



ISSUE: Understanding the addictions recovery and relapse process.

THINGS TO CONSIDER: It is important that people recognize that addictions recovery is a process as opposed to an event ie; recovery does not just happen if a person completes a treatment program. Addictions recovery will vary according to the person and the substance used.

- Employers need to be realistic about when to hire a person who has faced addictions. From experience, a person who has been in 'active' recovery ie; using their supports, showing growth and gaining people & problem solving skills for approximately 1 year will have a better chance of retaining employment.
- As an employer you will want to ensure that the employee has the necessary "wrap around" addictions supports in place eg; counseling, 12 or 16 step programs, mental health and medical supports if required, Ministry of Children & Family Services, etc.
- Stress & Crisis are two major factors that affect whether a person may relapse in terms of addictions. It is important that Employers address these when employing a person who is in the recovery process.
- Addictions affect a person's ability to focus and may impair some memory function. These skills may improve however this can take time, either months or years. Furthermore, some medications used in the treatment also impair some memory function.
- Addictions recovery often means additional medical and counseling appointments. An employer will want to accommodate these appointments that often fall during work hours. Appointments with specialists that treat ailments such as Hep C, HIV, and provide methadone prescriptions in particular are difficult to schedule, so employer support and flexibility is important.

THINGS TO DO:

- Put in place an Employment Support person who is assigned to take this on with the appropriate skills and knowledge.
- Employers should develop a wellness plan or process for regular check ins with an employee. This will assist in clarifying whether these wrap around supports exist.
- Stress in the Workplace: Employers can reduce employee stress in the workplace, and thereby help to prevent addictions relapse by giving clear instructions for work tasks, a clear idea of timeframes and deadlines for work to be completed, and assigning very specific tasks. In terms of multitasking, these employees could be given instructions that are written down in order to jog their memory if memory function is a problem.
- Staff Parties & Celebrations: It is important to note that these types of functions can be a big temptation and stressor if alcohol is served.
- Stress outside of the Workplace: There are many external stressors and factors that may affect an employee recovering from addictions in the workplace. For example, holidays, family pressures, disconnectedness from family that can lead to depression (disconnectedness often comes during their 'using' days), paydays, friends and acquaintances.
- Often success in addictions recovery means an employee leaves behind former friends and acquaintances that may still be using. It is important to recognize this loss, the grieving process and the time needed to detach. Healthy social connections need to replace these past toxic connections. Employers can nurture healthy social networking in the workplace eg; Creating a



team where an employee is partnered with someone who is a good role model eg; prior addictions or addictions experience.

- **Pay Day:** It is important that employers recognize the temptation that comes with receiving a regular paycheque. Recognizing signs such as restlessness or agitation on paydays and then having an open dialogue to ask the employee what may be going on and if its related to their payday is a good idea. Ideally, if the employer has flexibility around paydays, then you may want to consider a Monday payday schedule rather than Friday which falls before the weekend and traditionally an even greater time to be tempted into relapse.
- The key for an employer is to a) recognize the impact of external stressors and b) have a process in place eg; an employment support person or other who regularly checks in with the employee in order to monitor some of these external factors
- **Crisis outside of the Workplace:** Common crises are lack of housing, relationship problems, death, unplanned pregnancy, physical health and mental health, financial crises. Employers must recognize that crises often occur, and a process for regular check ins through an employment support person can help monitor the employee for these types of external crises. That way the support person and employer can take a preventive approach in helping that person through the crises.
- **Importance of Employer Feedback:** These employees require even more feedback on how they are doing in the workplace, even just a few words here and there on a regular basis. Negative feedback can be given constructively.
- If you are concerned that an employee is using there are signs and symptoms to look for. See our Alcohol & Drug Abuse Checklist for more info. You will typically notice that an employee is regressing and withdrawing before they even relapse. This is the critical time to pay attention.

POSITIVE SIGNS OF ADDICTIONS RECOVERY:

- The employee shows signs of excitement and “giving it all in the workplace”
- More energy so that employee wants to learn and do more in the workplace rather than being in survival mode.
- More desire to learn and consideration of future goals in the company, education, new hobbies
- The employee takes more care in their personal hygiene, how they present themselves to the world and workplace.
- A person who has moved through the addictions recovery process successfully will have a natural desire to be open and honest about their own addictions and recovery. Some people find this honesty too blunt, however it’s important that people in the workplace see this openness as a positive step. However, the employee may benefit from guidance on how to communicate this information more professionally, tactfully and skillfully.
- Also they may approach life from a spiritual place where helping others will be part of their recovery process.

RESOURCES: BC Addictions or Women’s Hospital Addictions Program

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