

How To Talk To Your Student About Alcohol

When talking with your student about alcohol and the decisions to be made in college, we invite you to consider the following strategies:

Be prepared.

You have a key opportunity to talk with your student about some of the most important choices they will make as they begin college. Doing some research ahead of time will help you get ready for those conversations. Reviewing AlcoholEdu for College materials is a great way to get started, as it provides you and your student with knowledge about alcohol use and drinking in college.

Discuss the topic openly.

Like many other conversations with your student, an interactive discussion is the best way to keep the dialogue open. Plan your conversation for a relaxed, unhurried time when you can listen carefully to each other. The more open you are, the more you can hear your student's perspective.

Support personal responsibility.

One goal of your conversation might be to strengthen your student's sense of personal responsibility for their choices and actions. Use some examples from your own life to show how various decisions can have different outcomes. Increasing your student's sense of accountability can also increase awareness of their choices and promote healthy decision-making.

Set clear and realistic expectations about studying and academic performance.

College is big commitment of both time and money. It is one of the most important and expensive investments a student and their family can make. Studies clearly show that college students who drink heavily get poorer grades.

Listen like a parent.

You know what to listen and watch for when talking with your student – the cues to talk more, the signals to “back off,” the body language that says “I’m comfortable” or “I don’t know what to do with this discussion.” Use your experience and your parenting skills to create a safe space for your student to ask questions, tell you what they’re

How To Talk To Your Student About Alcohol

worried about, and talk about what they're feeling as they think about college and drinking.

Remind your student about the law.

You know – and you may want to remind your student – that drinking alcohol under the age of 21 is illegal.

Have your student become familiar with specific campus regulations. Violations of the law or campus policies can have serious consequences. For example, possessing a fake ID (false identification) can carry federal and state penalties. Make it clear that you do not condone breaking the law.

Emphasize that there is no excuse for drinking and driving.

All 50 states have zero tolerance laws – making it illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to drive a car after drinking alcohol.

While the best (and safest) plan is to not drink, sometimes plans change. It's important that your student be aware of some simple strategies to stay safe:

- Use a designated driver – plan ahead of time to ride home with someone who won't be drinking – at all.
- Some schools have a safe rides program, which is a free or affordable service that offers students a safe ride home. Have your student save the number in their phone.
- Have your student save the number for a local taxi service in their phone. Encourage them to use it, if they ever need a safe way to get home.
- Making plans to stay overnight at the location of an event can be an excellent option.

Let your student know that most students abstain or have just a few drinks when they party.

Research has shown that students tend to have an exaggerated view of how much other students drink. The perception is that a majority of college students drink heavily, but that's not the case. Emphasize that he or she doesn't have to drink to fit in.

How To Talk To Your Student About Alcohol

Instruct your student to intervene when classmates are in trouble with alcohol.

Your student should know the signs of alcohol poisoning - unconsciousness or semi-consciousness, slow or irregular breathing and cold, clammy, pale, or bluish skin. If he or she sees a person showing one or more of these symptoms, your student should immediately call 911 for assistance.

Encourage your student to get involved.

Research indicates that students who volunteer and are active in the community have lower rates of alcohol and other drug use. You can encourage your student to become aware of and get involved in campus activities and organizations that support safe and healthy events or policies.

Tell your student to stand up for their right to a safe academic environment.

All students can be affected by the behavior of students who drink, ranging from interrupted study time and sleep to assault or unwanted sexual advances. College officials are expected to provide a safe and healthy campus, and they will take your student's complaints seriously.

Check-in with your student periodically.

This should not be a one-time conversation. Check in with your student throughout the academic year. Be available to talk and listen.

Finally, if you drink, be sure that you consistently model the responsible use of alcohol. How much you drink, and how you act when you drink, will be a major influence on your student.

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How To Talk To Your Student About Alcohol

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