



Belonging and Excellence for All (BE4ALL) is a joint effort by SMART, SMACNA, and the ITI to create an industry-wide culture where everyone is welcome and belongs, including those from historically underrepresented groups, and where we all strive for the highest standards of performance and professionalism, resulting in a thriving unionized sheet metal industry that affirms the dignity and worth of us all. These Toolbox Talks are in support of this mission.

BE4ALL Toolbox Talk

Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcoholism, also known as alcohol use disorder, is a medical condition defined by an impaired ability to control one's alcohol use despite the negative consequences associated with heavy drinking. There is a difference between casual, social drinking, and alcohol abuse or alcoholism, which is characterized by a dependency on alcohol. Excessive use or dependency can result in experiencing social difficulties, occupational setbacks, and health complications. In the workplace, especially in physically demanding and precision-focused jobs like sheet metal work, the consequences of alcohol abuse can be particularly severe.

Recognize the signs in yourself or others:

- Using alcohol as an escape from problems, such as chronic pain or emotional trauma
- Feeling shame or guilt surrounding one's behaviors while intoxicated
- Family, friends, and colleagues expressing their concerns about your alcohol use
- Frequent absenteeism or tardiness
- Lack of effort and decline in work quality
- Taking longer than necessary to complete tasks
- Avoiding coworkers, especially supervisors or managers
- Inability to stop drinking after one or two drinks, also known as binge drinking
- Partaking in risky behavior while intoxicated
- Experiencing problems in relationships and at work, or facing legal issues related to drinking
- Erratic behavior such as violent outbursts or impulsive decisions
- Sleeping on the job or disappearing for periods of time
- Physical signs such as bloodshot eyes, unsteady gait, or the smell of alcohol

Effects of alcohol in the workplace & beyond:

The effects of alcohol extend beyond individual health. Beyond the implications that alcoholism may have on one's social/personal life, alcoholism can have significant impacts on workplace safety. Short-term effects like impaired judgment, slowed reaction times, and decreased coordination can lead to accidents, especially when operating machinery or handling tools. Long-term alcohol use can result in chronic health issues, such as liver disease and cardiovascular problems, which further impair job performance. This is dangerous not only for the individual suffering from alcoholism, but everyone around them. According to research, on-the-job drinking can also be correlated with gender harassment and sexual harassment, which means that along with the physical risks, alcohol poses a mental/emotional risk. Outside of the workplace, alcoholism can place a strain on interpersonal relationships as well as result in more severe issues such as legal consequences or even threats to one's physical safety.



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR PROMOTING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Creating a supportive work environment involves encouraging open communication about alcohol-related challenges and promoting healthy coping mechanisms for stress. It is important to remain open and understanding when interacting with coworkers who might be struggling. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, and there are many avenues available to support those in need.



SMART members, including officers, and their families have access to the SMOHIT Helpline, which is free, confidential, and voluntary. Use of this resource is encouraged for anyone who needs to talk, and is not only for crisis situations. The Helpline is available 24/7 at 877-884-6227 (if you are experiencing a mental health emergency, please dial 988 immediately). More info about the SMOHIT Helpline can be found here: <https://www.smohit.org/smart-map/smohit-helpline/>



SMOHIT also hosts monthly 12-step, recovery-based meetings with the goal of supporting mental health and aiding in addiction recovery. These meetings are available to all SMART members. Learn more here: <https://www.smohit.org/12step/>



Additionally, many employers and SMART local unions/regional councils offer resources and support for employees struggling with alcoholism, including Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that provide confidential counseling and referrals for treatment. It's important to raise awareness about these kinds of resources and support colleagues who may be facing challenges.

Staff Conversation & Notes:

What are some effective ways to approach an individual who you suspect might be struggling with alcohol abuse?

How can we challenge the stigma surrounding Alcohol Use Disorder and encourage open communication about this topic?








Use the link below or scan the QR code to fill out a survey for a chance to win a \$50 gift card!

<https://forms.office.com/r/aqZ11zfAtn>

(OPTIONAL FURTHER READING & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES)

Things to avoid when attempting to help someone suffering from alcoholism:

-  **Referring to someone as a “drunk” or “addict”...** These terms are outdated and can be stigmatizing. Those struggling with substance abuse disorders are more than a label, and language like this perpetuates the misconception that addiction is a moral failing, as opposed to a disease. Instead, focus on the individual and their behavior rather than the label. For example, use “person with an alcohol use disorder”, or “person in recovery” instead of “alcoholic”, or “former addict”.
-  **Blaming and making accusations...** Blaming someone for their condition often causes them to shut down and stop listening entirely. Using shame tactics will rarely get someone to take the appropriate course of action. The best way to help someone out of alcoholism is to show support and offer encouragement. Have a conversation rather than give a lecture.
-  **Enabling...** You might think you’re being helpful by covering for a coworker whom you suspect is struggling by doing things like clocking in for them, vouching for them to management, or even helping them out financially. In reality, you are creating a false safety net and prolonging the process of them seeking help.
-  **Speaking in generalizations...** Vague statements and “beating around the bush” will only cause confusion and delay the chance of a positive outcome. Point out specific behaviors that are troubling, be honest about your concerns, and suggest specific avenues of support that may be helpful.
-  **Being unsupportive...** Always respect people’s choices and boundaries. Do not encourage or pressure someone to drink if they have expressed disinterest in participating. There are a multitude of reasons that someone may choose not to consume alcohol, and supporting this decision is an important part of showing respect for them.

ACTION PLAN - How to help someone struggling with alcohol use:

1. **Learn more** about Alcohol Use Disorder and familiarize yourself with the resources available for someone in need, at your individual employer, local union/regional council, and on a larger scale.
2. **Prepare** to have a conversation by deciding what you are going to say and choosing the right time and place to have it.
3. **Approach and listen** with honesty, compassion, and support. Avoid judgment and ask yourself how you would like to be treated if the roles were reversed.
4. **Intervene** if necessary. Expressing your concerns is different than intervention – which involves a more concrete plan of action including a proposed treatment plan, setting boundaries, and following through with consequences.

Want to read more? Check out SMOHIT’s collection of Toolbox Talks for more information on alcohol/substance use and recovery: <https://online.fliphtml5.com/ihjd/tskp/#p=93>

