

Making Smart Choices About Alcohol

continued

Be Upfront About Your Concerns. While solely using generalized scare tactics (i.e. “So many kids die at college because they drink!”) can turn students off, hearing your concerns directly can have an impact on students. “I’m afraid that if you get arrested for drinking, it will be on your record and could show up on a background check when you’re going for your dream job” has a very different tone—it uses the “I” voice and speaks directly to a real-life concern.

Don’t Glorify Your Own Alcohol Use. If you made it through college or your young adult life abusing alcohol without any negative consequences, congratulations. You’re lucky. Glamorizing tales of your own alcohol abuse sets a poor example for your student, though, and can make him feel invincible (“If nothing happened to Dad, I’ll be fine, too.”). Be a strong role model for good decision-making instead.

Encourage Smart Decision Making. Talk about how, if an event is known for high-risk drinking, it’s best to steer clear—the peer pressure is bound to be high, dangerous situations will likely arise and the possibility of the police stopping by is almost a given. Same holds true for being alone with someone you don’t know well, especially if one or both of you have been drinking, because that’s where many sexual assaults begin.

Have a Calm, Open Conversation. When speaking with your student about alcohol, stay calm and be open. Encourage him to express his fears and concerns, and try to understand where he’s coming from. Don’t interrupt your student in the quest to get your point across. And try not to use “Yes... but...” sentences as the word “but” can invalidate anything you were saying beforehand.

Stay in Touch with Your Student. Keep up the communication so that your student feels comfortable sharing college happenings with you. Instead of passing judgment, help your student examine her choices and make responsible decisions for herself.

Students who let the campus alcohol culture just “happen” to them by buying into campus myths and buckling to peer pressure will likely have a tough time at college. Those who talk with their parents and think about their decision making ahead of time will likely make smarter choices. And they’re the ones who have a better chance of finishing college and coming out stronger on the other end.

The Effects of Others’ Drinking

Your student may be negatively impacted by others’ alcohol abuse in instances such as:

- taking care of an intoxicated roommate or other student
- experiencing an unwanted sexual advance
- having a loud hallway on weekend nights when intoxicated residents return
- getting into an argument with an intoxicated individual
- becoming a victim of sexual assault or date rape
- being hit, pushed or assaulted
- being insulted or humiliated
- not getting enough uninterrupted sleep or study time
- having property damaged

Encourage her to talk with residence hall staff members or other advocates (coaches, advisors, etc.) about the best way to handle such scenarios. Those folks are there to help *all* students enjoy their right to a safe academic and living environment.

Sources: “Alcohol, Other Drugs, and College: A Parent’s Guide” from *The Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention*, www.higheredcenter.org; “How to Talk to Your College Age Child/Student About Alcohol & Other Drugs from the Substance Abuse Prevention & Health Enhancement Office at Syracuse University,” <http://sumweb.syr.edu/health/parents.htm>; “A Message to Parents About High-Risk Drinking at College” from the Ohio College Initiative to Reduce High Risk Drinking, www.higheredcenter.org/parents/ohio.pdf