University of Essex

ALCOHOL, DRUG AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE
MANAGER GUIDANCE

PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Alcohol, Drug and Substance Misuse: Manager Guidance

The University Strategy 2019-25 sets out our commitment to create and maintain environments that foster a sense of belonging, inclusion, well-being, resilience and empowerment (O3.1). For this to be achieved, conversations about wellness must become a routine part of how we work. Creating an environment where people feel able to ask for help, knowing they will be supported and signposted to help, is important.

Our people-centred approach shapes the way we support members of our university community within the workplace. It ensures equality of treatment through our policies, processes and the value-based decisions we are trusted to make. Specifically, in relation to this guidance, we should all have an awareness of how we can support a member of staff who may have an alcohol, drug or substance misuse problem.

As a manager, you play an important part in supporting and promoting wellness amongst your colleagues. Taking time to understand if and how a member of your team may be suffering with an alcohol, drugs or substance misuse related problem and exploring ways of alleviating any stress at work are effective ways of providing support. Managing this well will enable individuals to feel supported at work. Having regular conversations with your team gives individuals the opportunity to raise any issues and for you to help to identify problems at an early stage.

Recognising possible alcohol, drugs or substance misuse

People with drug or alcohol problems come from all demographics, and can be any age, gender, ethnicity or social/ economic background. Alcohol, drugs or substance misuse can show in a wide variety of ways. As well as episodes of acute intoxication or drunkenness longer term misuse may show up as changes in a person's work or academic performance, their social behaviour or relationships, a decline in their mental and physical health or through deterioration in their appearance or self-care.

Some of the more common signs of chronic misuse are listed below. None are specific to alcohol, drug or substance misuse so it cannot be assumed to be the cause. For example, being bullied and harassed can lead to many of the performance issues below. The effects of some medical conditions may cause a person to appear drunk or intoxicated. However, you should not avoid discussing a valid concern over an employee's performance or behaviour because of uncertainty over its cause. Whilst it may be difficult to spot some of these signs when you are managing staff remotely it is still important that any concerns are addressed as soon as they arise.

Changes in behaviour and appearance

- hand tremor, slurred speech
- mood changes, irritability, lethargy
- marked change in alertness or social behaviour after breaks
- avoidance of eye contact
- excitable or inappropriate uninhibited behaviour
- poor personal hygiene

Inadequate or erratic work performance

- improbable excuses for poor work performance
- mistakes or errors of judgement
- unreliability and unpredictability

- frequent sickness absence with minor illnesses e.g. colds, stomach upsets, headaches
- poor timekeeping: frequent lateness, repeated short absences away from a person's normal work location
- poor concentration and forgetfulness
- becoming more prone to accidents – at work or at home

Relationships with colleagues

- complaints about behaviour
- extreme reaction to real or imagined criticism
- avoidance of meetings
- borrowing money
- unreasonable resentment
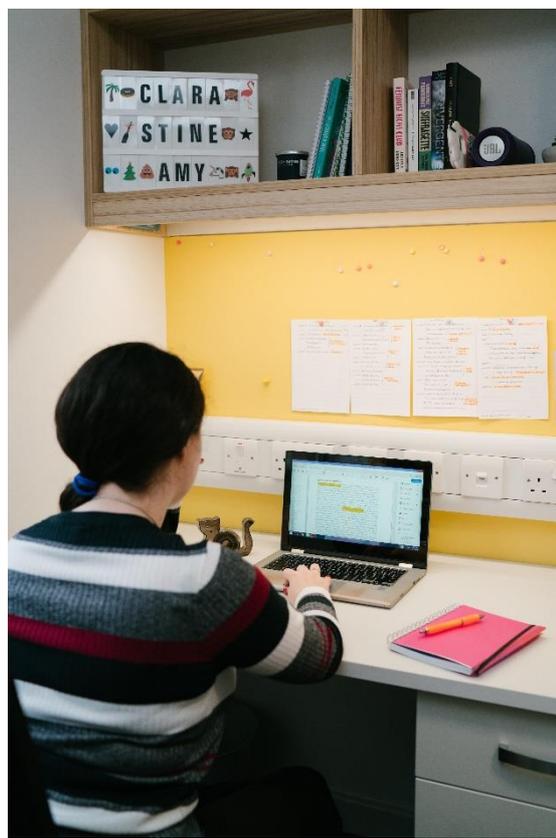
Staff working from home

Whilst it may be difficult to spot some of these signs (e.g. body language/smell of alcohol on the breath) when you are managing staff remotely it is still important

that any concerns are addressed as soon as they arise. Establishing regular 'check-ins' (ideally via a video call) with the individual to maintain contact is important as it can help to create an environment where they may feel able to confide in their substance misuse. Good communication is the foundation of any successful remote work arrangement. If contact is poor the individual may feel disconnected, isolated and abandoned. This can affect stress levels and mental health.

Some other signs that may be a cause for concern when staff are working remotely are:

- turning up late to virtual meetings or refusing to participate in virtual meetings
- not engaging in team projects
- taking longer to respond to emails than normal
- taking longer than usual to do a task


Having a conversation

If you need to speak to a team member regarding a suspected alcohol, drug or substance misuse problem or if a colleague would like to speak to you about how they are feeling, you should feel confident to follow your usual practice:

- **Allow adequate time to have a conversation.** It may be best to meet at a time where there are no other commitments scheduled for immediately after the meeting is due to finish. This is to ensure that the end of the conversation is not rushed and both you and your colleague feel that you have discussed everything you need to.

- **Find an appropriate location.** It is important to hold the conversation in a place that is comfortable for all and in a space where colleagues feel they can speak freely in a confidential space. A suggestion would be a quiet, separate room with natural light and a source of ventilation. If you are managing staff remotely, and you are unable to meet in person, a video call (e.g. zoom) is probably the best alternative to a face to face meeting.

- **Be patient.** Talking about an alcohol and drug problem is likely to be difficult for the individual. As a result, it can take a lot of courage for people to speak about an addiction and this is sometimes accompanied by feelings of shame, embarrassment and fear. These societal barriers are real, and it is important to acknowledge them to ensure that you are creating a safe environment to hold your conversation. At the beginning of your meeting, take time to establish rapport and trust with your colleague by explaining that the meeting will be free from judgement and centred around the provision of support. Speak calmly and be prepared for some silences. Be caring and compassionate.

- **Listen to understand.** It is important to actively listen to your colleague to understand how they are feeling, rather than solely listening to respond to what they have just said. You can gain more insight into how your colleague is feeling by asking open questions and allowing them to expand upon their answers. You should avoid providing advice on what has worked previously for you or others you know, as what works for one person may not work for another.

- **Display empathy.** Empathy is the ability to understand the feelings of others. You do not need to have had a personal experience of an alcohol or drug problem to try to understand how they are feeling, and the impact of their symptoms on their life both inside and outside of work.

- **Discuss whether other members of the team should be informed.** Some colleagues may feel comfortable speaking to others within the team about their feelings and symptoms. Others will not. Establish which is the case with your colleague and ensure that their wishes are upheld in the best way possible**.** Should they provide consent for other members of the team to be informed, discuss whether they would like to tell them or whether they would prefer you to do it on their behalf.

- **Explore ways that your colleague can be supported and agree on next steps.** Find out if the individual has contacted their GP or other support service. Suggest that you refer them to Occupational Health for support. If work adjustments are recommended to support recovery you should do all you can to support these changes. This may include adjusting work patterns to allow the individual to attend support groups as necessary. It is important to be flexible and understanding about providing time off for someone to get treatment or support relating to alcohol or substance misuse. Ask the individual about the support they need, as everyone's situation will be different. Some people may require time out to get help, others may need flexibility in working time to attend appointments, and some people may require role adjustments such as addressing a high workload or stress levels. You should also arrange a time for a future meeting to review these changes and set clear objectives regarding expected standards of work.
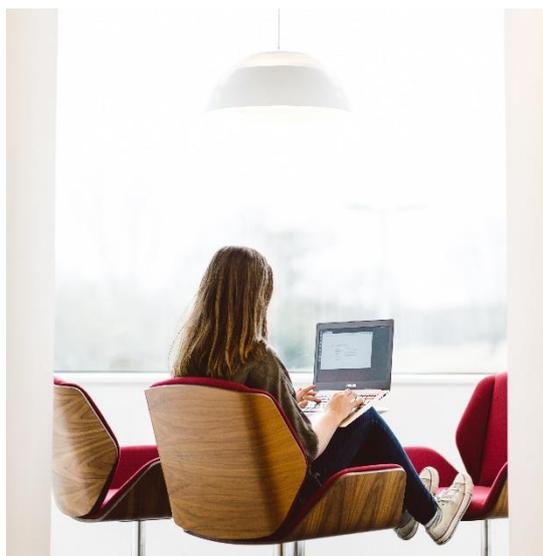
Workplace factors

To support an enabling environment, you should be aware of any workplace factors, including working conditions, workplace customs, practices and environments, that could increase the risk of individual alcohol, drug or substance misuse. These may include:

- isolation e.g. employees working in isolated areas who are separated from family and friends may be more likely to consume alcohol as a result of boredom, loneliness or lack of social activities, or social activities where the priority focus is on drinking;
- homeworking where employees may be more likely to consume alcohol/drugs in their 'workplace', as it is more easily accessible and where they will not be viewed doing it;
- extended working hours or shift work;
- interpersonal factors including workplace relationships, bullying and harassment;
- inadequate supervision;
- inadequate job design and training, which may lead to low job satisfaction and/or work-related stress; and
- organisational change e.g. restructure, job transfer or redundancy.

If you are concerned that workplace factors may be causing an employee stress you should discuss the matter with the individual concerned and seek advice from People and Culture Employee Relations team.

Guidance on safety critical roles

Alcohol, even in amounts insufficient to cause obvious intoxication, can impair physical coordination and reflexes. It can also adversely affect concentration and alertness. A person under the influence of alcohol is at greater risk of an accident, risking harm to themselves and others.

Managers should identify jobs or tasks where there is potential for serious injury or significant damage to property or equipment in the event of an accident. Jobs which require sustained vigilance or careful attention and where inattention could result in significant loss or harm to others should also be considered.

Staff in safety critical jobs should be instructed that they must not drink alcohol when at work, including during lunch breaks. They should also be advised that heavy drinking after work may mean they could be unfit for work on the following day. Safety critical jobs include the following:

- working in a laboratory where hazardous materials including chemicals or biological agents are handled;
- operating potentially dangerous machinery, e.g. workshop machinery, food processing equipment, hand tools, cutting equipment;
- working at height, or where an unimpaired sense of balance is essential, e.g. working on a roof, scaffold or ladder;
- electrical and gas maintenance;
- driving vehicles of any description, including their own vehicle on University business;
- clinical duties;
- security work;
- first aid;
- nursery work.

This is **not** an exhaustive list.

Supporting an individual to return to work

If an employee has been absent for a period of rehabilitation – or has been granted a more flexible arrangement to receive support from a drug charity or medical professional – but is now in recovery and able to work normally, you should plan for their return. In many cases this is likely to be a similar approach to an employee returning after a long period of [sickness absence](#) – consider a phased return to work, a mini 'induction' to allow them to catch up on any missed projects or developments, and ensure that you support them during the first few weeks. You may also have to offer some flexibility in the employee's working pattern (for example, if the employee is part of a mutual aid fellowship (like AA), they should attend 90 meetings in the first 90 days). You should also address any aspects of work that could have been contributing to a problem (for example excessive workload).

Creating the right culture within your team[1]:

- **Lead by example:** Actively encourage your team to adopt healthier working habits by working sensible hours, taking full lunch breaks, taking annual leave and resting after busy periods. This is particularly important when individuals are homeworking.

- **Build your confidence on mental health:** Familiarise yourself with the University's mental health resources and how staff can seek confidential advice and support.

- **Normalise mental health:** Touch base regularly with your employees to check how they're getting on and think about what might be causing them stress. Create space 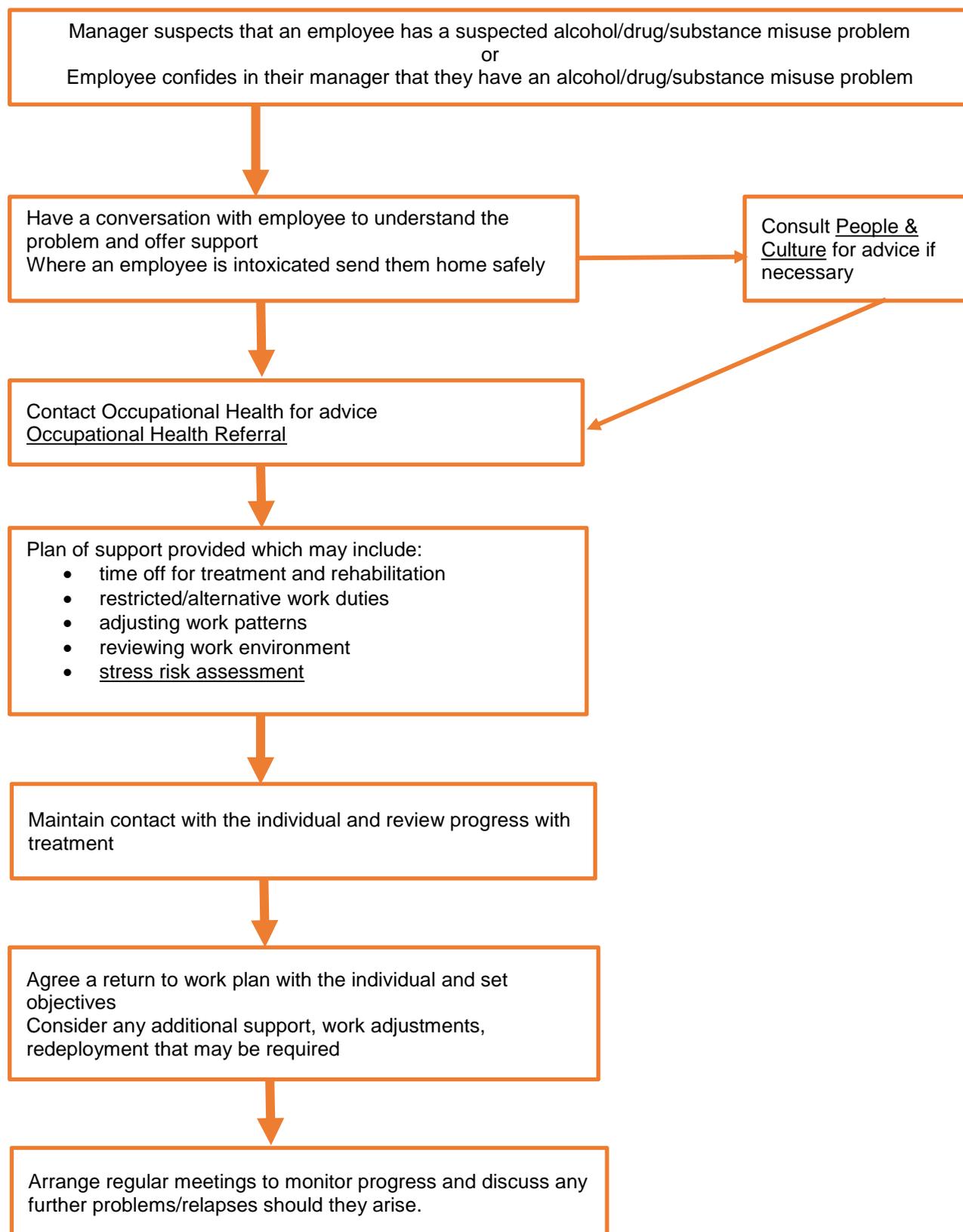for them to ask questions and raise issues and give them permission to talk about home as well as work issues if they wish.

- **Be available for your staff:** Regular one-to-ones and catch-ups can help to maintain good working relationships and build mutual trust.

- **Treat people as individuals:** Treat employees with respect, praise good work, offer support if there are skills gaps, and try to use a coaching style of management. Ask for feedback about the support you provide and what support they need to help them achieve their goals.

- **Embed employee engagement:** Promote a culture of open dialogue and involve employees in decisions about how the team is run and how they do their job. Make sure employees understand their role in the bigger picture and make clear their contribution to the organisation's vision and aims.

- **Create opportunities for coaching, learning and development:** Make sure employees are confident, well equipped and supported to enable them to do their job to a high standard. You can help them gain confidence and skills by developing and rewarding their capabilities and by being available for regular work-related conversations as well as providing formal training.

- **Promote positive work relationships:** Support a culture of teamwork, collaboration and information-sharing, both within the team and across the University, and model these positive behaviours to staff.

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[1] Adapted from the *Thriving at Work Review (2017)*, CIPD People Managers' Guide to Mental Health, September 2018. In January 2017 the prime minister commissioned an independent review into how employers can better support the mental health of all people currently in employment, including those with mental health problems or poor well-being, to remain in and thrive at work. The Thriving at Work review into workplace mental health was led by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Mind CEO Paul Farmer CBE (Stevenson and Farmer 2017).

Flowchart of support – Please also refer to the Alcohol, Drug and Substance Misuse Policy

Manager suspects that an employee has a suspected alcohol/drug/substance misuse problem
or
Employee confides in their manager that they have an alcohol/drug/substance misuse problem

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Have a conversation with employee to understand the problem and offer support
Where an employee is intoxicated send them home safely

→ Consult People & Culture for advice if necessary

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Contact Occupational Health for advice
Occupational Health Referral

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Plan of support provided which may include:
- time off for treatment and rehabilitation
- restricted/alternative work duties
- adjusting work patterns
- reviewing work environment
- stress risk assessment

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Maintain contact with the individual and review progress with treatment

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Agree a return to work plan with the individual and set objectives
Consider any additional support, work adjustments, redeployment that may be required

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Arrange regular meetings to monitor progress and discuss any further problems/relapses should they arise.

Helpful Resources

It is not essential that you become an expert in all types of drugs and alcohol but it is important that should an individual ask for your help that you are able to listen to why they may be misusing alcohol/drugs, including whether work may be a contributing factor, and signpost them to expert support when needed. There is a wide variety of support available for individuals with substance misuse problems, including local authority and NHS support services, drug and alcohol charities, mutual aid groups (such as Alcoholics Anonymous), counselling support and University sources of support. The most helpful form of support will vary from individual to individual and there is no one 'right' way to deal with misuse issues. You should support individuals in whatever approach is seen to be the most effective in their situation.

There are several external agencies available to provide advice and support to individuals and their families.

- **GP** - most referrals to specialist services are made via general practitioners or mainstream NHS facilities.
- **Drinkaware** – www.drinkaware.co.uk (national alcohol helpline)
- **Open Road** (Drug and Alcohol Services in Essex)
- **Alcohol Concern - Drinkline** Tel 080091708282 www.alcoholconcern.org.uk
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** Tel 0845 769 7555 www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk email help@alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk
- **Addition Helper** 0800 0448315 email info@additionhelper.com
- **Addaction** 020 7251 5860 www.addaction.org.uk email info@addaction.org.uk
- **ACAD** (Advice and Counselling on Alcohol and Drugs) www.acad.org.uk
- **Essex Alcohol Recovery Community** (www.essexarc.org.uk)
- **Samaritans** www.smaritans.org.uk
- **FRANK** National Drug and Alcohol Service Tel 0800 776 600 (24 hours) www.talktofrank.com
- **NHS** (Information and advice from the National Health Service) www.nhs.gov.uk
- **Narcotics Anonymous** 0845 373 3366 www.ukna.org

Please contact Occupational Health at ohquery@essex.ac.uk if you have further questions about the local support available.

University Sources of Support and Information

- Alcohol, Drug and Substance Misuse Policy
- Occupational Health Referral Guidance
- Employee Assistance Programme (Validum)
- Stress Management Guidance for Line Managers
- Coaching Essentials for Line Managers
- Improving Assertiveness
- Top Tips Working from Home for Managers
- Bystander Intervention Training
- Report and Support
- Mental Health First Aid
- Zero Tolerance of Harassment and Bullying
- Building Resilience in Periods of Change
- Health and Safety Policy
- Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure
- Stress Management Policy

- Stress Management Guidance for Managers
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Capability Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Appeals Procedure
- Flexible Working
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Special Leave Policy
- Equality and Diversity Policy and Strategy
- Zero Tolerance Policy
- Healthy University Sub-Strategy
- Student Alcohol and Drug Policy
- Special Leave Policy
- Working from home