



Leader Tool

Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace

Recent surveys reveal that 1 in 5 people say they are drinking more during the pandemic. Individual stressors such as job loss, financial pressure, the death of a loved one, and relationship breakdown can lead to an increase in alcohol consumption. People who currently experience issues with alcohol, or have in the past, might be more vulnerable to using alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with the new and unprecedented stressors relating to the pandemic.

However, reports also reveal that some people have reduced their consumption. You can find out more [here](#). This highlights the importance of engaging with your people individually as messages around limiting consumption and the implication of “problem drinking” may seem unnecessary to some while vitally relevant and essential to others.

Taking time to notice the warning signs, reaching out and starting a conversation is often the best approach. Most leaders ensure that they regularly “eyeball” their team members via Zoom if they are unable to see them face to face. Working from home adds a degree of difficulty in identifying subtle behavioural or physical cues. At AccessEAP we are shaping our Future Workplace, which includes returning to the physical workplace, balancing the preferences of our people with our duty of care, business objectives, the need for collaboration and a whole lot more.

Indications that a person may be affected by drugs and/or alcohol include breath odour, slurred or rapid speech, slowed movements, difficulty focusing, unable to articulate thoughts coherently, pupils not dilating, unexplained change in appetite or drop in body weight, changes to complexion or skin appearance, restlessness, scratching, teeth decaying quickly, suspicious or paranoid thoughts, impulsive or reckless behaviour, aggression, withdrawal from team, or excessive alcohol consumption at work events. These signs in isolation do not mean that a person is affected by alcohol and/or drugs; however, as a leader, you have a duty of care to follow up on your concerns.

Here are some tips to help guide you in addressing potential alcohol and/or drug misuse with one of your employees:

1. **Have a Conversation:** Organise a private conversation and share your observations using supportive and non-judgemental language. You may need to directly ask the question as to whether they are having problems with drugs or alcohol.
2. **Respect Privacy:** Ensure that any information that person shares with you is not disclosed without their consent and that they know it’s confidential. There may be exceptions; e.g. there is a risk of harm to the employee or someone else, or your organisation’s safety policy requires you to disclose.
3. **Identify Potential Work Causes:** Often, alcohol and/or drugs are used to alleviate stress or mental health symptoms. If perceived stress at work is considered a contributing factor, ensure that action is taken to investigate or address the work issues identified.



4. **Safety as a Priority:** Assess whether there is a risk of injury or significant harm to that person or someone else at work as a result of their drug or alcohol use. If there is any risk at all, consult HR about options for keeping the employee and others safe.
5. **Arrange Support:** If the person acknowledges drug and/or alcohol misuse, check whether they have any professional supports in place; such as their GP. EAP's have a long history working with alcohol and drug addiction. The Manager Support Hotline is a great place to start if you would like to determine the best approach and resources available as part of your EAP.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

AccessEAP acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land we work on and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

