

Security Spotlight

An Informational Guide for Securitas USA Clients and Employees



July 2015

Securitas Security Services, USA, Inc.

Number 136



Detecting Substance Abuse

Tom noticed that one of his fellow coworkers, Betsy, had exhibited signs of poor performance lately, which was not her normal behavior. When confronted about her tardiness, having disheveled clothing, and appearing to be sleepy during her shift, she told him that she was just tired and that everything was alright.

Tom took her at her word, but gave her a verbal warning regarding her performance and advised that she needed to immediately correct her behavior. Does this sound familiar? Have you seen someone like this? Is it just being tired and stressed out or could it be something more serious, like substance abuse? Know the signs.

What is drug abuse and addiction?

Drug abuse and addiction is the problematic overindulgence of a substance, such as alcohol or drugs, which leads to the loss of a person's self-control and ability to function in a normal manner. When speaking about substance abuse, most people inherently think of illegal drugs, but studies have shown that more people are turning to legal substances. This is predominantly in the realm of alcohol and prescription medications, with a dramatic rise in the latter. It is assumed, by many, that substance abusers lack the self-control or principles and

choose to continue taking them despite the negative consequences related to their long-term use. However, there are many reasons why some people become addicted while others do not and there are a number of factors, when combined, increase one's chances of abusing drugs or alcohol.

The first factor is biological. The genetic disposition of an individual combined with potential mental disorders, is one main cause attributed by doctors and scientists as a leading aspect.

The second factor is the environment in which individuals exist. This can range from socio-economic status, parental upbringing, impact of family and friends, stress factors experienced in daily life, peer pressure, and a general quality of life. Outside influences can either introduce or reinforce attitudes and behaviors about drugs and alcohol.

The third factor pertains to the developmental stage of a young person when abuse begins. Studies have shown that the earlier an individual begins using drugs and alcohol, the more likely the person will advance to a serious addictive state. The reason is that the brain is still developing and its associated skills are being impacted in such areas as thinking and control. (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2012).

Impact of substance abuse in the workplace

The costs to society are enormous. It is estimated that alcohol and drug abuse is associated with 100,000 deaths per year and costs society roughly \$100 billion per year, of which businesses shoulder about \$80 billion of that amount.

In addition to costs, substance abuse affects businesses in terms of lost performance and productivity, high absentee rates for affected employees, an increased likelihood of injuries and fatalities, theft of property to fuel abuse, low employee morale, and increased health care and legal costs for both businesses and employees. (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 2015)

Detecting possible substance abuse:

There are several signs that indicate that an individual may be abusing drugs or alcohol.

- One of the most common and obvious signs is the dilation of the eyes. It is connected to and could be a result of alcohol, marijuana, or amphetamine usage.
- The physical smell of an individual's body or outfit. Odors are emitted from a person's clothing, hair, and breath, and could assist in the detection of possible substance abuse. An example of this could be intoxication.
- A definitive and more serious sign is needle marks on a person, usually their arms. This is also referred to as "track" marks, and is typically associated with the injection of drugs like heroin.
- Do you notice a person with excessive sniffles, redness of the nostrils, or frequent bloody noses? If so, this could possibly be associated with drugs that are snorted, such as cocaine.

Possible behavioral changes:

- Ask yourself if the individual lacks motivation, enthusiasm, shows a decrease in memory and concentration skills, or exhibits a short attention span, which did not exist before.
- Do you notice the individual drifting off to sleep or exhibiting extremes in energy – from TIRED to WIRED?
- Has the person become anti-social, less gregarious, curt, and lacks proper social interaction with others?

Detecting possible substance abuse in the workplace:

There are some signs that could point to possible workplace substance abuse problems. (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 2015)

Job Performance

- Inconsistent work quality
- Poor concentration and lack of focus
- Lowered productivity or erratic work patterns
- Increased absenteeism
- Unexplained disappearances from the job site
- Needless risk taking
- Disregard for safety for self and others
- Extended lunch periods and early departures

Workplace Behavior

- Frequent financial problems
- Avoidance of colleagues
- Blaming others for poor workplace performance on evaluations
- Complaints about problems at home
- Deterioration in personal appearance or personal hygiene
- Excuses and time off for vaguely defined illnesses or family problems.

The above are not always a sign of substance abuse, but if you observe such unusual behavior, or if you have concerns about a co-worker, you should contact your HR representative to discuss the matter confidentially.

Alcohol & Drug Abuse Information



The National Institute on Drug Abuse has some valuable information on drug abuse. You can access this information at:

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/understanding-drug-abuse-addiction>.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence also has some excellent information on drugs in the workplace. This information is posted at:

<http://www.ncadd.org/learn-about-drugs/workplace>.