

Q

I enjoy my role as a drugs worker and feel that I am working well with my clients, but recently I have been feeling very over-supervised. My manager has started to sit in on my client meetings and interrupts to the point where I'm feeling thoroughly undermined. I feel I'm being picked on. How can I tackle this calmly and constructively?

Rob, by email

Bull by the horns

Rob
You have to take the bull by the horns. You're going to get nowhere until you tackle this issue directly with your boss – if you get anyone else to mediate you'll just put your boss's back up and make things worse. If your manager has a personal issue with you, this would be a chance to get it all out in the open. Just be straightforward.

Kate, Nottingham

Misunderstood

Dear Rob
I was in your situation once and I actually started thinking I was imagining it – that's what everybody else told me, including my partner at home. My work life became a miserable experience, so I found another job. When I went to hand in my notice, my boss said to me, 'you've always hated me haven't you?' and gave a catalogue of supposed examples of me being hostile and undermining her.

This was a surprise to me as I thought she was the problem; she obviously saw it as the exact opposite. What I'm trying to say is, I left a job I

enjoyed because a misunderstanding got out of hand. Tackle the situation so it doesn't happen to you.

Eleanor, by email

Equal treatment

Dear Rob
It's hard to judge from your letter whether the situation's unfair on you. Does your manager micro-manage your colleagues? If so, then I think there's a case for solidarity and a bit of tactful team feedback. If it's just you, list the problems for your next appraisal and talk through them calmly without resorting to personal attack.

Good luck mate,
Kevin, South Wales

Confront it now!

Hi Rob
Don't take this rubbish! You've trained for this post – what right has your manager got to make you feel insecure? He/she should be supporting you, not jeopardising your one-to-ones with clients.

Sort it out with your manager before you waste any more energy on worrying!

Tam, by email

Need other readers' advice?

Email your Q&A questions to the editor, claire@cjwellings.com or write to the address on page 3.

Comment

Why reinvent the wheel?

Future drug prevention strategy has to be underpinned by a strong evidence base – but let's not ignore the valuable research that's already been done, says Matt Hayman.

The issue of developing evidence-based practice in the substance misuse sector is as important today as it ever has been.

Recent reports by the RSA and UKDPC highlight that, despite some successes, policy and practice still lack close links to research evidence. In the area of drug prevention and education this is made more difficult by a lack of agreement on what works and the outcomes that can be interpreted as successes.

It is important that more research is undertaken, as work in the sector must be led by developments in the research field. Research enhances our understanding of the issues and should guide effective policy and practice. However by repeatedly highlighting the lack of good quality evidence in drug prevention, are we missing the wider point of how existing research can be used in new projects? The need for further research will always be important; as we learn more about this fascinating field we also realise how much we don't yet know.

A paper in the March issue of the *British Medical Journal* by Bonell *et al* is a good example of how existing research can be used in practice, in this case with implications for preventative work. The article, 'Improving school ethos may reduce substance misuse and teenage pregnancy' (vol 334), summarises several studies of school-based prevention projects and comes to the conclusion that various social influences affect a young person's decision to use substances and engage in sexual activity.

Based on their review of the research the authors suggest that initiatives need to better reflect these influences and point to school ethos as

a way to achieve reductions in substance misuse and teenage pregnancy. The paper also provides practical and non-technical suggestions of how this can be achieved on the ground. This approach is a departure from the traditional approach of classroom-based drug education that generally attempts to reduce or prevent drug use by one brief input. In reality, a complex mix of risk and protective factors are involved in decision-making and it is these factors that need to be addressed.

This example is just one of many that show how useful the existing evidence base can be when trying to develop innovative drug prevention programmes that deliver meaningful outcomes. The challenge for commissioners for the future is how to respond robustly to the prevention agenda as children's trusts develop and the importance of demonstrating outcomes from available resources continues.

Of course further research is vital, but in calling for more we must not lose sight of the existing body of evidence already out there. It provides a wealth of knowledge about which approaches to avoid and ideas that can be used to develop fresh new programmes. More evidence is needed, but so too is evidence of successful implementation.

Matt Hayman is Director of Innovation With Substance C.I.C. Ltd. a new social enterprise delivering evidence-based drug prevention services. For more information visit www.innovationwithsubstance.com.

The RSA's report, *Facing Facts*, is online at www.rsa.org.uk/projects/drugs.asp

The UK Drug Policy Commission's report, *An Analysis of UK Drug Policy*, is at www.ukdpc.org.uk/reports.shtml