



Asking for Help at Work

We are all feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are barraged with information from many different sources – work, family, friends, schools, news, social media, emails and more.

We may be working remotely for the first time, or be working on-site and facing increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. We may have children at home while trying to work, or have loved ones laid off. We may be worrying about getting the food and supplies we need to survive. Some of us may have family or friends who are positive for COVID-19, a significant source of worry and distress.

The seriousness of these issues, along with the gravity of the pandemic, can take a significant toll on our mental health and wellbeing. These increased levels of stress, uncertainty and anxiety can also potentially lead to an increase in substance misuse or substance use disorders, or an increased risk for relapse for those already in treatment or recovery. This may impact you or someone in your family.

If opioid use or misuse or other drug misuse is affecting your life or work, or you think you may have a problem with substance use, the time to seek help is now. A substance use disorder (the medical name for a drug addiction) is a long-term, relapsing brain disease – asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Signs of Substance Misuse

It can be hard to tell if you or someone you know is misusing opioids or other drugs, especially when you are not with them in-person. Similarly, many signs and symptoms you may see (distress, withdrawing from relationships, etc.) may be indicative of mental health distress, stress or grief, and not substance use.

Don't assume cause, but do check in and listen with compassion. Watch and listen for the following signs:

- Disclosure of problematic substance use
- Disclosure of mental health conditions, including but not limited to depression, anxiety and more
- Disclosure of exceptional stress
- Failure to fulfill major life responsibilities, such as work, school or financial obligations
- Withdrawal from important relationships

- Legal consequences such as drug possession arrest, DUI, etc.

Who You Can Talk To

An Employee Assistance Program representative. If your organization has an EAP, its services are free and confidential, and nothing discussed will be shared with your employer. When you talk to the representative, you can get advice on what to do next and get referrals if you need them.

Your doctor. Be honest about your substance misuse and work together to create a plan for accessing treatment. During the COVID-19 crisis, accessing medical services may look different than it would prior to the pandemic – your doctor or other medical professional may be providing services through telehealth mechanisms, for example. Find a place in your home or somewhere safe where you can talk your questions through with your doctor confidentially.

A company supervisor and/or human resources professional. These employees are working hard to navigate the new realities of COVID-19 and their effect on the workplace. As always, they will work within the company's drug-free workplace policy to help you get treatment and preserve your job status.

If none of these resources are available to you or you don't feel comfortable exploring them, consider using resources such as a [Treatment Services Locator](#) or calling SAMHSA's 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information hotline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). Do whatever makes you most comfortable, but if you are struggling in any way, please seek help.