



While there is no foolproof way to prevent substance abuse in every situation, there are many very good ways to start!
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Substance Abuse and Bullying in the Workplace

Bullying is a problem not only for children, but for adults as well. When bullying occurs in the workplace, workers are at risk of developing mental, physical, and emotional disorders. When an employee is being bullied, coworkers are subjected to the toxic consequences of the intimidation. The damaging effects of experiencing or committing workplace bullying are immediate and long-lasting.

Bullying is often the cause and result of verbal, mental, emotional, and physical abuse. This kind of trauma can lead to substance abuse and addiction. In extreme cases, bullying-related suicide can occur.

Bullying and substance abuse create toxic workplaces and distressing symptoms for employees. Both disorders separately can produce unstable and stressful working environments, but when they occur simultaneously, the impact is multiplied. Workplace bullying can negatively affect the productivity of a team and impact the financial wellbeing of the company. It

adversely affects employees' job satisfaction and contributes to errors and accidents.

Types of Bullying

Bullying is defined as the assertion of power through aggression that involves a bully repeatedly and intentionally targeting a weaker victim through social, mental, emotional, or physical means. In the workplace, approximately 70% of bullies are male, and more than 60% are bosses.

In addition to physical, verbal, social, and sexual bullying, cyberbullying and relational aggression are common forms of bullying in the workplace. Relational aggression is the act of making sneaky, undermining, aggressive comments intended to cause harm. Employees who are victims of bullying experience stressful and difficult emotions that could result in seeking methods to self-medicate with illicit drugs or alcohol.

Bullies themselves are impacted by bullying. They are often the victims of parental abuse, neglect, and harm. Workplace bullies are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol which can lead to addiction.

Preventing Workplace Bullying

Preventing workplace bullying is more effective than trying to stop the behavior after it has begun, and business owners and managers are in a position to identify and prevent bullying at work. Employers and supervisors must take the lead in identification and prevention of workplace bullying.

Bullying is not just the result of escalated conflict between employees. Research has shown that environmental factors like leadership style, oppressive working conditions, and low job control can contribute to the presence of bullying at work. Too often, bullying is a systemic problem and organizational factors must be addressed as part of any effective prevention program.

Bullying at work typically happens when there is minimal supervision and in places where the bully can be covert or anonymous. Therefore, prevention through presence is an important strategy. However, this can be challenging because staff may change their behaviors when a manager is present. To deal with this possibility, supervisors should randomly and unexpectedly show up at the worksite and be present with workers as much as possible.

In the same way that employee drug education is important within a drug

free workplace program, education is also an important part of preventing bullying. The goal of this type of training should be to teach staff how to behave professionally, how to defuse conflict and how to communicate effectively.

Employers must also be careful to not unwittingly reward bullies by promoting them and to not allow bullying to operate as a form of informal managerial authority. And of course, supervisors should always lead by example and be careful to never engage in bullying employees in any way.

Treatment for Bullying

Bullying in adults is rarely discussed but is unfortunately fairly common in the workplace.

An employee who has been the victim of bullying may experience signs and symptoms of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or other mental health issues and may need therapy to help deal with the effects of the behavior.

Mental health professionals can help employees who have been bullied work to rebuild their confidence and develop coping strategies. Workers who have been bullied should be referred to the company Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or to a qualified treatment provider for assessment and recovery.



Co-occurring Disorders

Many people who suffer from drug and alcohol addiction also struggle with co-occurring disorders.

National Institutes of Health (NIH) research studies have stated that approximately 50% of people with a substance use disorder have chronic pain, and about one-third have a psychiatric disorder like anxiety or major depression.

People who suffer from substance abuse *and* a psychological condition can display some difficult behavioral traits that can make it particularly challenging to work with them.

Other examples of co-occurring disorders are attention-deficit disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorders, personality disorders, and schizophrenia. These co-occurring mental illnesses are known as comorbidities.

Because an extremely high number of people experience trauma of some sort in their lifetime, the prevalence of co-occurring disorders is multiplied.

Data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) shows elevated rates of comorbid substance use disorders and anxiety disorders that includes general anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. About one in four individuals with a

serious mental illness also have a substance use disorder. This is due in part to attempts to self-medicate in order to relieve emotional and mental pain.

Other research has shown that co-occurring substance abuse in people who suffer from serious psychological conditions is between 30%-60%. Victims of violence or sexual abuse seeking help for alcohol or drug addiction is about 50%, and 75% of women in addiction treatment centers suffer from PTSD as a result of childhood sexual abuse.

NIDA research has also shown that people with mental, personality, and substance use disorders are at increased risk for nonmedical use of prescription painkillers. Forty-three percent of people in substance use disorder treatment for prescription painkiller abuse have a diagnosis of mental health disorders.

Mental Illness & Substance Abuse

Suicide rates nationally continue to increase, employee stress and depression are on the rise, and alcohol and drug addiction—especially to opioid painkillers—is causing serious problems in the workplace.

The American Psychiatric Association reports that almost one out of five adults experience some form of mental illness every year, and according to *Mind Share Partners' Mental Health at Work*, 61% of

workers said their productivity was affected by their mental health. Unfortunately, the majority of individuals who need mental healthcare do not get the help they need.

Part of the problem with employees receiving much needed treatment is the prohibitive cost involved. Treating depression alone costs more than \$110 billion annually, and half of that cost is paid by employers. Companies also spend between two and three billion dollars annually on opioid addiction.

Barriers to Getting Help

Another big part of the problem in the workplace is that people are reluctant to ask for help with mental illness and substance abuse issues.

In a study conducted by a major U.S. health benefits administrator, a majority of employees—68%—said they worry that a mental health or substance abuse issue could negatively impact their job security. But employees need to understand that being honest about the fact that they need help can shift a supervisor or manager's focus from suspicion to a proactive approach of providing assistance. The key, however, to helping employees get well, is to find the appropriate treatment programs.

Treatment Challenges

Part of the difficulty in treating co-occurring disorders along with addiction, is that as a person becomes trapped in the downward spiral to substance abuse, their brain becomes more

sensitive to stress, physical and emotional pain, and drug-related cues, while becoming less sensitive to natural healthy pleasures in life—driving them to take higher and higher doses of drugs to preserve a dwindling sense of well-being.

Treatment that includes mind-body techniques that help to increase the sense of natural healthy pleasure, joy and meaning in life can work to heal individuals with comorbidities. Treatment that includes a spiritual approach is also effective.

Unfortunately, it is common for mental health professionals to reject clients with active addictions, and many addiction centers refuse to treat those who require psychotropic medication for their conditions.

It is extremely important then, that therapists be aware of the complexity between dual diagnosis and be trained to treat such disorders.

When seeking treatment for an employee or a loved one suffering from substance abuse and co-occurring disorders, it is crucial to find a recovery center that provides a safe, welcoming, and positive space with well-trained practitioners who offer treatment plans tailored specifically to client needs.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers guidance on finding a mental health professional on their website at: <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Individuals-with-Mental-Illness/Finding-a-Mental-Health-Professional>