



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Continued Increase in Drug Use

For the past decade illicit drug use has been steadily increasing across the country. Why is drug use on the rise in America's communities and workplaces?

With all of the information available about the problems caused by drug use and the millions of lives ruined by addiction, how can our country be losing the battle against substance abuse?

Did you know that teenagers in America are twice as likely as European teens to use illegal drugs? The number of heroin users in America is at a 20-year high, and the number of opioid drug overdose deaths in the U.S. has quadrupled in the last 15 years. In the workplace, the percentage of employees testing positive for drugs has reached the highest level in 10 years.

In spite of nationwide drug prevention and drug education efforts, drug use rates continue to rise, and drugs are becoming even more potent and more dangerous. What has led to this permissive attitude toward drug use?

Perception vs. Reality

The perception of the dangers of using and abusing drugs is much different than it was in the past. Could this be in part due to nationwide attempts to legalize drugs in America—along with the influence of social media on drug use and drug legalization?

A recent *Monitoring the Future* study found that fewer teens from the previous study perceived a risk in occasionally using inhalants, crack cocaine, or Vicodin. And according to the Pew

Research Center, 60% of young people say the problem of drug abuse in their neighborhood is either a minor problem or not a problem at all. Despite the nationwide increase in drug use and the tragic increase in drug overdose deaths, only 20% of people under the age of 30 think drug abuse is a national crisis.

Higher Levels of Pain?

Another possible contributing factor to the ongoing increase in drug use is the number of people who report experiencing acute and chronic pain.

For unknown reasons, at some point in the recent past, Americans suddenly began to suffer from pain at higher levels than ever before. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, one in every four Americans now report suffering from pain that lasts longer than 24 hours, and millions more say that they suffer from acute and chronic pain.

Prescription painkillers are the most likely remedy to be prescribed to people in pain, and prescription drug abuse is the strongest risk factor for heroin abuse or addiction. Realizing that individuals who are addicted to narcotic painkillers are 40 times more likely to abuse heroin makes it easy to see how increased levels of pain (perceived or real) contribute to increased drug use and addiction.

Stressed Out and High

Stress levels in America also contribute to an increase in drug use, and Americans are apparently more stressed than ever before. A study published in the National Library of Medicine found that 90% of workers

are stressed about their finances, and more than 50% reported “moderate” or “significant” stress. The American Psychological Association has reported increasing stress levels for Americans year after year since 2007. Numerous studies have found that the top two sources of stress in the U.S. are money and work.

Stress is a well-known risk factor for the development of addiction and in addiction relapse vulnerability. People who are stressed-out struggle with controlling their impulses and delaying gratification. Exposure to stress increases the risk of drug-seeking and drug-using behavior, and is a considerable factor in the increase in drug use in America.

A Top Priority

The use of illegal drugs is a long-standing problem in the U.S. that is only getting worse. The concern and the distress of drug addicts’ family members and loved ones are expressed every day on social media, in news reports, in public forums, at home, and at work.

While it is true that some people are able to use alcohol and other drugs without becoming addicted, too many Americans engage in excess consumption (for multiple different reasons)—resulting in severe and detrimental impacts on their overall health and mental wellbeing.

Substance abuse is unquestionably a serious social problem for the United

States. And while it is beyond the scope of this newsletter to address all of the possible *reasons* that drug use is increasing, the fact remains that preventing drug use at home, school, and work should be a top priority in our country.

Working Together

We all must begin to work together to reduce substance abuse in our nation. Parents, community leaders, and employers have to take a proactive stand against illicit drug use, and must engage in approaches to substance abuse prevention that work.

Parents need to lead by example and educators need to be diligent in talking about the dangers of drug and alcohol use. Medical professionals should focus on finding drug-free pain management alternatives, along with healthy ways to manage stress.

Prevention of substance abuse should begin at home, continue throughout the school-age years, and be reinforced in the workplace.

For those who are already addicted, treatment and counseling needs to be made available at affordable rates or for free for those who are indigent.

Substance abuse treatment exists in many forms to treat physical, mental, and emotional health, but currently, too many people in America do not get the assistance that they so badly need and deserve.