

ALCOHOL AWARENESS

DISCUSSION LEADER'S OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Good morning my name is _____. Today we will be talking about alcohol awareness.

The **ground rules** for this discussion are:

- (1) No personal attacks on anyone's opinions
- (2) Allow each participant to express themselves
- (3) Make head calls at your leisure, just don't interrupt the group
- (4) Keep your language clean as not to offend others
- (5) PARTICIPATION BY ALL!!!!!!

Gain Attention

Most of us know that drinking too much is a bad choice. It can lead to alcohol dependence as well as to severe career and legal consequences. But, how do you know when you have misused alcohol? How do you engage in low risk drinking? Knowing this information will help you make safe, low risk decisions with regard to drinking alcohol.

Key points for the discussion today will be:

- (1) Identifying signs of impairment
- (2) Recognizing symptoms of alcohol poisoning
- (3) Describing strategies to prevent alcohol misuse and its effects
- (4) Making low-risk decisions about alcohol
- (5) Intervening when someone is misusing alcohol

Learning Objective: After this guided discussion, you will be more aware of how to recognize alcohol impairment and alcohol poisoning. You will also have a better understanding of strategies to prevent alcohol misuse and low-risk decisions you can make about drinking. Finally, you will be equipped with steps for intervening when someone is misusing alcohol.

DISCUSSION

We will begin by examining the signs of alcohol impairment.

KEY POINT 1

1. The more you drink, the more you increase your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level, which is the amount of alcohol present in your bloodstream. You become more impaired as your BAC rises. The effects of drinking can appear within 10 minutes of taking your first sip.
2. Signs of impairment include:
 - a) Reduced inhibitions
 - b) Slurred speech
 - c) Motor impairment
 - d) Balance and coordination problems
 - e) Breathing problems
 - f) Sleepiness
 - g) Confusion

- h) Memory problems
- i) Concentration problems
- j) Poor judgment and decision making
- k) Aggressive behavior

Interim Summary: Even small increases in BAC can result in considerably increased physical and mental impairment. That can lead to car accidents, violent behavior, and vulnerability to sexual assault. Continuing to drink even after you display signs of impairment puts you at risk for alcohol poisoning, a life threatening condition.

KEY POINT 2

1. Alcohol poisoning occurs when there is so much alcohol in the bloodstream that areas of the brain controlling basic life-support functions—such as breathing, heart rate, and temperature control—begin to shut down.
2. Symptoms of alcohol poisoning are:
 - a) Mental confusion, stupor, coma, or inability to wake up
 - b) Dulled responses, such as no gag reflex
 - c) Vomiting
 - d) Seizures
 - e) Slow breathing (fewer than eight breaths per minute)
 - f) Irregular breathing (10 seconds or more between breaths)
 - g) Hypothermia (low body temperature), bluish skin color, paleness
3. Alcohol poisoning can have lethal outcomes. Affecting the functions that sustain our bodies, alcohol is a depressant that slows the heart rate and blood pressure. If too much alcohol is consumed functions in the brain that control breathing can be sedated--literally put to sleep. When that happens, people lose consciousness and can die from heart failure, low body temperature, or seizures. People can also die from choking on their own vomit or severe dehydration from vomiting. If a victim survives, there can still be permanent brain damage.

We just finished discussing signs of impairment and alcohol poisoning. We learned that the consequences of alcohol misuse can be severe and even deadly. As a result, we all need to be aware of strategies to prevent alcohol misuse.

KEY POINT 3

1. There are several simple things you can do to avoid becoming impaired and getting sick from alcohol poisoning if you decide to drink.
 - a) Pace and space. Pace yourself so that you have no more than one standard drink per hour. Sip slowly. Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones.
 - b) Don't drink on an empty stomach. Eat before and while you drink so that the alcohol will be absorbed more slowly.
 - c) Know in advance the number of drinks you will have and stop when you have reached your limit. Setting a goal helps keep alcohol consumption in lower risk amounts.
 - d) Know the early signs of impairment and stop drinking when you feel any of them.
 - e) Keep track of how much you drink.
 - f) Know the standard drink sizes so you can count your drinks accurately.
 - g) Build your "no." Have a polite, convincing, "No, thanks" ready for the times when someone offers a drink and you don't want it.

If you choose to drink, it's important that you exercise the strategies we just outlined. They can save you from harming yourself or others. In addition to those strategies, there are also low-risk decisions you can make about alcohol ahead of time. Let's look at them.

KEY POINT 4

1. Drinking responsibly means deciding to drink in a low-risk way.
 - a) Don't drink if you are under age. CONUS and OCONUS legal drinking ages differ, however, UCMJ guidelines apply to every Marine. If you drink underage, you risk criminal and military penalties.
 - b) Never drink and drive. Plan for a designated driver, prepare for a cab, or use the Marine Corps Arrive Alive program.
 - c) Know and stick to low-risk limits. For men, this means no more than one standard drink per hour, three standard drinks a day, and 14 standard drinks per week. For women, this means no more than one standard drink per hour, two standard drinks a day, and seven standard drinks per week.

Decisions about drinking are some of the most important decisions in your life. Choosing to drink in low-risk ways, if you choose to drink at all, is an intrinsic part of staying healthy and being a successful Marine.

Another responsibility you have as a Marine is to look out for your peers and friends if you see that they are drinking too much. It is easy to slip into dangerous levels of alcohol consumption while out at a bar or party. Alcohol degrades one's ability to identify and counter threats in the environment. This may impair the response of bystanders that could assist an intended victim or deter a potential offender.

KEY POINT 5

1. There are steps you can take to intervene with peers or friends engaged in alcohol misuse.
 - a) Enlist the assistance of another person to address the person drinking
 - b) Express concern and empathy in a non-judgmental manner, e.g., "I'm worried about you."
 - c) Firmly address the drinking, e.g., "It appears you have had a great deal to drink."
 - d) Offer some alternatives, e.g., sitting, walking, moving the person to an alcohol-free area, offering a non-alcoholic drink
 - e) Follow up by checking in and offering assistance

It may not be easy or comfortable, but we all have an obligation to intervene if we see our fellow Marines or friends displaying signs of impairment.

We are going to conclude by reading the following scenario and using what we have learned today to answer some questions.

KEY POINT 6

Sgt Anderson went to a party straight from work without stopping for any dinner. In the last two hours, you've seen he has had three beers and four shots of vodka. Even though he didn't want them, he accepted the shots because his host offered them. Anderson's speech is slurred. He is having trouble walking and keeping his balance. He is picking fights for no reason. He is throwing lit matches into the backyard. Anderson is planning to drive home by himself.

1. Has Anderson misused alcohol? What are the signs?
 - a) Yes, Anderson is impaired
 - b) Signs: slurred speech, trouble walking, balance problems, poor judgment of throwing lit matches into the backyard, picking fights
2. How could Anderson have avoided becoming impaired?
 - a) Pace and space—have no more than one standard drink per hour (Anderson had seven standard drinks over the course of two hours)
 - b) Eat before drinking (Anderson skipped dinner)
 - c) Build a “no” (Anderson accepted vodka shots he didn’t want)
3. What decisions Anderson should have made to keep his drinking low-risk?
 - a) Never drink and drive and find a safe transportation alternative (Anderson plans to drive himself home)
 - b) Know and stick to low-risk limits—for men, this is no more than one standard drink per hour (Anderson had seven standard drinks over the course of two hours)
4. What steps can you take at the party to help Anderson?
 - a) Get assistance from the host or another guest to address Anderson
 - b) Express concern and empathy in a non-judgmental manner, e.g., “I’m worried you are going to hurt yourself.”
 - c) Firmly address the drinking, e.g., “I’ve seen that you have had a lot to drink.”
 - d) Offer some alternatives, e.g., “Let’s sit down together for a little bit. Here’s some water to drink.”
 - e) Follow up by checking in and offering assistance

Anderson exhibited numerous warning signs of impairment. He didn’t make the right decisions about alcohol to keep himself safe. If you see a fellow Marine misusing alcohol, take steps to intervene.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Today we discussed alcohol awareness. Having a drink now and then is common. Drinking to the point of impairment, however, should never be normal. You now can identify the effects of alcohol misuse as well as the symptoms of alcohol poisoning. Additionally, today’s training equipped you with strategies and steps for preventing alcohol misuse, making low-risk alcohol decisions, and intervening when someone is drinking too much. Being able to recognize when you should stop drinking, and knowing how to prevent alcohol from becoming harmful for yourself and others, is essential to being a responsible Marine.

Closing Statement:

Drinking is a choice. You can choose to drink in an unhealthy way, but that choice comes with serious risks. The objective for today was to increase your awareness of the negative effects of alcohol misuse as well as provide you with strategies to drink in a low-risk way. We also sought to teach you how to intervene when you see someone drinking too much. The next time you drink, think about what you have learned today and practice low-risk drinking.

END OF DISCUSSION

RESOURCES

1. Managing Combat & Operational Stress, Combat and Operational Stress Control, Headquarters Marine Corps
2. Alcohol Overdose: The Dangers of Drinking Too Much, July 2013, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
3. Rethinking Drinking, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
4. Know the Risks of Binge Drinking, Military OneSource, retrieved from http://www.militaryonesource.mil/crisis-prevention?content_id=272711
5. Overview of Alcohol Consumption, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, retrieved from <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption>