



Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
December 2018

When the Holidays Hurt

By Jaime Carter-Seibert, MA, LMHC

The winter holidays can be a magical time of celebrations and fond family memories, but they can also shine a light on grief, depression, and troubled relationships that don't disappear when the decorations come out. Idealized images in movies, commercials, and Facebook posts can give the impression that everyone is deliriously happy with perfect families--and if you're not, then there's something wrong with you.

What's more true is that many people feel overwhelmed by unrealistic expectations, loneliness, debt, and strained family gatherings, all of which can worsen existing depression and anxiety. And for those struggling with addiction, the steady stream of social events can make sobriety extremely difficult and lead to an avalanche of associated problems—one of which are DUIs. In fact, drunk driving accounts for 40% of fatal accidents between Christmas and New Year's as compared to 28% for early December. As a whole, December sees more people die in DUI-related crashes than in any other month.

Savvy supervisors can best support their staff by realizing that the holidays aren't "the most wonderful time of the year" for everyone. Did someone on your team recently go through a break-up or divorce? Grieving the death of a loved one? Is someone dealing with a serious illness, financial crisis, or weighted down by other hardships? Added financial and social pressures, and the expectation to suspend sadness and be merry during this season can make coping with current problems even harder. Knowing this and checking in with your employees can guide you to intervene when you see

someone struggling. Consider your EAP as a resource and remind your employees we are here 24/7 for support via phone, and can provide referrals for face-to-face support, and other services that can help. Call us at (800) 777-4114.

Addiction challenges

Work holiday parties can be great opportunities for celebrating the year's successes and building company spirit. But, they can also be particularly hard for those in recovery and may trigger relapses. Employees struggling with alcohol addiction can find it hard to stop after that first or second drink, which can lead to unintentional over-consumption, volatile behavior, DUIs, or worse. Hosted bars can fuel a binge, so consider using a strategy to limit the flow of alcohol—such as a 1 or 2 drink maximum and issue drink tickets to enforce it. Offering festive non-alcoholic options and making the focus on fun activities can keep cocktails from taking center stage.

It's not just folks battling addiction who can be vulnerable—28% of those surveyed in one study admitted to drinking more during the holidays. And for those who drink infrequently, alcohol can have more of an impact especially if someone doesn't know his or her limits. The EAP is here to help with resources for treatment options and referral suggestions.

"Reasonable suspicion" - observable behavior that a reasonable person would suspect is related to the influence of drugs or alcohol

As with alcohol, drug use can flare up during the holiday season as people cope with increased life stressors and navigate difficult family relationships. Because of this, employees may show up at work impaired. As a supervisor, it can help to know your reasonable suspicion policy and the signs that someone may be under the influence of a substance. Hyperactivity, long lunches, frequent trips to the restroom, poor concentration, lethargy, red eyes, impaired coordination, slurred speech, mood swings, or volatile behavior are just a few of the signs that someone may be using drugs or alcohol.

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Your HR team will be the best resource for assisting you with employees you suspect are under the influence, and your EAP is also here to consult on possible next steps and treatment referrals. Employees can lean on the EAP for emotional support and treatment referrals as well.

Signs of depression

The season of light may be dimmed by the dark days of winter and contribute to seasonal affective-related depression. Grief can also reappear for many as a loved one's absence is sadly felt at family and other gatherings. Isolating from others, frequent absences, poor concentration, mood changes, sudden weight loss or gain, sad demeanor, angry outbursts, increased use of alcohol or drugs, and suicidal statements are red flags that someone is likely depressed and intervention is needed.

You can help by expressing empathy and concern, and encouraging your employee to call the EAP for immediate telephonic support, 24/7, and a referral for ongoing assistance. A kind way to facilitate this is to call the EAP yourself with the employee in your office, ask to speak with a counselor right then, and hand the phone to the employee and step out of the room to allow for confidentiality. An EAP clinician will help the employee plan for safety, provide support, and guide the person to resources including an EAP referral.

Celebration awareness

Christmas trees, stockings, carols, and even tacky sweaters dominate advertising and stores during the holiday season, which can be uncomfortable or even annoying for those with other religious or non-religious beliefs. It can be easy to exuberantly include others in your customs, like playing Christmas music in the workplace, hanging Advent calendars, Christmas stockings for everyone, or secret Santa gift-giving. While the intention may be truly kind-hearted, it can make others who don't share the same religious or cultural practices feel uneasy.

Like the rest of the year, it's important to remember that people express their culture, religion, and holiday traditions in diverse ways and to make room for variety in your workplace. Sharing favorite foods and talking about family, cultural, religious, or seasonal traditions can

allow employees to learn about and appreciate the unique ways their co-workers experience important occasions. That said, there may be employees who don't celebrate any holidays. If this is the case, it may take a creative approach to allow for celebrations that also respect and provide a way to opt out for those who don't celebrate. Look to your company's policies and procedures for clarity on how holidays may be celebrated in your organization.

Leaders are human too

While looking out for your employees this season, don't forget to care for yourself. Leaders can feel like they need to be unflappable and impervious to life's challenges, which is hard to do if the holidays are difficult for you. If you are grieving the loss of a loved one, struggling with anxiety, depression, or reliving painful family holidays, don't suffer alone. Reach out to a friend, family member, or religious community, and remember your EAP is here for support anytime at (800) 777-4114.

No matter if or how you celebrate, we wish you, your families, and employees health and happiness as we head into the new year ahead!

<https://www.orrllaw.com/dui-blog/2017/december/holiday-dui-statistics>

<https://www.losangelesduiattorneyblog.com/everything-need-know-holiday-duis>

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