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HANDLING SUD IN THE WORKPLACE

80% Human Resources (HR) Decision-Makers

believe that substance use disorder impacts their employees

yet only 25%

feel prepared to deal with the issue.



SIGNS OF SOMEONE STRUGGLING WITH SUD

- **Absenteeism.** This is among the leading indicators of SUD – especially increased absenteeism and increased used of sick time and vacation time.
- **Job disappearance.** Frequent or unexplained absence from work.
- **Job performance.** Unusually poor or inconsistent job performance.
- **Accidents and near-accidents.** Either on the job or at home.
- **Concentration.** Difficulty in focusing, or inability to focus at all.
- **Judgment.** Look out for an increase in poor decision-making and on-the-job errors.

- **Appearance.** A downturn in physical appearance and personal hygiene.

HOW TO TALK TO AN EMPLOYEE ABOUT SUD: DO'S AND DON'TS:



If you had an SUD, chances are good you'd be very sensitive to being confronted with it, especially in the workplace. Caution and care are highly advised. Here are a few guidelines to consider:

- **DO have the conversation privately.** This reduces the chance that the employee will feel either 1. Threatened or 2. Acutely self-conscious. Your goal is not to get the employee to admit there's a problem, but if there is one, he or she is more likely to be open about it behind closed doors. If this happens, be ready with next steps and options. Be prepared to talk about being a Recovery Friendly Workplace.
- **DO use performance reviews as a place to start** - especially if there are performance-related issues to bring up. But don't wait for an annual review if you feel there's a problem that needs to be addressed now. Set a meeting and document the results.



- **DO ask questions rather than make accusations.** Minnesota's RFW program offers this approach to an employee with a possible SUD: "I've noticed you missed quite a few deadlines and days of work. Your performance has declined and it seems you have trouble concentrating. Is everything ok? Is there anything I can help with?" This line of inquiry opens a door for the employee to step through, if he or she is ready.
- **DO expect denial.** Those in the grasp of an SUD will often refuse to acknowledge a problem. If this is the case, move on with procedures you have for poor performance or behavior. Set expectations clearly according to existing policies. Document your encounter.
- **DO stick to facts.** Remember - all your actions need to be based on facts: performance, actions, and policies. Suspicion is not enough.
- **DON'T ignore the signs or the situation.** An employee with SUD is not going to suddenly get better. Dealing with it professionally and compassionately is the correct course of action.
- **DON'T approach an employee** unless you have legitimate, reasonable, documented instances where you feel there was evidence of SUD-related behavior.
- **DON'T be aggressive.** You might be aggravated or upset by the employee's behavior, but refrain from being abrupt, loud, accusatory, or confrontational.
- **DON'T make snap judgments.** Keep an open mind about how you can help the employee and how a positive outcome can be achieved.

