

# ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE USE AND MISUSE



Eric is a heavy equipment operator who's always been reliable. But after an injury off site, he started using painkillers to get through the workday. Over time, Eric realized he was depending on these pills just to feel normal, and it was affecting his focus and reaction time at work. One day, after a near-hit accident, Eric made the hardest decision of his life, he made a call to get help and found a treatment program to get the help he needed.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Understand the Risks and Know the Facts:** Substance use and misuse are serious safety and health issues in construction. Research shows construction workers have some of the highest rates of substance use among all industries.<sup>vii</sup>

**Know the Signs of Impairment and Respond:** Slurred speech, frequent absences, dramatic changes in demeanor, or appearing “out of it” can be signs of a substance use problem or impairment. If you notice serious safety concerns that could be related to substance use, report them to a supervisor according to company policy.

**Know Where to Turn for Help: Resources** like employee assistance programs, union support lines, and confidential helplines such as 988 (which connects callers to mental health, substance use, and suicide crisis services) are available. Another resource is 1-800-662-HELP (4357) which is the National Treatment Helpline which is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service in English and Spanish for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. Supervisors and managers can also use the Drug Free Workplace Helpline: 1-800-WORKPLACE (967-5752) for free and confidential help with creating and maintaining drug-free workplace programs.

## JOBSITE DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. What are some other ways we can cope with stress that don't involve substance use?
2. What are some ways we can support a coworker who might be struggling—without judging them?
3. How can we make it easier for people to ask for help?

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Substance misuse is a serious but addressable issue in construction. Recognizing the risks, responding thoughtfully, and knowing where to find help can save lives and careers. Studies show that early intervention and support significantly increase the chances of recovery and safe return to work.<sup>viii</sup> On this job site, we believe in offering help, not judgement. Some resources to be aware of are the National Treatment Helpline 1-800-662-HELP (4357) and the suicide and mental health crisis line which can be reached by calling or texting 988.

*Don't forget to mention your company's mental health resources or local service options.*

<sup>vii</sup> American Addiction Centers. (2024, August 23). Construction workers & addiction: Statistics, recovery & treatment. American Addiction Centers. <https://americanaddictioncenters.org/workforce-addiction/blue-collar/construction-workers>  
<sup>viii</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2021 Report on Workplace Substance Use Policies. 2022, December. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/data-we-collect/nsduh-national-survey-drug-use-and-health/national-releases/2021>