

Warning Signs of Alcohol and Substance Abuse

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

The following indicators or warning signs are associated with alcohol and drug addiction, as well as a variety of physical and mental disorders.

They are not meant to substitute for a screening or qualified clinical assessment.

Personal Attitude/Behavior Indicators

- Has one or more arrests for DUI; for drug use in public places; or for possession, delivery, or sale of illegal drugs
- Arrives for appointments, interviews, or meetings intoxicated
- Talks about getting high, uses vocabulary typical among drug users
- Frequently goes "on and off-the-wagon"
- Behaves in an uncharacteristic, impulsive, or inappropriate manner
- Is increasingly angry or defiant
- Overreacts to ordinary circumstances and problems, advice and criticism
- Is uncharacteristically isolated and withdrawn
- Is secretive concerning behaviors or whereabouts
- Denies, lies, or covers up
- Loses interest in hobbies and activities
- Takes unnecessary risks or acts in a reckless manner
- Breaks or bends rules, cheats
- Has increasing financial problems (may borrow or steal from family and friends)

- Has increasing legal problems/arrests (e.g., domestic abuse, disorderly conduct, assault arrests, or outstanding warrants)
- Misses interviews, appointments, or meetings

Cognitive/Mental Indicators

- Has difficulty concentrating, focusing, or attending to a task
- Frequently appears distracted or disoriented
- Makes inappropriate or unreasonable choices
- Has difficulty making decisions
- Experiences short-term memory loss
- Experiences blackout
- Often needs directions repeated
- Has difficulty recalling known details
- Needs repeated assistance completing ordinary paperwork (e.g. application forms)

Physical/Emotional Indicators

- Has smell of alcohol on breath or marijuana on clothing
- Has burned fingers, burns on lips, or needle track marks on arms
- Slurs speech or stutters, is incoherent

(continued)

- Has difficulty maintaining eye contact
- Has dilated (enlarged) or constricted (pinpoint) pupils
- Has tremors (shaking or twitching of hands and eyelids)
- Is hyperactive and overly energetic
- Appears lethargic or falls asleep easily
- Experiences sleep disturbances (e.g., insomnia, chronic fatigue)
- Exhibits deteriorating personal hygiene, grooming, and posture
- Exhibits impaired coordination or unsteady gait (e.g., staggering, off balance)
- Speaks more rapidly or slowly than normal
- Has frequent injuries or bruises without reasonable explanations
- Has chronic illnesses requiring doctors visits or hospitalization
- Experiences wide mood swings (highs and lows)
- Experiences general change in mood toward a more depressed and negative or critical outlook
- Appears fearful or anxious; experiences panic attacks
- Appears impatient, agitated, or irritable
- Experiences ongoing depression
- Has paranoid thoughts

On the Job Indicators

- Demonstrates periods of extreme high or low productivity
- Makes frequent performance mistakes
- Gives questionable excuses or blames others for poor performance

- Has difficulty adhering to schedules and timeliness
- Misses meetings and scheduled activities
- Lodges numerous complaints or grievances
- Is frequently tardy
- Uses excessive sick leave with poor excuses
- Takes long lunch hours and breaks
- Returns to work after breaks in a noticeably changed condition
- Avoids supervisors and coworkers
- Violates company policies and procedures

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For additional information, please contact:
 Connecticut Helps, Office of Family Support (860) 418-6262
 United Way Infoline 2-1-1
 Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (800) 446-7348
 Connecticut Department of Children and Families (860) 550-6484
 Connecticut Clearinghouse (800) 232-4424



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