

January 2009

# SAFETY TIP OF THE MONTH

## ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE INDICATORS

(PART 1)

### TIPS FOR CSW'S IN THE FIELD

Many workers have faced the challenge of working with families who are dealing with an addiction to alcohol or drugs, if not on the streets then within their own family. That is why part 1 of this 2 part safety tip will focus on identifying alcohol and substance abuse in individuals while working in the field. Part 2 will focus on alcohol and substance abuse in the workplace.

While the following are indicators of drug abuse they **do not** "prove" drug abuse. Certain other medical or mental health conditions can cause some of these indicators as well. Therefore the following are not meant to replace an appropriate assessment.

#### Physical/Emotional Indicators:

- Has smell of alcohol on breath or marijuana on clothing
- Has burned fingers, burns on lips, or needle track marks on arms
- Slurs speech or stutters, is incoherent



Seeing any of these drugs in a home, is an indicator of substance abuse and suggests increased awareness for personal safety and the possible need for an assessment.

- Has tremors or jitters (shaking of hands or eyelids)
- Appears impatient, agitated, or irritable

#### Behavioral Indicators:

- Uses drug culture jargon
- Erratic behavior, impulsive or inappropriate
- Takes unnecessary risks or acts in a reckless manner
- Breaks or bends rules, cheats
- Misses appointments, meetings, or shows up intoxicated

#### Mental Indicators:

- Difficulty making decisions

- Short-term memory loss
- Experiences blackouts
- Has difficulty concentrating
- Needs directions repeated frequently.

These indicators can serve CSW's well in the field, as they can help assess for possible dangerous situations. If you notice someone exhibiting several of these indicators, use precautions and safely exit the situation. Reschedule your visit, and/or come back with a co-worker.

#### Also watch for Paraphernalia

- Hypodermic needles
- Balloons
- Mirrors or flat metal
- Short straws
- Smoking or glass pipes
- Aluminum foil wrappers
- Vials or capsules

More information on this topic may be found through the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Mental Health Services @ [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)