problems and symptoms over time in the workplace. When evaluating a situation, you must review the total picture. Do you see more than one of these signs? Have several instances occurred over a period of time? Is there a progression of signs or symptoms?

Stage 1 - Casual or "experimental" use

Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrives late in morning or after lunch• Leaves job early• Unexplained absences during the day
General Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fellow workers complain about behaviour or performance• Overreacts to real or imagined criticism• Complains of not feeling well
Job performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misses deadlines• Makes mistakes through inattention or poor judgement• Displays decreased efficiency

Stage 2 - More frequent use

Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Takes frequent days off for vague ailments or improbable reasons
General Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Statements become unclear or undependable• Avoids colleagues• Borrows money from colleagues• Exaggerates work accomplishments• Is hospitalized more than average• Incurs repeated minor injuries on and off the job• Displays unreasonable resentment
Job performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhibits general deterioration of work performance• Works at spasmodic pace• Shows lack of concentration

Stage 3 - Preoccupied with "getting high"

Attendance

- Takes frequent time off, sometimes days
- Fails to return from lunch

General Behaviour

- Exhibits grandiose, aggressive or belligerent behaviour
- Indifference to personal hygiene
- Domestic problems interfere with work
- Displays an apparent loss of ethical values
- Encounters financial problems or garnishment of salary
- Hospitalizations increase
- Refuses to discuss problems
- Experiences legal problems

Job performance

- Far below expected level

Stage 4 - Compulsive use

Attendance

- Has prolonged, unpredictable absences

General behaviour

- Drinks or uses on the job
- Becomes totally undependable
- Experiences repeated hospitalizations
- Physical deterioration is visible
- Financial problems worsen
- Develops serious family problems and/or divorce

Job performance

- Uneven and generally incompetent

There are the more obvious signs of drug or alcohol use that include dilated pupils, reduced alertness and motor co-ordination and mood swings.

Addressing the situation

Aside from the previously discussed health, safety and productivity issues, other factors prompting companies to address substance abuse include government legislation (e.g. Canada Labour Code and provincial health and safety legislation), contractor requirements (many U.S.-based companies require a substance abuse policy), and the desire to achieve high quality and ethical standards. Some see substance abuse as a “red flag” for organizational or work design problems.

Your company should have a substance abuse policy in place (if not, it is strongly urged that one is established) for you to consult. It makes your job as a manager easier if an employee has contravened terms of employment. Whatever the case, if you suspect an employee’s job performance is impaired due to substance abuse, DO NOT accuse the employee of abusing alcohol or drugs. Instead, focus on his or her job performance. If, during discussions, the employee indicates he or she has “personal” problems, direct them to resources such as an Employee Assistance Program.

The bottom line is that the employee’s job performance is deteriorating or not up to standard. You may choose to talk to the employee in private. If that hasn’t worked, or you prefer a more formal and documented avenue to resolving the issue, a performance interview is necessary.

The performance interview

Conducting a performance interview requires careful preparation. Begin by collecting essential information such as:

- substance abuse policy
- standards of conduct
- job descriptions
- performance standards
- corporate mission, vision and value statements

- any information concerning previous discussions regarding performance and/or behaviour.
- an outline that clearly states the problem, the business reasons the performance issues must be resolved and the consequences if the person decides not to address the problem.
- an agenda outlining the points to be covered.

Do not delay intervention. A timely response reinforces to the employee and your staff the importance you attach to the situation. Select a location that is private and allows for a confidential discussion. Limit the number of people present, although in a unionized setting, a union representative usually attends and you may wish to include a representative from Human Resources.

Here are some tips to help ensure the meeting is not confrontational and will address the situation in a business-like and effective manner.

- Relax.
- On arrival, greet the person in a friendly manner, but do not engage in chit-chat. Open up the conversation quickly and get to the point.
- Work from the facts, not heresay.
- Keep your emotions in check. Remain logical and impartial. Do not react to emotional behaviour but draw the line if the behaviour becomes abusive.

- Focus on the performance issue, do not accuse the person of abusing alcohol or drugs unless you have hard proof.
- Be polite, tactful and business-like.
- Listen actively. A successful performance interview hinges on good communication. Active listening techniques help establish a climate of co-operation and reduce the potential for misunderstanding. Essentially, active listeners practice clarification, confirmation and paraphrasing techniques. Remember to use "I" statements to diffuse defensive or aggressive responses. Try writing a few "I" statements prior to the meeting as an aid.
- Discuss the cause and effect of the performance issue and ways to deal with it. Ask questions and get information, rather than just stating opinions.
- Agree to what resolutions have been made and make sure the individual understands the consequences if the situation continues. Work towards a win-win situation for everyone.
- Finally, schedule a follow-up meeting to finalize the situation.

Promoting prevention

Prevention is, of course, the best method of dealing with substance abuse in the workplace. There are several ways a company can promote and maintain a safe and healthy workplace where substance abuse is not tolerated.

1. The most important element is a written substance abuse policy that is supported by top management, understood by all employees, consistently enforced and perfectly clear about what is expected of employees and the consequences of policy violations.
2. A substance abuse prevention program with an employee drug education component that focuses not only on the dangers of drug and alcohol use but also on the availability of counseling and treatment.
3. Training of all managers, front-line supervisors, human resource personnel, medical staff and others in identifying and dealing with substance abusers.
4. An Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

As a manager, you have an important role to play in this initiative. You can:

- Be a good role model.
- Educate yourself about substance abuse and treatment methods.
- Explore various options for employees and their family members to obtain help or information regarding drugs, alcohol or individual or family problems. For example, make sure all employees are aware of EAP services.
- Create opportunities for your organization to get involved with the community and promote awareness activities and events. For example, participate in Drug Awareness Week.
- Be attentive and observant. Know the signs of impairment.
- Document. Keep records of facts about job performance issues.
- Be consistent. Follow the same procedures for ALL employees.

Conclusion

The behaviours and poor job performance caused by an individual with a substance abuse problem can have a ripple effect on an entire organization. A 1998 report stated that as many as 40 percent of employees experience at least one negative consequence associated with a co-worker's substance abuse. These include frustration caused by having to do extra work, the stress of dealing with unreliable colleagues, reduced job satisfaction, deteriorating work relationships and an unhealthy, often unsafe, work environment.

Managers are also affected by being forced to focus their time and energy on attending to the fallout caused by substance abuse instead of on organizational needs.

In today's competitive business environment, rapid reaction, innovation and the capacity to change are essential qualities for organizations and individuals alike. Ignoring workplace substance abuse problems and absorbing their real and hidden costs is no longer viable. Suspected drug or alcohol abuse must be dealt with quickly before further problems arise.

For assistance with, or more information on, managing employees with substance abuse problems, contact Expert-Aide at 1 866 314-9533 (English service) or 1 866 314-9534 (service en français).

Recommended reading

Substance Abuse in the Workplace

by Reginald L. Campbell and R. Everett Langford

Alcoholism & Drug Abuse in the Workplace:

Managing Care & Costs Through Employee Assistance Programs

by Walter F. Scanlon

Preventing Workplace Substance Abuse: Beyond Drug Testing to Wellness

by Joel B. Bennett and Wayne E. K. Lehman

Understanding the Alcoholic's Mind

by Arnold M. Ludwig

Understanding Drugs of Abuse: The Processes of Addiction, Treatment & Recovery

by Mim J. Landry

Workplace Intervention

by James Fearing

Willpower's Not Enough: Understanding & Recovering From Addictions of Every Kind

by Arnold M. Washton

Understanding Addiction

by Elizabeth Connell Henderson M.D.



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