

Alcohol, Substances & Service Culture

Recognizing when a fast, culturally familiar coping tool starts creating additional risk.

Why use can become appealing

Alcohol or other substances may temporarily reduce arousal, help with social bonding, interrupt intrusive thoughts, or create a sense of sleepiness. The short-term effect can hide longer-term costs.

Warning signs

- Needing more for the same effect.
- Using primarily to sleep, numb, or transition off duty.
- Hiding amount or frequency.
- Relationship conflict, missed responsibilities, or risky behavior.
- Withdrawal symptoms, morning use, or difficulty cutting back.

Safer next steps

- Talk with a clinician or medical professional rather than waiting for severe consequences.
- Do not abruptly stop heavy alcohol or benzodiazepine use without medical guidance because withdrawal can be dangerous.
- Build alternative decompression rituals and peer support.
- Use confidential employee, union, peer, veteran, or professional resources when available.

Try this reflection

What job-related state are you most often trying to change with alcohol or another substance: adrenaline, numbness, sleeplessness, anger, loneliness, or intrusive memories?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.