

Problematic Substance Use: First ask yourself some questions...

- Do you ever need to use to get you started in the morning or fall asleep at night?
- Do you feel guilty about your substance/drug use?
- Do you or a family member think you need to cut back on how much you use?
- Are you annoyed when other people comment on or criticize your substance/drug habits?

Definition: The way the term “Problematic Substance Use” is used here is meant to cover a wide range of substance/drug use and is not meant to just be designated for “addicts.” This tab can be used to help you identify if you may have an issue that could be addressed.

Signs (i.e. what may be observed by others) and Symptoms (i.e. what is reported by firefighter).

- Feeling that you have or need to use the substance/drug regularly — this can be daily or even several times a day.
- Having cravings for the substance/drug of choice.
- Needing more of the substance/drug to get the same effect over a period of time.
- Keeping an unhealthy avenue open to get the supply you need.
- Spending money on the substance/drug, even though you can't afford it.
- Pushing your obligations and work responsibilities off so that you have more time to use.
- Reducing social or recreational activities to use substance/drug.
- Doing things to get the substance/drug that you normally would not do, such as stealing.
- Partaking in risky activities when you are under the influence of the substance/drug, such as driving.
- Inability to stop or reduce your substance/drug use on your own.
- Withdrawal symptoms when you reduce or stop use of a substance/drug.

Other Issues to Consider:

Problematic Substance Use can be called many names such as a drug addiction or a substance use disorder. These terms are used when there is dependence on a legal or illegal drug or medication. Keep in mind that alcohol and nicotine are legal substances, but are also considered drugs and have addictive qualities.

Substances/drugs impact the brain's reward center in ways that mimic the natural effects of dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins. The mind/body wants to feel the influence of these “happy” chemicals and once a substitute form of these “feelings” is found through the use of substances/drugs the natural chemicals become suppressed. Withdrawal occurs once the substance/drug use is stopped or reduced and these natural brain chemicals have not yet returned to normal levels. Typically these effects can be reduced in 30 to 45 days provided no permanent damage has been sustained from the recreational substance/drug of choice.

Drug use and addiction can cause long term physical and mental changes in the person using that can effect or destroy relationships, careers, and even lead to legal problems. Ceasing drug use is sometimes difficult and may require help. Talk to your family or friends for support, contact the Illinois Firefighter Peer Support Team for a peer referral, find a therapist or make an appointment with your doctor. An additional option would be to contact an addiction treatment center such as Rosecrance whom has a program specifically for firefighters.

Self-Help Goals:

Thought Goal: I use substances/drugs because I think (Insert problematic thought here)... I can stop or lessen my substance/drug use by thinking.... (i.e., Making a conscious thought not to dwell, About someone or something important to you that has been impacted, issues related to your overall wellness, Changes you have wanted to make for yourself, etc.).

Feeling Goal: I use substances/drugs because I feel (Insert problematic feeling here)... I can stop or lessen my substance/drug use by feeling... (i.e., Spending less time alone, Do you remember what it felt like the last time you felt good sober?, The importance your family, friends, career, upcoming events, etc.).

Behavior Goal: I use substances/drugs because my behavior... (Insert problematic behavior here)... I can stop or lessen my substance/drug use by behaving.... (i.e., Not spending time with your source or at the location where you obtain your drug of choice, Do you remember when you first were on the job...all the excitement and motivation?, or when you were first in your marriage/relationship?, are there ways for you to engage parts of your life by being present and available, etc.).

*These goals are only examples; use them as guide not an absolute. You know if there is a problem, let **now** be the time to fix it.*

Lastly:

Reaching out for help is **never** a sign of weakness, but rather one of strength. It may be intimidating, annoying or frustrating to think about what to do and how to approach overcoming this, but it can be done. You do not have to do it alone. If you cannot reach or maintain all of these goals on your own, contact a peer supporter and/or a psychology professional.

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