

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences substance abuse prevention policy for students

1. INTRODUCTION

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences is committed to the prevention of substance abuse and will intervene early with any such problems. Under the Polytechnics Act (932/2014, Section 36), a university of applied sciences is required to establish a procedure for the prevention of substance abuse among students and for intervening in such abuse. This substance abuse prevention policy is drafted in cooperation by the parties active in the student welfare groups of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.

In this policy, substance abuse refers to the use of alcohol, drugs or medicinal substances in a manner that weakens the students' ability to carry out studies or endangers their safety or that of the environment.

Substance abuse may have many different causes. It may originate from a need to be relieved from the stress and tension caused by studies. Substance abuse will have effects on students' performance in their studies and work as well as on how they cope. The way in which people use drugs as young adults often carries on to later phases in their lives. Therefore, it is necessary to give consideration to one's own relation to drugs at the beginning of one's studies and professional life.

The purpose of this substance abuse policy, intended for students of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, is to inform students of detrimental effects and risks associated with the use of drugs, to make easier the intervention in abuse cases, and to stand as the policy guideline to be turned to in matters related to drugs.

2. DIAK'S APPROACH TO DRUGS

One part of students' wellbeing at Diak University of Applied Sciences consists of the drug-free environment. Some students may associate the use of drugs with negative experiences in their childhood and youth, and the memories of these experiences may become reactivated when the teaching deals with substance abuse and mental health problems. Such negative experiences may change into resources as well. If necessary, students have the opportunity of contacting public health nurses, school social workers and study advisors to discuss the feelings arising from their own experiences.

Participating in instruction under the influence of drugs, or when suffering from withdrawal or hangover will prevent students from concentrating in learning and, in the worst case, it may endanger the safety of the intoxicated student as well as that of others. The use of drugs and presenting oneself under the influence of drugs is prohibited during study-related situations. Intoxicated students are removed from class or other educational situations. An incident report is completed each time via INCY.

Under the Polytechnics Act (932/2014, Section 36), a student may be obligated to undergo drug testing and to submit the respective certificate to the university of applied sciences, should there be any reason to suspect that the student has appeared under the influence of drugs in any practical activity that is required for his/her studies, or in practical training, or if it is reasonable to suspect the student of drug addiction. Students are informed of these issues at the beginning of their studies and the issues are discussed annually before students begin their practical training.

If the conditions for drug testing are fulfilled, the suspected student must be tested without delay.

2.1. Student welfare group

Every campus of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences has a student welfare group, the purpose of which is to promote student welfare and to prevent problems related to substance abuse. Information about student welfare group members is available in campus-specific safety guidelines.

Members of student welfare groups may be consulted if substance abuse is suspected, and if necessary, they will meet with the student and refer him/her to treatment. Student welfare groups include representatives of the student health organisation, and this representative will draft the treatment agreement with the student.

Contact information for the public health nurses, school social workers and study guidance counselors in the student welfare groups is available in the appendix of this substance abuse prevention policy.

2.2. Teacher in charge of semester/academic year

At Diak, students have a teacher nominated to be in charge of the semester or the academic year. This teacher supports students during their studies and meets each one in group sessions and, when possible, on a one-to-one basis.

It is also possible to confidentially discuss matters related to drugs with this teacher. If the teacher in charge of the semester/academic year becomes concerned about the excessive substance abuse of a particular student, the teacher broaches the matter one-to-one with the student and instructs the student to contact the student welfare group. (See chapter 4, Intervention in substance abuse, broaching the issue of abuse.)

2.3. Tutoring other students

The student body organisation trains advanced students to function as student-tutors for new students. Student-tutors introduce new students to their UAS studies and provide peer support for them. In addition, student-tutors arrange events and parties to encourage new students to become active in student organisations.

Student-tutors influence the use of drugs in the student community through their own behaviour and attitudes. Student-tutors should be aware of Diak's policy concerning substance abuse and they should understand the possibility and necessity of referral to treatment. Diaconia University of Applied Sciences strongly promotes the drug-free concept for student activities.

2.4. Student health organisations

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences has student health services implemented at each campus. Students of universities of applied sciences are entitled to municipal health services. Some Diak campuses arrange a student health nurse to meet most beginning students in connection with their initial health check. All beginning students should complete a health questionnaire containing questions about their drug use, among other issues (AUDIT).

Students may contact student health nurses on their own initiative in matters that relate to sleeping problems, stress, fatigue or any crises in their lives. When these issues are discussed, students' drug use is brought up as well.

Information about the effects of drugs is available at the address www.paihdelinkki.fi. Elämäntapaliitto (Association for Healthy Lifestyles) and Finnish Student Health Service have produced material for students in higher education to discuss the health-related effects of drugs. The idea is to provide students with information about the health-related effects of drugs and to influence students' attitudes to make the use of drugs more controlled and less harmful. This material is suitable for students at universities of applied sciences, and it can be found at the address www.fshs.fi. In addition, the website of Nytyi ry provides information about drugs and addictions. This information is available at www.nytyi.fi.

3. HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE A SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEM?

A student's drug problem may cause worry among the staff and fellow students. Such a worry is always a common matter, and every person either studying or working in Diak is obligated to address the issue. Substance abuse may be connected to the behaviour given below. However, it is good to remember that reasons for this behaviour may be unconnected to drugs. In these situations, it is recommended to discuss the matter with the student to learn what support might be appropriate.

- The student shows external signs (e.g. fatigue, disheveled appearance, drowsiness during class).
- The student refrains from contact with teachers and all others, behaving evasively.
- On some days, the student's behaviour is exceptionally light-hearted and cheerful and may even disturb class.
- Changes occur in the student's behaviour. He/she may have appeared happy before but is now sombre and cheerless, even aggressive.
- The student smells of alcohol.
- Short absences occur frequently.
- The student's explanations for his/her behaviour are vague.
- The student is often late, particularly in the mornings.
- The quality of the student's study achievements deteriorates.
- Team work fails; the student tries to become a free-rider.
- The student may exhibit odd behaviour.

It is often the fellow students who have the closest view to how drug abuse impacts study performance.

4. INTERVENTION IN SUBSTANCE ABUSE

It is important to intervene in drug abuse cases as early as possible. The earlier the intervention, the less the harm caused by drug abuse. Anyone, whether a staff member or a fellow student at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, may broach alarming drug use. Student welfare groups may be consulted, should anyone observe such use.

Diaconia University of Applied Sciences has specified a procedure for referral to treatment. Referrals to treatment and treatment agreements are managed through the student health organisation. Intervention in cases of substance abuse is intended for helping and supporting the student so that he/she can cope in the challenging circumstances, proceeding with his/her studies, and growing into a responsible professional in the field of social welfare and health.

A great deal of responsibility is involved in all work with people; anyone working with patients and clients should be particularly aware of the risks associated with the use of drugs.

Instructions for broaching abuse

Staff members have an ethical responsibility to broach the issue of substance abuse. The issue should be broached with the student immediately when the suspicion of substance abuse arises. It is preferable that the person who observed the situation does this, such as the teacher present at the event.

If a student is worried about the way a fellow student uses drugs, it is important to broach the matter with this fellow student as soon as possible. It is important to give this feedback to the person if his/her use of drugs has caused concern. Student welfare groups can be consulted with confidentiality about broaching a substance abuse problem.

When confronting a person with his/her substance abuse, the following items are important:

- Trust your own intuition. It is an important tool for you so you can recognise and identify your feeling of concern.
- Make sure that you approach the topic at the right moment on a one-to-one basis when the student feels relaxed and the situation is safe. First, be sure to assess the safety of the circumstances and if the time is right for the discussion, also check that the student is calm. Consider whether or not you need someone else present to support you in broaching the issue.
- Never put your own safety at risk!
- In warm tones, explain clearly what worries you.
- Think carefully how you might express yourself so that the other person will not understand your words as an accusation or reproach.
- Listen to the student and be yourself.
- Direct the student to where he/she can start sorting out his/her affairs. If the student wishes, you might at first go along to give your support.
- Remember that you do not have to be a professional before you can broach the issue of abuse. The members of the student welfare group will take the matter forward.

When you broach the issue, it is important to keep the atmosphere confidential and to respect the sensitivity of drug abuse during the discussion. The situation must be handled on a one-to-one basis. You must not discuss the student's use of drugs within the hearing of other students, or in the case of practical training, within the hearing of the staff or clients; keep in mind, however, the circumstances relevant to your own safety. It is important that you express your worry about the student's use of drugs and its effect on his/her studies and welfare. This discussion alone will function as an intervention, and if necessary, the issue can be returned to at a later time. You can recommend that the student contact a student health nurse directly so that he/she can obtain a referral to a physician.

If the student's use of drugs has been detrimental to his/her studies or if it has endangered patient safety, the eventual recommendation for treatment is binding for the student. Members of student welfare groups are there to provide advice and support for broaching abuse issues.

If substance abuse was detected during a lesson, at school otherwise, or in practical training, the event must be reported in detail via INCY. These situations include e.g. a student participating in instruction while intoxicated or hung-over, or being unable to take part in instruction such as a lab due to his/her use of drugs. All events that endangered patient safety must be reported. If a student's state is suspected to be caused by drugs, actions are taken in accordance with Drug testing at Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (pg. 1).

Problematic situations in practical training, including those with drugs, are dealt with as instructed in Diak's practical training instructions.

5. REFERRAL TO TREATMENT

Referrals to treatment take place as specified in Diak's procedure for such referrals (Appendix 1).

A student health nurse and a study guidance counselor (if necessary, a school social worker) draft a treatment and study plan with the student. The party charged with assessing and monitoring the treatment process is the student health organisation.

Substance abuse is a matter of student health-related legislation. Under the Polytechnics Act (932/2014, Section 34), an educational institution may require a student to deliver such health information only that is pertinent to assessing the grounds for his/her admission as a student or for the decision concerning the forfeiture of the student's right to study. Information concerning health statuses may be collected only if the information is pertinent to admission to education in a particular field or to the completion of degrees in that field. A student may be obligated to undergo a health examination should there be any justified reason to suspect that the student may have a health-related issue preventing participation in education and the completion of the degree. The right to study can be withheld until the student agrees to undergo the checks and examinations required by the school (A 932/2014, Section 38, Subsection 4).

6. DRUG ABUSE BY A STAFF MEMBER

If a student is concerned about a staff member's substance abuse, the student can report the situation confidentially via INCY. Information of the report is given only to the supervisor of the staff member concerned and the vice rector.

Appendix 1

Procedure for students' referral to treatment, instructions for problems relating to mental health and drugs

1. DETECTION AND INTERVENTION

The student himself or herself, a teacher or another staff member may be the first one to detect that the student is suffering from a mental health or drug-related problem. For the situation to be clarified, the student is given support and referred to the public health nurse or the student welfare group so that any further actions can be determined.

Criteria for teachers/supervisors of practical training to consider: if

- a) a student appears intoxicated on campus or in his/her practice training place,
- b) a student is repeatedly absent from school or practice training, or continually neglects his or her duties
- c) a student appears fatigued, anxious or absent-minded, or behaves improperly or shows restlessness in his or her motor action,
- d) you are worried or unsure of how to proceed with a student,

then contact the public health nurse, school social worker or a study guidance counselor. All issues will be treated with confidentiality.

2. TREATMENT AGREEMENTS

Referral to treatment

If a student uses drugs, experiences mental health problems or otherwise requires care, the student must visit the public health nurse/mental health nurse or a nurse specialised in drug issues, or school social worker. They will map the situation, and the student together with the public health nurse/school social worker and a study advisor will draft a written treatment agreement. The agreement states how treatment is arranged and estimates the time in which the treatment will be completed. The student's studies during treatment are agreed on with the party in charge of the care and a member of the student welfare group (public health nurse, school social worker or study guidance counselor).

Treatment

During the treatment period, the unit in charge of the care makes the treatment decisions. (For example, drug screenings possibly associated with the care are decided on by the unit in charge.) The student may start studies, study during treatment, or resume studies after treatment if the party in charge of the care, a member of the student welfare group and the student, after discussing the situation in a meeting, deem studies to be possible.

3. INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PERIOD DURING AND AFTER CARE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND DRUG PROBLEMS

What do you do when

mental health or drug problems have disturbed your studies after successful treatment?

You must find yourself regular treatment again and make a commitment to it. See point 2, Treatment agreements.

you find drugs, medicines, syringes or similar items on school premises?

Do not touch the substances or equipment; instead, report the event via INCY.