

# Working Solutions

## Denial and Enabling: Stumbling Blocks to a Drug-Free Workplace

**Do you have friends who used to care about their work**, but are now sloppy and indifferent to the consequences of poor job performance—even when it constitutes a danger to others? Do they consistently miss work? Or show up late? Do they always seem to be borrowing money from you or your other co-workers? Do they disappear at breaks and lunch time, shunning old friends and coworkers?

If you do have such a friend, you know that something is happening in his or her life that makes your friend behave differently than he or she usually does. And, as time goes on, you realize that your friend's once bizarre and uncharacteristic behavior is now routine; it has become the way he or she usually behaves.

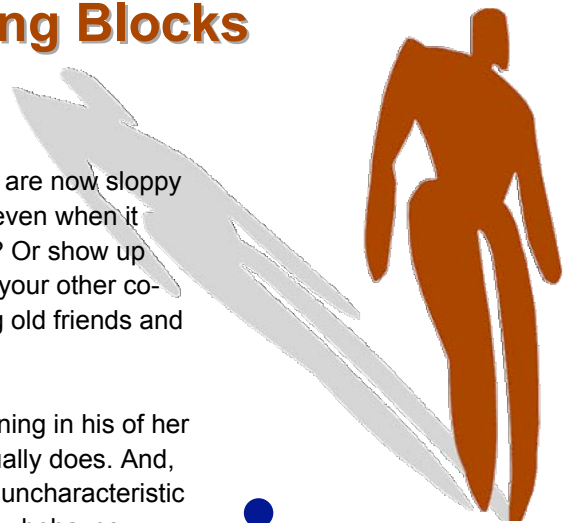
### What do you do?

Do you cover up for your friend by helping get the work done? Do you lie to a supervisor so your friend won't get into trouble? When your friend botches an assignment, or gets into really hot water with the boss, what do you do? Do you try to "explain away" or excuse the behavior?

You're in a tough spot. You know how your friend's job performance has slipped. But you also know your friend has a family at home that needs his or her paycheck. Years of seniority may be at stake. An impeccable reputation may be involved. You don't want to lose a friendship. And you certainly don't want to damage a career. Besides, you ask yourself, is this problem—whatever it is—really all that bad? Won't it get better in time?

So you continue to deny that your friend may be in trouble and you aid and abet him or her by covering up. When the incident blows over, you're right back there helping your friend get the job done, and on time. You've done the correct thing. Right? *Think again.*

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## No Help At All

If this scenario of denial and cover-up sounds familiar, then you're what is called an "enabler." By helping your friend mask his or her performance problems at work, you are unintentionally helping him or her to ignore the real cause of those problems. And, very often, that cause is substance abuse.

Despite the high probability of these negative consequences, an enabler continues to make excuses for why a friend has failed to show up for work, or lies to a supervisor about how an accident happened. An enabler mistakenly believes that these efforts give a friend the "time" or the "chance" needed for "things" to clear up. Enablers do not understand that substance abuse does not get better if it's ignored. It only gets worse.

## Stumbling Blocks

Denial and enabling are two significant stumbling blocks to creating a drug-free workplace, a functional family, and a successful life. Users typically deny their drug problems ("Me? I can quit anytime I want to!") and the enabler's misguided attempts to help in the short-term delay problem identification and can ultimately contribute to such long-term problems as job-related accidents or negligence, job loss and, in the worst case, premature death of the alcohol or substance abuser.

It is difficult to stop being an enabler. Alcohol and substance abusers take advantage of their friends in order to continue their drug use. Once you have allowed yourself to be used as an enabler, your friend will continue to come back to you for more "help."

## Stop the Cycle

In order to stop the cycle of denial and enabling, you must commit to change. Five approaches you can use include:

1. **Stop lying to yourself.** Admit that your friend has a problem that you are contributing to by failing to acknowledge it.
2. **Learn all you can about chemical dependency.** Understand that your friend does not have control over the drug: it controls him or her. Alcoholism and drug dependency are progressive conditions that will only get worse if left untreated.
3. **Educate yourself about the dangers of alcohol and drugs.** Find out what the physical effects and signs of alcohol and drug use are.
4. **Learn about your organization's drug and alcohol policy.** Educate yourself about the impact substance abuse has on the workplace and how it affects non-users, as well as users.
5. **Stop enabling.** Do not cover up your friend's deficiencies any longer. Allow job performance problems to emerge so that the employer notices them.

## A Perfect Opportunity

The workplace provides a perfect setting for helping a friend face a substance abuse problem. The threat of losing a job has more influence on an alcohol or drug abuser than a spouse's threat to leave or a friend's decision to end a relationship. Many substance abusers will seek help for their problem if they believe their job is at stake, even though they have ignored such pleas from other people important in their lives.

The key to setting this life-saving process in motion is for co-workers to understand that where drugs and alcohol are concerned, overlooking a problem is not an act of friendship. The best thing to do is stop enabling substance abuse by looking the other way. ■

**Source: American Council for Drug Education, 1993; Reviewed 2003; Article has been edited for this publication.**  
*This document is intended for general information only. You may wish to contact an Employee Assistance Professional for questions concerning your particular situation.*

**AWP can help you deal with alcohol and substance abuse for yourself or as an enabler. We can also help you learn about your organization's Drug-Free Workplace policy. Call toll free at 800-343-3822, 24 hours a day. We are here to help.**

## Injured on the Job: EAP Help for Hurdles

If you are injured on the job and forced to miss work, closely follow your medical professionals instructions for a speedy recovery. During the recovery process, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) can help you cope with the hurdles of depression and other emotions that can result from injuries and missing work. Some studies have shown that interpersonal conflicts, unresolved stress issues on the job, and even reactions by family members to the injury can contribute to delays in recovery and returning to work. It makes sense to get help. **Call AWP toll free at 800-343-3822.** We are available 24 hours a day. ■

## Accessing Sexual Offender Registries

The FBI's Crimes Against Children Unit coordinates the development and implementation of the National Sex Offenders Registry (NSOR). This was made possible by the Pam Lychner Sexual Offender Tracking and Identification Act of 1996. All 50 states participate in separate programs to track sexual offenders. It is from these databases that the public can obtain information by name, county, city, and zip code with some restrictions. The FBI Web site listing at [www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/states.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/cac/states.htm) lists all 50 state Web sites. ■

## “Lifting” Yourself from Depression

**Exercise can help lift depression.** The most talked about research concerning exercise and depression was reported in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* in 1999. According to the research, older adults who exercised were found to have experienced improved moods equal to the benefits of their antidepressant medications. Always follow your doctor's advice about the use of medication, and if your doctor recommends exercise, do it! In your fight against depression, research supporting the benefits of exercise is in your favor! ■

## Technology: Are You Liberated or Leashed?

The increasing use of cell phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs), beepers, and laptops is a reflection of our growing, technology-driven society. Today, it's possible to work 24/7 and never take a break! The challenge is avoiding entrapment in a work-world blur with the only escape being sleep.

As a work-life balance seeker, are you winning the battle for boundaries? If it is getting tougher, consider an emerging model of work-life balance intervention—making technology work for you rather than the other way around. Don't get mad at technology for keeping you “connected.” Instead, get even.

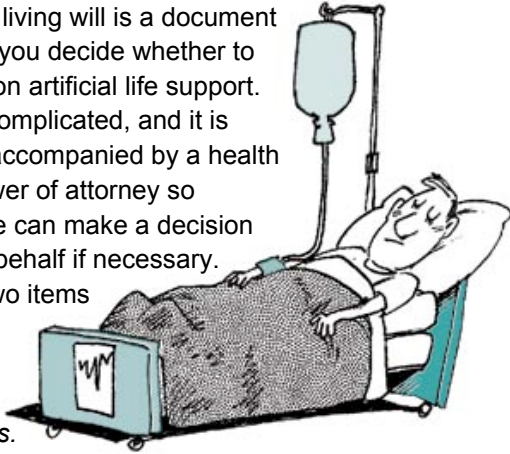
Commit yourself to learning how to properly use and access the basic functions of your equipment *before you need them*. Being prepared reduces stress. Set boundaries for yourself. It's okay to not use every function on your phone. Just learn the ones that you use on a daily basis. Only use technology if it's the best solution to solve the problem. Sometimes it's less stressful to walk over to someone's desk and just ask them a question rather than sending an e-mail.

**AWP's professionals can help** you identify more strategies to reduce stress in your life and achieve a work-life balance. Call toll free at 800-343-3822. ■



## Wants, Wishes and Living Wills

If you were in a permanent coma or persistent vegetative state, would you want to be kept on life support for years? Would you decline life support under such circumstances? Provided you are mentally competent, you have the right to make this decision before such a tragedy may occur. A living will is a document that lets you decide whether to be kept on artificial life support. It's not complicated, and it is usually accompanied by a health care power of attorney so someone can make a decision on your behalf if necessary. These two items are also called *advance directives*.



For more information go to: [www.uslivingwillregistry.com/forms.shtml](http://www.uslivingwillregistry.com/forms.shtml). Choose your state from the list provided to access forms. For more information, you can also call AWP at 800-343-3822. ■

*“Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.”*

— Thomas A. Edison

**Don't give up! Call AWP toll free at 800-343-3822. We can help.**

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## Mental Health Fitness

You know that physical exercise is important to staying healthy and warding off chronic disease. Well, your mental health is no less important—you just don't hear about it as much. Here are a few “exercises” to help you stay fit:



- 1) **Emotional Awareness:** Practice being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. When you experience stressful states, manage them with healthy ways of coping.
- 2) **Talk about Your Feelings:** Talk about how you feel with someone you trust in order to process difficult emotional events.
- 3) **Focus on the Positive:** Difficult and distressing experiences happen to everyone. Bounce back faster by practicing letting go, anticipating a positive future, and taking action to shape a desired outcome.
- 4) **Think Upstream:** Many life struggles are avoidable. Make decisions early that may thwart preventable crises later.
- 5) **Aim for Balance:** Make time for things you enjoy, and practice renewal by detaching regularly from sources of chronic stress.
- 6) **Count on AWP to help** you with the above! Call toll free at 800-343-3822. We are available 24 hours a day. ■

*Your EAP is designed to help you deal with life stresses and a variety of personal challenges. For confidential services offered at no cost to all employees and their families, please call:*

**Alliance**  
work partners

**Toll Free (800) 343-3822**  
**TDD (800) 448-1823**  
**Teen Line (800) 334-8336 (TEEN)**  
**E-mail: [eap@alliancewp.com](mailto:eap@alliancewp.com)**  
**Web: [www.alliancewp.com](http://www.alliancewp.com)**

Alliance Work Partners is a professional service of Workers Assistance Program, Inc. 

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