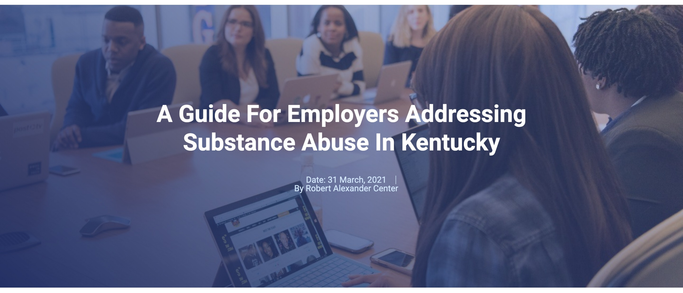

A Guide For Employers Addressing Substance Abuse In Kentucky

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By Robert Alexander Center

As an employer, substance abuse in the workplace should be one of the things you address. According to statistics, as many as 70% of all illegal drug users in the US are either in full or part-time employment. This means that there is a high likelihood that some of your employees are battling some form of addiction.

How Employee Substance Abuse Affects Businesses

How does having employees who are struggling with substance abuse affect your business? Simply put, it affects the bottom line and costs you money. How? Well, workers with substance abuse:

- Tend to miss more work days and take more sick leaves.
- Fail to do their work well and fulfill their work responsibilities leading to lost man-hours.
- Are more careless and less efficient when discharging their duties. This means they're likely to cause accidents that lead to injuries and other dangerous situations at work.
- Are often thinking about getting the next hit or high so don't concentrate that well on their work and are less productive.
- Lead to overworking others who have to step in to handle their work. This can eventually lead to low morale in the workplace.

All the above can easily be translated into increased costs in the following ways:

- Higher expenses for overtime pay
- Higher rates of absenteeism or tardiness.
- Higher worker's compensation and insurance claims.
- A reduction in job performance and productivity leading to losses.
- Increased safety and health risks for employees mean increased costs for the company in terms of keeping workers safe.

Also, don't forget hidden costs caused by things such as friction among employees, damage to equipment, a high employee turnover as well as damage to the company's public image.

Addressing Workplace Substance Abuse

As an employer, you might be tempted to dismiss substance abuse as a personal issue. You may want to take a "wait and see" approach and hope that the individual in question cleans up their act. Unfortunately, given the nature of addiction, this rarely happens. What's most likely to happen is that the worker will persist with their behavior as long as they feel they can get away with it.

It's upon you to take action to address substance abuse in your workplace. Here's what you can do:

1. Make sure the problem is due to substance abuse.

The first step to handling such a situation is to ensure that the employee actually has a problem with substance abuse. Some of the things that should raise concern include:

- The worker keeps falling sick and taking sick off days.
- They're involved in more workplace accidents.
- Their productivity has reduced.
- There has been a noticeable change in their personality.
- You've had to talk to or discipline them more lately.

Once you decide there's an issue, you can move to confront the employee but only after you've consulted the company's HR and legal departments.

2. Establish a workplace substance abuse policy.

Noticing incidents of substance abuse in your workplace gives you the perfect opportunity to raise awareness on this issue among your workers. You can start by having drug and addiction specialists such as those from the Robert Alexander Center for Recovery come in and address your staff on substance abuse. This may inspire some employees to come forward and ask for assistance in beating addiction.

Another important step you can take is to come up with a Substance Abuse Policy for your company. If one already exists, this is the time to sensitize your staff about it. A substance abuse policy outlines your company's position regarding addiction and substance use in the workplace. It explains how the company views addiction and what the consequences are for using substances while at work. Furthermore, it clears up the actions to be taken if employees violate the policy.

The substance abuse policy should also outline the company's position on drug testing as well as the consequences of a worker getting a positive result on their drug test.

3. Establish an Employee Assistance Program.

To show that your company cares and values its employees, establish an Employee Assistance Program for those struggling with substance abuse. Explain how the program will help workers who come forward for assistance e.g. access to short-term counseling or referrals to treatment centers. Also, outline the steps the company intends to take after an employee begins treatment for addiction as well as how their recovery will be monitored and reviewed.

It's also good to explain how you'll handle cases of relapse.

4. Train your supervisors and managers.

The people close to workers are their supervisors and managers. They are also better placed to recognize signs that may point to drug or alcohol abuse or addiction. It, therefore, makes sense to train them to address issues to do with substance abuse in the workplace.

Ensure that the supervisors and managers understand your company's substance abuse policy and train them to recognize signs of alcohol and drug dependence in staff. They should also be aware of the steps they should take if they suspect a problem and how to help and support the employee in question.

5. Take appropriate action

When confronting an employee about their alcohol or drug use, remember to preserve their confidentiality. Additionally, always handle such issues professionally and in private as much as possible. This shows your workers that you respect them.

Part of helping your employees can be referring them to addiction treatment specialists in Kentucky. Treatment specialists from a treatment facility such as the Robert Alexander Center for Recovery have the experience to deal with workplace substance abuse and we can give you the resources you need to help your employees.

We also have a range of addiction treatment programs and services from our Detox Services and Family Therapy Program to our Intensive Outpatient Program and Outpatient Program, all designed to help individuals overcome addiction and reclaim their lives.

Get in touch with us if you need help addressing substance abuse in your workplace or if you need help crafting a substance abuse policy for your company. We'll be glad to assist you.

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