



Safety/Injury

Prevention #21

ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE

Alcohol and drug abuse degrade mission effectiveness. People undergoing stressful life events may turn to alcohol or other substances to help distract from their distress or to cope. Substance use can worsen medical conditions and mental health problems such as depression and post-traumatic stress. It also places personnel at greater risk for suicide. The Air Force maintains a “zero tolerance” policy for illicit drug use, including the misuse or abuse of prescription medication.

Signs Wingmen Should Know/Look For

- “At risk” or “heavy” drinking:
 - Men: More than four (4) drinks on any day or 14 drinks per week.
 - Women: More than three (3) drinks on any day or seven (7) drinks per week.
- Alcohol on person’s breath at the workplace.
- Appearing intoxicated during duty hours (slurred speech, unsteady gait, etc.).
- Appearing “hung over” on multiple occasions.
- Indications of alcohol or other substance withdrawal such as tremors, sweating, anxiety, and irritability (ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL MAY INDICATE A MEDICAL EMERGENCY).
- Reputation as a heavy drinker.
- Presence of other stressors, such as relationship, financial, or work-related stressors.
- History of previous or ongoing treatment for substance use disorder, depression, anxiety, or other mental health or medical problems.
- History of self-injurious behavior (i.e., cutting), suicide attempts, or aggression toward others.
- Obtaining prescriptions from multiple sources.
- Frequent visits to Emergent/Urgent Care facilities with injuries or other pain concerns.
- Overzealous questioning about other people’s medications after visits to the dentist or other prescribing provider.

Recommended Wingman Action

- Create a unit/community environment that promotes/ encourages responsible use of alcohol.
- Create a unit/community environment that encourages self-identification as soon as substance use begins to cause minor problems.
- Create an atmosphere within the unit/community in which it is clear that alcohol-related misconduct is not acceptable.
- Encourage open communication regarding substance abuse and the negative impact it has.
- Be aware that persons with substance abuse problems are very good at hiding it. Isolated instances of problems related to substance use may be the “tip of the iceberg.”
- Be aware that substance abuse puts people at greater risk for depression, suicide, violence, financial problems, marital problems, and negative career impact.
- Be aware that alcohol/substance abuse may represent an individual’s unhealthy attempt to cope with other problems.
- Ensure that personnel who appear to be experiencing alcohol or substance use withdrawal receive a prompt medical evaluation.



Leadership Considerations

- Work with Violence Prevention Integrator, Community Support Coordinator, and Community Action Team to synthesize available installation data to guide efforts that foster an environment that facilitates substance abuse prevention, deterrence, intervention, and reintegration of Airmen following substance abuse treatment.
- Ensure personnel are aware of the negative impact of substance abuse and can identify possible indicators of at-risk personnel.
- Ensure personnel are aware of policies related to substance abuse.
- Ensure personnel are aware of resources for seeking help for substance-related problems and how to refer individuals for assessment and/or treatment.
- Communicate clearly that even isolated instances of substance-related problems should be reported to Command.
- Observe and document the performance and conduct of subordinates when substance use is suspected to be a factor in declining duty performance or inappropriate off-duty behavior.
- Clearly communicate a desire to help personnel manage potential substance use problems before they have a negative impact on work, relationships, and health.
- Recognize that individuals diagnosed with substance use disorders need specialized treatment. While in treatment, these individuals have a duty-limiting condition, which will preclude deployment and possible permanent change of station.
- Direct blood alcohol and drug testing, if appropriate.
- Refer those suspected of substance abuse to ADAPT program for evaluation.
- Members should not be allowed to self-refer after being involved in alcohol-related misconduct. If there has been alcohol-related misconduct, Command should make a referral to ADAPT.
- Assess the member's suitability for continued military service following unsuccessful completion of treatment.
- Serve as an active member of the treatment team (TT) when an Airman is diagnosed with a substance use disorder. Recognize that a Commander's non-concurrence with a recommendation for inpatient treatment can have significant negative consequences for the member and the unit. Inpatient treatment may be necessary for serious substance use disorders due to medical, safety, and other risks.