

The C&A Express

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“Why Does My Employer Care Whether or Not I Use Drugs?”

Many people consider their choice to use or not use illicit drugs to be a very personal one. And yet their employers may feel that several factors make it their business as well. October is Alcohol/Drug Awareness Month, so let's look at some of these concerns:

Safety: Drugs can affect a person's **reflexes, ability to focus, and sense of timing and pacing.** We've all seen warnings on common prescription medications to this effect; illicit substances are no exception. **Your employer needs the workplace to be as safe as possible** and would like to avoid accidents and injuries that may be caused by someone's drug use.

Health concerns: Illicit substances can harm the physical and mental health of people who use them. Drugs may affect a person's **cardiac and respiratory systems**, putting too much pressure on the heart and lungs. Damage can also occur to the pancreas, liver, brain, nervous system, mouth and throat. **Emotional problems** like anxiety or depression may increase.

When physical or psychological damage results in a need for medical attention, everyone's **health and disability insurance premiums** go up, both the company's share of these premiums as well as the employees' contribution.

Attendance and productivity: Workers who are high or hung over may have a harder time **getting to work** in the morning or staying on top of things during the course of the day. Their **concentration** may be affected, and they may need to take more frequent breaks in order to stay productive.

Morale: If one team member's performance has gone downhill, **everyone else has to work harder** to make up for it. Although most of us don't mind pitching in when a coworker is ill, resentments arise when the condition is viewed as easily avoidable. Coworkers and supervisors alike grow tired of covering up for a colleague whose inefficient or flawed work has gone on for too long.

Legal issues & bad public relations: No company likes it when an employee is caught buying or selling drugs on the job or in the community. They'd rather project a wholesome image to the public, showing that quality goods and services are made and delivered by people who are alert, focused, and respectful of the law.

Respect for employees: You have a right to work in a place where your safety, morale, and productivity are not jeopardized by someone else's drug use.

Today's business climate challenges us every day. You in turn are being challenged to maintain your health, safety and productivity by avoiding drug and alcohol misuse.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues on a more personal basis, please don't hesitate to call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at 800-742-2858. We offer confidential, prepaid help 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Diversity Corner

Autumn holidays like Thanksgiving often celebrate the harvest. In other cultures, holidays may occur in the fall of a given year, but since their exact dates are based on a lunar calendar, the season may not be as relevant.

The Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah) begins a time of spiritual renewal, ending ten days later with the solemn fast day of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. Five days later, the harvest festival of Sukkoth snaps everyone out of their solemnity. Families may build a little hut or *sukkah*, eating and sleeping in it all week long to honor ancestors who slept in makeshift desert shelters for 40 years. The *sukkah* provides minimal protection while allowing the family to see a few stars through the roof.

Muslims think of the month of Ramadan as a kind of tune-up for their spiritual lives. This year (2002), Ramadan begins on November 5th and ends on December 4th. During daylight hours, observant Muslims sharpen their self-control by abstaining from food, smoking, drinking and sex. The end of a successful Ramadan may be celebrated as Eid-ul-Fitr.

Back to School! Are You Prepared?

Back to school preparations involve more than shopping for new backpacks. Here are some simple things you can do to ease the transition for you and your child.

- **Don't let last year's problems carry over into this year.** Algebra was tough; your son or daughter may fear that geometry will be worse. The bullies who ran the playground last year are even bigger now. Unresolved problems may cause your child to dread going back to school. Don't minimize these concerns; be calm and supportive, and focus on possible solutions.
- **Have a plan for after school.** Decide where your child will go, who's on the list for emergency pick-ups, and what to do when home alone. A quick check-in with you or another adult may be a good idea, but discourage long phone calls to the office.
- **Plan now for academic help or special accommodations.** Is tutoring available after school? Can you request a special needs evaluation from school guidance professionals?

If going to the office for PM meds is uncomfortable for your child, you might try asking the pediatrician if an appropriate timed-release version is available.

- **Be realistic about outside activities.** It's nice if your teenager can earn enough money for personal expenses, college, driving lessons, etc. But will there be enough time left for studying? If you're not sure how much homework will be assigned in a given class, check with the teacher.
- **Share activities with your partner so you both can participate in the school experience.** Shopping for supplies, checking homework, and attending parent-teacher conferences are duties that often seem to fall to Mom by default. But Dads can do all of these things, too! Active participation by both parents is important whenever possible.

Single parents or parents who work second shift may need to be creative when it comes to conferences, but don't let that stop you. Many teachers are happy to arrange a private meeting at your convenience rather than risk not meeting with you at all. A bit of planning now will go a long way.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month:

"How can I help without making things worse...?"

Worried about a friend who's in an abusive relationship?

Experts say that the first thing you can do is believe that your friend is telling you the truth.

Lots of people in abusive relationships are afraid to let anyone know. They fear being told that they're overreacting, that a person as nice as their partner couldn't possibly be guilty of abuse. This is especially true when the abuser is outwardly very religious, polite to others, the victim's adult or teen child, or a woman. We can't be sure how many victims of domestic violence are men, as society makes it difficult for a man to admit that this could possibly be a problem.

*Your friend may be justified in believing that there will be retribution if she calls the police or leaves. In most cases where a woman is murdered by her partner, the act occurs **after** she has left the relationship.*

You can encourage your friend to seek help from a local agency specializing in domestic abuse.

They will help her develop a Personal Safety Plan *before* she tries to go out on her own. You can support her decision to:

- Keep a small "survival bag" and her most meaningful personal valuables at a friend's;
- Supply her employer with a photo of the abuser so the receptionist and security will recognize him if he comes after her;
- Attend a restraining order workshop so she can have an order of protection all filled out and ready to file when she decides it's time to take this action;
- Have a plan for boarding her pets in a safe place if she decides to go to a shelter.

You can get more ideas on how to help from your EAP at Crites & Associates, (800) 742-2858.

If your friend works somewhere else, ask her to see if her employer has an EAP counselor whom she could call for ongoing confidential support.

She can also call the toll free National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (800-799-SAFE). Be concerned for her personal safety, but please remember to be patient with your friend if it seems she's moving too slowly. This may truly be a matter of life or death.