

IT' S OUR BUSINESS

**Does someone I work
with have a problem?**

- **ALCOHOL**
- **DRUGS and**
- **GAMBLING**

in the Workplace



**Alberta Health
Services**

Co-workers often get to know each other well. You may notice changes in a co-worker that could be a sign of a problem involving alcohol, other drugs or gambling. Sometimes, you may see these changes long before your co-worker's job performance is affected. Other times, poor job performance may be the first sign of trouble.

Because you care, you might choose to say something to your co-worker and suggest places he or she could find help.

You might also choose to take action because your co-worker's behaviour (which may be a result of gambling or use of alcohol or other drugs) could put you and other workers in danger.

Read on to learn how you can support a co-worker when you've noticed changes that suggest he or she may be having problems with alcohol, other drugs or gambling.

How will I know if my co-worker has a problem?

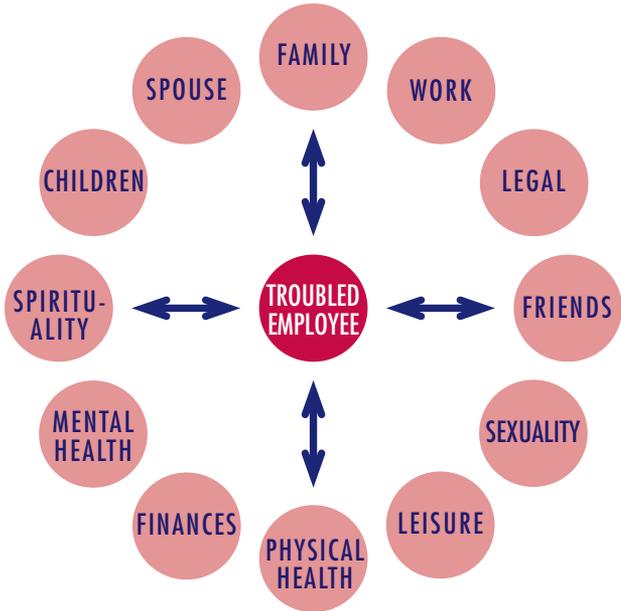
Maybe you've seen some changes in your co-worker. These changes might be in behaviour, attitude or job performance. If you think your co-worker might have a problem, chances are you're right.

The following are some common specific changes you might notice at work:

- attendance problems, absences from the work area
- delaying action on job duties
- lack of concentration
- causing workplace incidents, near misses
- not following health and safety rules
- complaints from other workers or customers
- changes in quality of work, making excuses
- poor judgment, confusion
- exaggerating work accomplishments
- incorrect or slowed actions, either physical or mental
- memory errors, including forgetfulness
- reduced motivation
- increased risk-taking
- coming to work intoxicated, or drinking alcohol or using other drugs at work

In addition to problems at work, signs of alcohol, other drug or gambling problems may show up in other areas of someone's life. If your co-worker is having an addiction problem, he or she is likely having difficulty in some of the following areas:

The most important thing to understand is that it is not your role to diagnose or counsel your co-workers. Leave that to the professionals.



The earlier a problem is identified and treated, the better.

For example, your co-worker might be having trouble with others, with money or with the law. Medical problems or strong feelings of guilt, remorse and depression can also be signs of a problem with alcohol, other drugs or gambling.

The signs of a substance use or gambling problem are the same signs that can come up when someone is experiencing other life problems, such as marriage or family difficulties, depression or health issues. Any of these problems could also lead a person to look for comfort in alcohol or other drugs.

If you are concerned, it's very important to act early. The earlier a problem is found and treated, the better. If nothing is done, the problem could get worse. It's not necessary for you to try to diagnose or counsel your co-worker. The most useful thing you can do is to support your co-worker in finding professional

counselling help. Your support might help your co-worker be more motivated to seek help.

When safety is at risk

Sometimes your co-worker's personal problems will put workplace safety at risk. These situations call for immediate action to safeguard your co-worker, yourself, your fellow workers, your customers or the general public.

You must take immediate action when

- a co-worker is at work and you suspect that he or she has been using alcohol or other drugs. You might actually see him or her using alcohol or drugs at work, or you might notice that a co-worker comes to work dealing with the effects of a hangover or still high from the night before.
- a co-worker is not fit for work. Someone who is drunk or stoned is not fit for work, but someone who is very stressed, emotionally upset or distracted because of personal problems is also unfit for work.

You don't have to know the reason that your co-worker is unfit for work or potentially unsafe. You do have to report the problem to a supervisor and allow him or her to take appropriate action.

This can be a tough step to take. You may feel like you're betraying a friend. On the other hand, remember that your decision can save lives. Think of your actions as being part of the solution rather than part of the problem.

Focus on being a bridge between your co-worker and the appropriate sources of professional help.

Even though your intentions are good, by covering for your co-worker, you actually help him or her to avoid the problem.

How you can help

Here are some tips to help you help your co-worker:

Get some advice. Before talking to your co-worker, you might find it helpful to talk to professional support staff that may be available through your company such as an employee assistance program (EAP) provider, someone in human resources, an occupational health and safety person or a supervisor. You can also call a community addiction service provider. In most cases, you can discuss your co-worker's situation confidentially and get advice about what, if anything, you should do to help.

Be aware of and follow workplace policy, practices and procedures. If workplace health or safety could be at risk, you must take action. Report concerns to your supervisor or manager. Although it's important to know possible signs of impairment, only health-care professionals should determine a cause of impairment and decide if a person is fit for work.

Do not cover up or ignore your co-workers' poor job performance. Allow co-workers to carry their own workload and make decisions. Even though your intentions are good, by covering for your co-workers, you can actually add to the problem by preventing them from experiencing the consequences of their actions.

Tell your co-worker that you are concerned. Link your concerns to the changes you have noticed. Be clear that your intent is not to pry, but simply to let him or her know that you care. Offer support and encouragement, but don't try to counsel. Your co-worker's reaction to your attempt to help

could range from thanks to denial to anger. The outcome is difficult to predict. Your expression of concern alone might result in your co-worker deciding to seek help, or it might be one of several messages that eventually motivate him or her to get help. Or, it may have no noticeable effect at all.

Share information about available help.

Remind your co-worker about the EAP or other sources of assistance that may be available. You might even want to provide a telephone number or brochure, if you have one. Encourage your co-worker to call but leave it up to him or her to decide. Whatever your co-worker chooses to do, you have given him or her information and support.

“It’s easier to deal with an angry co-worker than it is to live with the guilt when he hurts or kills himself or others.”

– Rob, 22,
roughneck
on a drilling rig

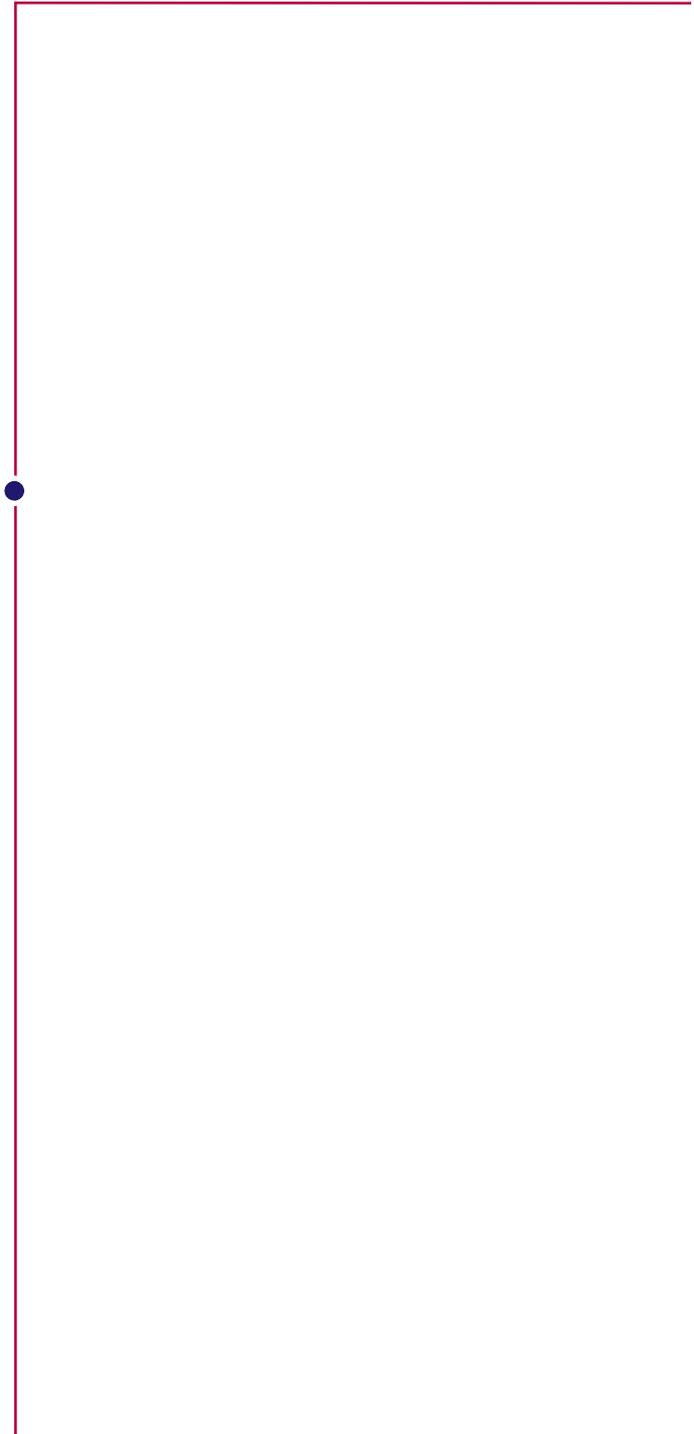
Where to get help

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

Other sources of help:

- the employee assistance program (EAP) at your workplace
- health professionals—your doctor, an occupational health nurse, a health and wellness representative
- workplace resources such as human resources personnel, managers, supervisors, union representatives or workplace peer support team members
- 12-step support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous or Gamblers Anonymous (available in most communities and listed in your telephone book)





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