

Drug-Free Workplace Program Basics

Background Information for Governor's Spouses, Coalitions and Others

Comprehensive alcohol- and drug-free workplace programs, commonly called drug-free workplace programs, do more than just rid the workplace of alcohol and other drugs, they significantly contribute to the creation of alcohol- and drug-free families, schools and communities. As such, states can benefit tremendously by engaging employers to implement and maintain drug-free workplace programs. States can benefit even more by encouraging employers to expand the scope of their drug-free workplace programs to include education for parents, guardians and other caregivers – the vast majority of whom work – about how they can help prevent underage drinking. Clearly, parents are key influencers in young persons' lives. Reaching out to them where they spend most of their time makes good sense from a prevention perspective.

It also makes good sense from an employer's perspective. When an employee is distracted by a child's use of alcohol or other drugs, it's likely to show at work in the form of decreased productivity. By doing their part to send strong prevention messages to today's youth, employers can help positively shape tomorrow's workforce.

In the event that an employer does not have a drug-free workplace program, the first step is to encourage them to implement one. And, to do so understanding the basic components of drug-free workplace programs and how they can contribute to underage drinking prevention is key.

Drug-Free Workplace Program Basics

What is a drug-free workplace?

A work environment where all employees understand that the use of or impairment from drugs and alcohol while working is not acceptable, and policies and programs discourage alcohol or other drug abuse and facilitate treatment and recovery.

What are the specific components of a drug-free workplace program?

Drug-free workplace programs typically consist of five components, as outlined below. Although each program should be tailored to meet the unique needs and challenges of each workplace, generally, the more comprehensive the program, the greater its positive impact.

Component 1: A written policy, which clearly communicates:

- The expectation that employees not come to work under the influence of alcohol or other drugs and that they not consume alcohol or other drugs while on the job
- The consequences for violating the policy, which may include disciplinary action, referrals to help, unannounced alcohol and drug testing, and careful observation to ensure that policy violators stay "clean" as a condition of continued employment
- The availability of help for those who voluntarily come forward with a problem
- The company's commitment to a work culture that does not tolerate or accept workplace alcohol or other drug use and recognizes the devastating impact of alcohol and other drug use on individuals and families

How this component can contribute to underage drinking prevention: Drug-free workplace policies hold workers accountable and increase the likelihood that parents will set good examples for their children by not abusing alcohol. Furthermore, for young people new to the workforce, such policies may be instrumental in helping them make smart choices not to use. Research demonstrates that delaying initiation of alcohol use decreases the probability of problematic alcohol or other drug use later in life.

Component 2: *Employee education* with a focus on:

- The written policy's requirements
- The negative impact of alcohol and other drugs on individuals and families
- Signs and symptoms of problems with alcohol and other drugs
- Rights and responsibilities surrounding alcohol and drug testing
- The continuum of use, abuse and addiction
- The dangers of alcohol and other drug use in terms of:
 - Compromised safety
 - Negative impact on worker health
 - Increased costs of worker alcohol and drug use, including workers' compensation claims from preventable injuries
 - Increased health-care benefits use by the entire family
 - Higher levels of loss/theft/pilferage
 - Reduced productivity due to absenteeism, tardiness and unreliability
 - Diminished company credibility
- How interventions and referrals for alcohol and other drug treatment can succeed in stopping use and help workers achieve recovery, benefiting not only the individual and their family but also the workplace
- How to get help for alcohol and other drug problems

How this component can contribute to underage drinking prevention: Employee education has significant power to spread underage drinking prevention messages. It provides a mouthpiece for educating parents about how to talk to children about drinking and, when necessary, intervene early and effectively. Incorporating the topic is an easy way for employers to help their employees *and* their business, because employees not distracted by problems at home are more focused at work.

Component 3: *Supervisor training* on how to:

- Recognize and identify employees whose job performance may be suffering because of problems related to alcohol or other drug use – whether their own or that of a family member
- Intervene early and make appropriate referrals for assistance or testing to help positively influence a worker's life and help them return to productive work
- Hold workers accountable for complying with the drug-free workplace policy at all times, and, when applicable, with any return-to-work provisions (e.g., staying clean and sober as monitored by unannounced alcohol and drug testing)

How this component can contribute to underage drinking prevention: Effective supervisor training teaches how to recognize job performance problems that may stem from alcohol and drug use and refer employees to help. This could include referring a parent whose work performance suffers due to worry over a child’s alcohol use. A supervisor referral can also be a pivotal event in a worker’s life, offering help before use escalates to addiction and endangers health and ends a career.

Component 4: *Alcohol and drug testing* as a mechanism to:

- Hold all employees accountable in the event they compromise safety by consuming or working under the influence of alcohol or other drugs on the job
- Use employment as an incentive to stop unhealthy and unsafe behavior
- Enforce policy prohibitions in a fair manner that can withstand challenges and create support for an alcohol- and drug-free workplace among the base workforce
- Subject policy violators to unannounced alcohol and drug testing and careful observation to ensure they stay clean as a condition of continued employment

How this component can contribute to underage drinking prevention: Alcohol and drug testing, combined with opportunities for treatment, is powerful. It can force employees to change behavior in order to retain employment. Thus, parents with problems can get the help they need and be better positioned to help their children make smart choices as they grow up. Leveraging the power of the work relationship is especially effective when jobs are not plentiful.

Component 5: *Support for employees* and their family members, such as:

- Community-based resources, such as local treatment providers health care service providers; or
- Employer-provided benefits, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs).

In either case, employers should emphasize that help is available to employees who come forward voluntarily as well as those referred by a supervisor. Those who violate the policy before seeking help may be required to be assessed by a professional and to follow a recommended treatment plan in order to retain employment.

How this component can contribute to underage drinking prevention: By informing employees about sources of assistance, employers increase the likelihood that a struggling employee gets help before problems manifest themselves at work. Helping working parents who abuse alcohol or other drugs get treatment can help break the cycle, making children less vulnerable to addictive behavior. They also let parents know where they can turn if they are concerned about a child’s behavior. Sharing such information sends a clear message that employers care about the health and safety of their employees and their families – and the communities in which they live and work.