



Informing and Educating Your Employees

Employee education is a critical component of a drug-free workplace program. Frequently a cornerstone of prevention, employee education can help employees in a variety of ways. It can help them learn more about the hazards of



substance abuse and improve their own resilience to prevent substance abuse. It can help them understand the policies and rules of their workplaces and become familiar with the steps they can take to get help for themselves and their families.

Employee education efforts can include information on the rights of employees and employers; the balance between the right of privacy and the need to know; the workplace's views about when treatment and recovery, or detection and disciplinary action, are appropriate; the implications of substance abuse for injury, accidents, and safety.

Many multimedia educational tools are available to help workplaces inform their employees about effective programs and steps they can take to improve their health in general. These include SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices¹ and SAMHSA's GetFit site.²



As you plan your employee education effort, make sure it is aimed at all employees and all levels of the organization.

Consider taking the following steps:

- Discuss the workplace's policy, program, and rules. Organizations have found it useful to hand out two copies of the policy—one to be signed and handed back, the other to be kept as a reference. As new people enter, make it part of the orientation package.
- Discuss how employees and their families can get help—for example, through an employee assistance program, a health/wellness program, health care coverage within the workplace, union resources, community outreach services, State and local treatment, and the like.
- Discuss how employee performance issues are to be evaluated.
- Discuss how management referrals and self-referrals are handled.
- Provide details about the circumstances, procedures, and other elements of drug testing (if testing is included in the policy).
- Explain the confidentiality and other employee protections that are included in the policy.
- Provide information about substance abuse, including the types and effects of drugs, the symptoms of drug use and abuse, and their effects on performance.
- Explain the relationship of the employee assistance program to any drug testing, treatment, rehabilitation, and aftercare.



- Discuss prevention resources such as health/wellness programs, helplines and other resources available in the community, and online national resources such as <http://getfit.samhsa.gov/>. Likewise, explain what resources are available for employees' families.

Implementing Employee Education

Employee education components can use a variety of multimedia approaches, singly and in combinations. Orientation programs for new hires, for example, frequently include video presentations that provide general information about substance abuse and more specific information about the organization. More traditional methods have included the use of posters, print materials, payroll stuffers, newsletter articles, booths at health/wellness programs, and brownbag lunch presentations. In-house employee assistance practitioners often get to know employees by eating lunch with them, having drop-in discussions at meetings, and meeting with them individually to discuss employee relations issues, family problems, and the like. Other in-house methods have included online information resources, seminars, and in-person and online trainings. External programs often offer prevention meetings or seminars, online resources, and a 1-800 number to call.



Programs found in SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices add other components to their employee education programs, such as Team Awareness³ efforts, or health and wellness efforts that can concentrate on various topics such as cardiac health, menopause, osteoporosis, and how to talk to your children about drugs. Frequently, these programs have evaluation components, so that they can measure the economic costs, economic benefits, and other outcomes of the programs.

More and more organizations understand that substance abuse education and prevention must be ongoing processes that evolve beyond an emphasis on



substance abuse policies, information, assistance, and discipline. In many cases, alcohol and other drug problems will have adverse impacts on employers, employees, and their families, even when the problems never come to the attention of management, the union, the employee assistance program, a health and wellness program, or a substance abuse treatment program. Many employees do not seek help for their alcohol or drug problems because the problems and the assistance are often stigmatized. However, when alcohol and drug interventions are linked to health and wellness promotion efforts—as is done in some of the newer approaches—the stigma is reduced and employees are more willing to seek the help they need.

Workplaces, when they are designing their prevention education efforts for employees, should consider addressing the special needs and interests of

- Employees interested in a range of health promotion and wellness issues—such as stress management, weight management, nutrition, activity/exercise—as well as disease prevention
- Employees who as parents, grandparents, or concerned family members want to learn to communicate effectively with the children in their lives about substance abuse, life skills, and decision-making
- Younger workers concerned about substance abuse among their peers

- Employees who are interested in being part of community-based prevention efforts and activities
- Employees who are interested in confidential, individual education (including Web-based education) on substance abuse and related issues

Some employers and unions survey their employee members and families to determine their needs for and interests in substance abuse programs, as well as in general wellness and health promotion education and services. Many employee assistance programs also offer or arrange for general and specialized employee education activities such as those outlined above.

Integrating Prevention Education Into Health Promotion Offerings.

Research indicates that the impacts are greater when substance abuse prevention and early intervention activities are carried out in the broader context of wellness, health promotion, and disease prevention efforts.^{4, 5, 6}



The popular topics of stress management, nutrition and weight management, and physical activity and exercise present

significant opportunities for providing educational materials and other elements on substance abuse prevention. The health topics discussed can be tailored to address specific workplace populations. For example, in workplaces with middle-aged women, embedding substance abuse prevention messages in a discussion of osteoporosis may be useful.

For workplaces with younger employees, a discussion of HIV/AIDS may be of interest. These and many other health issues have ties to alcohol and substance abuse.



Methods for adding substance abuse prevention education into health promotion and wellness topics include the following:

Stress Management. Relying on alcohol or drugs to deal with problems and emotions can often create more problems and can lead to substance



dependence. Identification of the social and emotional rewards people seek from drugs, including alcohol, can easily be linked to the identification of healthy alternative ways to relieve

stress and to meet other social and emotional needs. Testimonials and stories from those who have been able to manage stress in healthy ways, including from those who have embraced healthier alternatives and are reaping the rewards, can motivate participants toward behavior change. Modeling opportunities (e.g., video vignettes) that promote the use of healthy alternatives and the avoidance of substance abuse can build self-efficacy and teach skills.

Nutrition and Weight Management; Active Lifestyle and Exercise.

These health promotion topics can be used to raise awareness of the tendency of certain drugs (including alcohol) to lower inhibitions and cause dietary and exercise plans to run amok. Testimonials or stories of individuals who have changed their behaviors (e.g., by cutting down on alcohol consumption or by quitting the use of drugs to unwind) within the context of their weight management, nutrition, or exercise plans can help motivate change. A stepwise process for setting moderate drinking goals for drinkers who can safely drink can easily be

covered. These narratives provide an opportunity for discussing substance dependence and the risks of prescription drugs such as diet drugs. Lessons on refusing extra food in social situations can be taught in tandem with the same skills in refusing



alcohol or drugs. Nutrition offerings also provide an excellent context for factual information about the potential health benefits of moderate drinking for drinkers who can safely drink (defined as no more than two drinks a day for men and no more than one drink a day for women), as well as the risks of heavy alcohol consumption.

Instructions for Trainers

This section answers basic questions about how to effectively introduce a drug-free workplace policy and program to all your employees. Additional resources on this topic can be found in the SAMHSA descriptions of model programs in the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov>).

WHO?

All Your Employees Need to Know About the Benefits of the Drug-Free Workplace Policy and Program, and the Dangers of Work-Related Alcohol and Other Drug Use. Owners, top management, supervisors, and nonsupervisory employees at all levels should be prepared for the implementation of the policy and program. Everyone in the workplace needs information about the problems associated with the use and misuse of substances. They all can benefit from education and training that reinforce and deepen that awareness. And they can benefit from activities that motivate them to adopt safer and healthier attitudes and behaviors. It is especially important that all your employees become familiar with the benefits of the drug-free workplace policy and program, especially when they are supported by other health and wellness programs and activities.⁷



The Basics—The 3 Rs

- ***Rationale***
- ***Requirements***
- ***Resources***



For the policy and program to effect positive change, everyone must be on board. Research shows that the best way to encourage positive

change is to involve everyone in understanding and actively supporting the process.⁸

WHAT?

The Basics. Developing a drug-free workplace policy does not require a lot of resources—using the Kit, a policy and program can be developed and implemented even if time and money are limited. When time and other resources are at a premium, workers can be informed about the organization’s drug-free workplace policy and program in a short meeting.

At a minimum, your employees should be provided with the following information:

Rationale for the Policy

Present information on what the law requires (if the law applies to your workplace), why the program is important to the organization (whether or not the law applies), and how alcohol and other drug problems affect the workplace.

Provide various kinds of prevention information as part of the process of communicating the intention to create a healthy, safe, and productive drug-free workplace. Supplying basic information on alcohol, illicit drugs, and the nonmedicinal use of other drugs—as well as general health promotion information—will help reinforce the drug-free policy and program.

Requirements of the Policy

Information should be given on what situations the policy is attempting to prevent, and how the policy is likely to improve health, safety, and productivity in the workplace. The consequences of violating the policy should also be outlined.

Resources for Getting Help

Explain how to get help. Include information on the employee assistance program (if the organization has one). Describe the benefits offered by the health insurance plan. And identify local resources that may be available.

WHEN AND WHERE?

There Is No One Right Way to Inform, Educate, and Train Employees About the Drug-Free Workplace Policy and Program.

The characteristics of the workplace, the nature of the policy, and the elements of the specific program will determine when and where to provide information, education, and training.

Information That Is Presented in Smaller Amounts, Over Longer Periods, and Frequently Reinforced Is Often Better Understood and More Motivating Than One-Time-Only Handouts, Trainings, or Meetings.

In addition, information that is conveyed through interactive formats has been found to be more effective in promoting desired changes in attitudes and behaviors than information that is transmitted through one-way communications.⁹ And information, education, and training that are provided and reinforced in the workplace itself rather than in an offsite classroom may make a deeper impact on workplace attitudes and behaviors.¹⁰



Examples of approaches used by workplaces include the following:

- A meeting with staff members or department heads to explain the organization's drug-free workplace policy and program
- Informational materials about the organization's program and about alcohol and other drug abuse provided in the form of pamphlets, paycheck stuffers, mailings, and flyers posted in lunchrooms
- Posters and signs reminding employees they are in a drug-free workplace and that the worksite promotes healthy activities such as regular exercise, good eating habits, and smoking cessation

- Access to interactive Web sites that are tailored to your own workplace and that promote health and safety, such as GetFit
- Weekly 10-minute booster sessions that give your employees important information about alcohol and other drug abuse prevention and health promotion
- Action tips for employers

As the program is implemented, it is important to remember that the employer's actions also educate and inform employees.

The following action tips can help employers communicate more clearly to employees about the importance of a drug-free workplace program to their personal health and the health of their families and communities:

- Announce (for example, by means of a letter to all employees from the CEO or other top management) that having a drug-free workplace program and preventing drug and alcohol problems in the workplace and in families is a major organizational emphasis.
- Fully explain the benefits and procedures of the drug-free workplace policy and program to all employees. (See training instructions at the end of this brochure).
- Communicate to your employees that drug and alcohol abuse pose significant problems for businesses and other organizations, including increased absenteeism, tardiness, and use of sick leave and health services; higher insurance and workers' compensation costs; more injuries, fatalities, and thefts; lower productivity and product quality; reduced employee morale; and higher turnover.
- Communicate to your employees the connection between the abuse of alcohol and

other drugs and the presence of health problems, including sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Include guidelines for moderate alcohol consumption, for men and women who can safely drink alcohol.

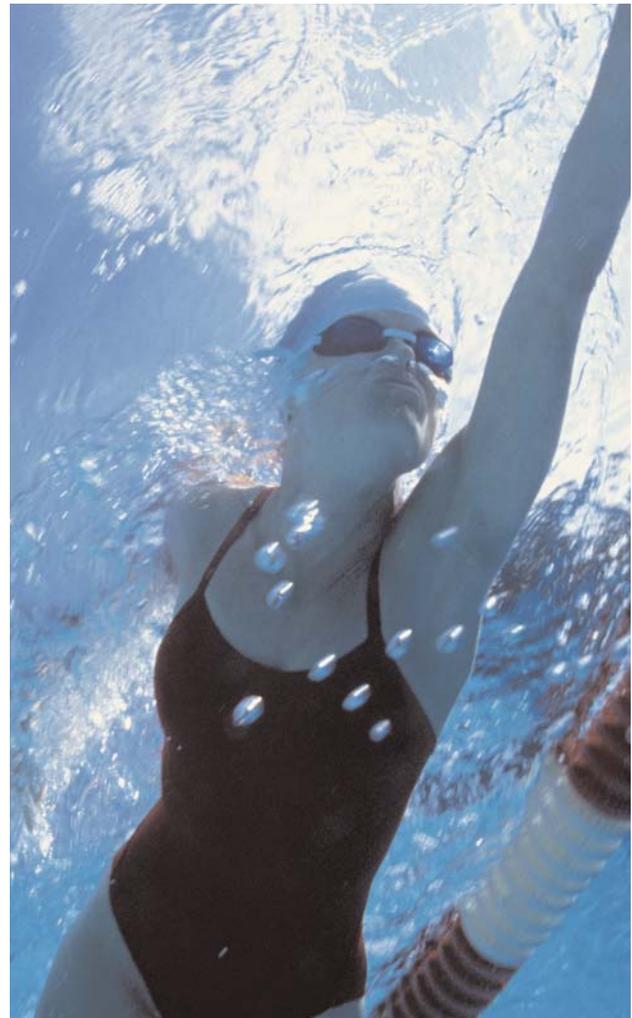
- Host alcohol-free events, emphasizing the organization's commitment to preventing injury or death associated with drinking and driving, especially around the holidays.
- Provide food and beverages in business settings that encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- Be a positive role model, consistent with the messages conveyed to the employees. Do not engage in any illegal, unhealthy, or dangerous alcohol or other drug use.
- Sponsor or help with prevention services in the community that would benefit your employees and their families.
- Include prevention and healthy lifestyle articles in your organizational materials.
- Consider formulating a corporate performance standard that encourages community involvement to prevent alcohol and other drug problems as part of an ongoing commitment to making the community a better place in which to live and do business.
- Appoint a corporate representative to serve on and support any prevention-oriented programs or community partnerships in your area that focus on alcohol and other drugs.
- Take a comprehensive approach to prevention efforts. Serve as a leader, supporter, or active participant in other community-based efforts to prevent the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs by youth.
- Support employees and their family members and encourage them to ask for assistance in

dealing with alcohol or other drug problems.

Treatment is more cost effective than incurring potential safety problems and lost productivity attributable to drug-related problems.

Specific Training Instructions

The following employee education training has been used by many organizations as a first step in informing and educating employees about their workplace policies and programs. It is designed to inform individuals about the formal procedures that administrators will follow in dealing with



substance abuse. Many successful drug-free workplace programs see this as only a first step and have used it as a springboard for more personalized trainings that concentrate on health and wellness in a team-oriented fashion.

TRAINING



- 1 Distribute the policy and be prepared to discuss the following questions:

What are the purposes of the policy and the program?

Who is covered by the policy?

When will the policy apply?

What behaviors are prohibited?

Are employees required to notify supervisors of drug-related convictions?

Does the policy include searches?

Does the program include drug testing?

If so:

Who gets tested?

When are drug tests given?

Who does the drug testing?

Who pays for drug testing?

What steps are taken to ensure the accuracy of the drug tests?

What are the legal rights of employees who test positive?

What are the consequences for violating the policy?

Are there return-to-work agreements?

What type of assistance is available to employees needing help?

How is employee confidentiality protected?

Who is responsible for enforcing the policy?

Who is responsible for answering any questions?

- 2 Discuss the impact of substance abuse on workplaces.
Fact sheet: *Workplace Substance Abuse Statistics*

- 3 Discuss the effects of alcohol and other drugs on job performance and family.
Fact sheet: *The Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Job Performance and Family*

- 4 Discuss the effects of alcohol and other drugs on your body
Fact Sheet: *Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Your Body*

- 5 Let employees know that help is available
Fact Sheet: *Workplace Substance Abuse Prevention Resources*
Fact Sheet: *GetFit.SAMHSA.Gov*
Other available assistance brochures (for example, from your Employee Assistance Program)

PREPARATION



Know each component of the policy and program. Pay particular attention about how employees can be

- Encouraged to get help.
- Given confidential and unrestricted access to an employee assistance program or counseling professional.
- Provided access to alcohol or drug treatment as part of a health benefits plan.

Schedule a meeting. All employees should be aware of the policy 30-60 days before it begins. Make sure to schedule during a slower time in the workday and week. Consider multiple meetings to ensure that all employees are able to attend.

Send a reminder the day before, specifying time and location of training.

Arrive early in order to set up, try out the equipment, and organize the materials.

Make sure all attendees sign-in.

EQUIPMENT



- A. Handouts
 1. The organization's drug-free workplace policy
 2. Fact sheets
 - a. *Workplace Substance Abuse Statistics*
 - b. *The Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Job Performance and Family*
 - c. *Effects of Alcohol and Other Drugs on Your Body*
 - d. *Workplace Substance Abuse Resources*
 - e. *GetFit.SAMHSA.Gov*
 3. Other materials that explain wellness programs, health benefits, and how to get help for substance abuse.
- B. Computer for PowerPoint presentation (or handouts downloaded from Web site)
- C. Easel pad and markers
- D. Other technologies (e.g., projectors, podcasts, videos)

References

- ¹ <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/>.
- ² <http://getfit.samhsa.gov/>.
- ³ <http://modelprograms.samhsa.gov/pdfs/model/TeamAwareness.pdf/>.
- ⁴ Joel B. Bennett and Wayne E.K. Lehman. 2003. *Preventing Workplace Substance Abuse: Beyond Drug Testing to Wellness*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- ⁵ Royer F. Cook and William E. Schlenger. 2002. "Prevention of Substance Abuse in the Workplace: Review of Research on the Delivery of Services." *Journal of Primary Prevention* 23(1):115–42.
- ⁶ Cynthia J. Sieck, Max Heirich, and Christine Major. 2004. "Alcohol Counseling as Part of General Wellness Counseling." *Public Health Nursing* 21(2): 137–43.
- ⁷ Royer F. Cook and William E. Schlenger. 2002. "Prevention of Substance Abuse in the Workplace: Review of Research on the Delivery of Services." *Journal of Primary Prevention* 23(1):115–42.
- ⁸ Laura Ferrer–Wreder, Stattin Hakan, Carolyn Cass Lorente, Jonathan G. Tubman, and Lena Adamson. 2004. *Prevention and Youth Development Programs: Across Borders*. New York, New York: Kluwer/Plenum Academic Publishers.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Joel B. Bennett and Wayne E.K. Lehman. 2003. *Preventing Workplace Substance Abuse: Beyond Drug Testing to Wellness*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.