

dealing with alcohol problems in the workplace

alcohol and the workplace

Workplaces are often reflective of what is happening in wider society. In Scotland, levels of alcohol consumption and harm are at historically high levels with a quarter of men and just under a fifth of women (18%) were categorised as hazardous or harmful drinkers.¹ Evidence also shows that those in employment are more likely to drink than those who are unemployed or economically inactive.² It is therefore likely that many employers will have at least some experience of dealing with alcohol issues in the workplace.

This factsheet aims to give information and guidance for supervisors, line managers and colleagues on how to raise the issue of alcohol where a concern has been identified.



what can be done if you are concerned about a colleague?

Most workplaces are keen to deal with alcohol problems in a supportive way and will offer help to employees to address the situation. The approach used to deal with any potential or known alcohol issues will vary in different workplaces and will also be dependent on the level of concern.

If the concerns have a serious health and safety impact, for example if the person is a driver, operating machinery or caring for others, then the issue should be dealt with immediately through a formal meeting. The meeting can be supportive but should identify if the person requires a change in duties until the issue is resolved.

If however, the concerns identified and associated risks are at a lower level – for example if there has been a drop in performance or if the person is regularly turning up late on Mondays - an informal meeting is often the best way to discuss these concerns. It is important that this meeting offers clear feedback to the person as to why this is being raised. Discussions should focus on the specific behaviours or actions that have caused concern and move on to explore if alcohol is a factor within this.

These conversations can at times be difficult but being calm and supportive and sticking to the specific concerns can help separate this particular situation from the person's overall work performance and history, and reduce the potential for confrontation. The following three stage approach can be helpful in guiding the discussion.

stage 1 exploration

This would be the time to outline the specific concerns you have and take the time to fully explore why these behaviours and actions are happening.

stage 2 understanding

At this stage you should discuss the workplace alcohol policy and what this requires of all employees. It would also be the time to discuss how this situation could be improved – this will require action and commitment from both the employer and the employee. For example it may be identified that specialist support is required and the employee may agree to undertake counselling or attend their GP to seek support.

stage 3 action

A course of action detailing the next steps should be agreed at the end of the meeting with timescales and targets being set. This action plan should be a joint agreement between the employer and employee with commitment made on both sides. A review process should also be agreed, including setting a date for a meeting to discuss and assess progress.

some common concerns

Should I be doing this?

'I'm worried that my colleague will be offended.'

By focussing on the specific concerns you are not 'diagnosing' the person as having an 'alcohol problem', rather you are helping them to understand their rights and responsibilities in line with the workplace alcohol policy. Speaking to the person in a supportive way demonstrates you are trying to understand what is causing them to behave in this way and shows that support is there if required.

Can I do this?

'Dealing with these kind of problems is a specialist role.'

A specialist may know more about alcohol but you will know more about the person. Your role as their manager/supervisor/colleague, and your existing relationship with them, will help guide how you approach talking to the person.

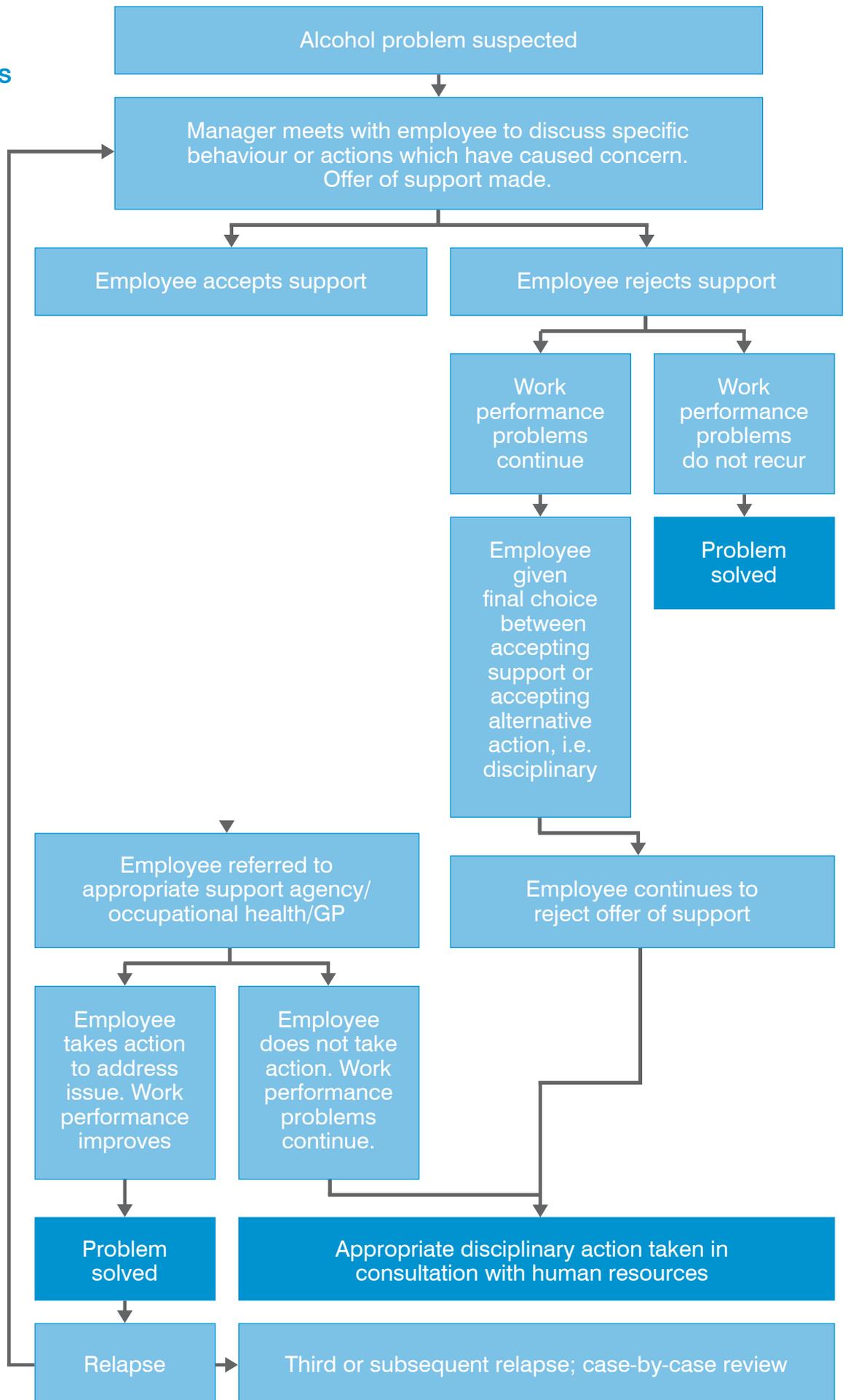
Will I do it right?

'I am worried that by bringing it up I will make things worse.'

If the issue has reached the point where it is having an impact on someone's work it is likely that they could use some support to help the situation. In addition, everyone has rights and responsibilities in terms of health and safety within the workplace, and it could be that the impact of the person's drinking is affecting the stress levels, performance and job satisfaction of colleagues. Using a supportive approach to discussing the concerns about the specific behaviour allows for understanding on your joint responsibilities in relation to that behaviour.



This flowchart can be a useful guide for managers when dealing with alcohol issues in the workplace.



for more information

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking call Drinkline on 0800 7 314 314 (8am-11pm, 7 days a week).

Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives
Tel: 0800 019 2211 www.healthyworkinglives.com

Alcohol Focus Scotland
Tel: 0141 572 6700
or email: enquiries@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk
www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk
Follow us on Twitter@[alcoholfocus](https://twitter.com/alcoholfocus)

Alcohol Focus Scotland is a Registered Scottish Charity (SC009538)
and a Company Limited by Guarantee (Scottish Company No.SC094096).

references

1. Rutherford L, Hinchliffe and Sharp C (2013) Scottish Health Survey 2012, Scottish Government, Edinburgh;
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0043/00434590.pdf>
2. Office for National Statistics (2013), General Lifestyle Survey overview – a report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey.
Newport: Office for National Statistics.