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Home » News » What to Know Before Asking for Time Off Work for Addiction Treatment

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What to Know Before Asking for Time Off Work for Addiction Treatment

Louisville Addiction Treatment Center - July 21, 2021

You can get the addiction treatment you need and still keep your job. In fact, your employer may be very supportive of the process. After all, if you're a good employee, they'll want to hold on to you. That said, it still helps to take the right approach to the situation. With that in mind, here's what to know before asking for time off work for addiction treatment.

The Law



The law will be your baseline for your engagement with your employer. If your addiction is to alcohol, then it will be covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA is, however, fairly limited in its scope, at least as far as addiction is concerned.

If your company is within the scope of the Family and Medical Leave Act, then you have an annual allowance of 12 work-weeks of unpaid leave in a 12 month period for reasons including "a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her job." This would potentially cover addiction treatment.

You should also check the laws in your state as they may give you extra rights.

Your Employer's Policies

As previously mentioned, the law is a baseline, not a target. There may be company policies that go over and above what the law requires. Even if there aren't, your company may still be willing to do whatever they reasonably can to support you.

Your Formal Diagnosis

You may know that you have an addiction issue, but only a qualified medical professional can formally confirm it. Similarly, only a qualified medical professional can make a formal recommendation for treatment.

This may actually be to your significant benefit since a medical professional may be able to recommend treatment options you might not have thought of yourself.

For completeness, be prepared for the possibility that your addiction has created separate medical problems which require their own treatment. This might not mean in-patient treatment. It could mean outpatient treatment or even just a course of medication.



Your Recommended Treatment Plan

In the context of addiction treatment, probably the single, most important decision is whether you need in-patient treatment, out-patient treatment, or a plan that combines both. You may need to spend a lot of time discussing your options with your doctor before you agree on a treatment plan.

Realistically, you should be prepared to spend some time in a residential addiction treatment facility. The initial withdrawal stages may be hard on both your body and your mind. You may therefore need, or at least benefit from, medical supervision during the process. After this, however, then your personal situation may strongly influence your recommended treatment.

For example, if your doctor feels that your home/work life is making your addiction worse, then they may recommend an extended residential stay. Basically, this will help you to break free of negative influences.

On the other hand, if your home and/or work environment is not an issue, they may recommend that you focus on outpatient treatment. This can help to maintain stability, including financial stability. It may also help with motivation and support.

The Right Approach To Your Employer



First of all, you need to decide who to approach. If your company has an HR team, then go directly to them. If it doesn't, then your line manager will generally be your first point of contact. In either case, you need to make them aware of your situation as quickly as possible. In simple terms, your legal protections start when you give your employer a formal diagnosis.

Secondly, you need to remember that a lot of success comes down to attitude. Your employer has to comply with the law, but they don't have to do any more than that. What's more, the law has limitations. For example, your employer could still fire you for performance-related issues, even if your addiction is recognized under the ADA.

On the other hand, employers tend to want to hold on to valued employees. That generally means people who do good work and have a good attitude. Most employers will recognize that getting treatment for a debilitating illness can help both your performance and your attitude. That said, the better the attitude you show to start with, the more likely you are to get them on your side.

With that in mind, take some time to think about what your situation means for your employer and what, if anything, you can do to help them deal with it. For example, could you schedule your absence(s) for quiet times when you'll be least missed? Always remember, however, that your health, both physical and mental, has to be your top priority.

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