

## A Parent's Guide to Talking to Your College Student About Alcohol

College is a very exciting time for both parents and students. It is a time where the possibilities and potential of the future are wide open. Students, particularly first year students, are exposed to a variety of new experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Frequently these experiences may include exposure to alcohol and alcohol use. We also know that:

Availability of alcohol  
Absence of parents  
+ Desire to fit in  
=Potentially risky behavior

It is very important for parents to talk to their students about their expectations for behavior, and also to discuss the potential risks and consequences associated with drinking. The following suggestions and information may assist you in these conversations:

**If possible, have a serious conversation about alcohol use and abuse before your student arrives on campus. If this has not happened, know that it is never too late.**

Some questions you may want to ask include:

- How will you decide whether or not to drink?
- What will you do if you find yourself at a party where there is only alcohol to drink?
- What will you do if your roommate drinks and/or if your room becomes a center for this type of activity?
- What will you do if you find a student passed out in the bathroom and/or how would you handle caring for someone who is very drunk?

**Be sure that your student knows your behavioral expectations for their time in college.**

Discuss family beliefs and values about drinking (including drinking and driving), class attendance, financial responsibility, and staying in touch. You may also opt to share your own experiences with alcohol, both the negative and the positive. In general, it is better to refrain from “glorifying” alcohol related stories from your younger years.

Nationally, almost one-third of college students admit to having missed at least one class because of their alcohol or drug use, and nearly one-quarter of students report failing a test or project because of the aftereffects of drinking or drug use. The average student spends about \$900 on alcohol each year, but only \$450 on books

**Stay in close contact with your first-year student, especially during the first six weeks of the semester.** The first six weeks of the semester are very important to academic success. It is also a time period where students may begin to drink heavily, which may interfere with their adjustment to college life and lead to feelings of failure. Poor adjustment to college can also result in requests to transfer or drop out. During the first weeks, you may want to ask your son/daughter questions like:

- How is your roommate?
- How do you and your roommate settle disagreements?
- How do you like each of your classes?
- Are you enjoying living in the residence hall?
- Can you tell me a little bit about the friends you have made?
- How are you spending your free time?
- Are you feeling overwhelmed?

According to the National Institute on alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), one-third of first-year students fail to enroll for their second year. Research indicates that one night of drinking can impair a student's ability to think abstractly for up to 30 days, limiting their ability to relate textbook reading to class lectures.

**Discuss the difference between low-risk and high risk drinking.**

Low Risk drinking is:

Abstaining from alcohol.

Thinking about whether and what you will drink before the party.

Being 21 or older.

Eating a meal before drinking.

Always knowing what you are drinking.

Making arrangements to get home safely before you go out.

Drinking no more than one drink an hour for females, and no more than two drinks an hour for males.

Alternating alcoholic beverages and nonalcoholic beverages throughout the night.

High Risk drinking is:

Drinking games, chugging, drinking anything out of a punch bowl, trough or funnel.

Drinking to get drunk.

Drinking too much too fast.

Leaving your glass unattended.

Not knowing what you are drinking.

Mixing alcohol with medications or illegal drugs.

Going to parties where people drink too much.

**Share with your student the consequences of high risk drinking.**

About 1,400 college students die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries. Each year 600,000 college students have been assaulted by another student while intoxicated, while 70,000 have been victims of alcohol related sexual assault. 110,000 college students have been arrested for alcohol-related violations. High risk drinkers are **21 times more** likely to: have engaged in unplanned sexual activity, not used protection when having sex, fallen behind in school work, damaged property, and gotten in trouble with campus police.

**Encourage them to know and understand the on-campus consequences of violating the College's alcohol policy.** Possible sanctions for being found in violation of the alcohol and/or alcohol paraphernalia policies at Eastman School of Music may include being placed on probation, monetary fines, removal from housing, mandatory substance education classes and counseling, community service, or written assignments on top of regular class work.

**Encourage your student to stand up for the right to a safe academic environment.**

Students who don't drink may still be affected by the drinking of others. Encourage your student to deal directly with the person or problems that can result from another student's alcohol consumption. If they need assistance, encourage your student to speak with their RA or Residential Life staff.

**Know where to go for help.** If you suspect your student is having a problem, encourage them to seek help on campus. Good resources for assistance are the University Counseling Center, University Health Services, Resident Advisors and Residential Life staff, The Office of Student Life staff, and Office of Academic Affairs staff.

**Signs that may indicate Alcohol or Drug use problems:**

Missing or skipping classes (or assignments).

A significant change in academic performance.

Frequent requests for money to cover expenses, or taking a second job.

Moodiness, defensiveness, or silence when you try to talk to him/her about school.

**Resources**

Center for Science in the Public Interest, Alcohol Policies Project. Information available at: <http://www.cspinet.org>.

Facts on Tap. Information available at <http://www.factsontap.org/collexp/Collexp.htm>.

Illinois State University. *Talking to With Your College Student About alcohol*. Available at: [http://www.deanofstudents.ilstu.edu/crr/downloads/Talking\\_About\\_Alcohol.pdf](http://www.deanofstudents.ilstu.edu/crr/downloads/Talking_About_Alcohol.pdf)  
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. *The Hidden Consequences of College Drinking*. Available at:  
<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/Parents/FactSheet.aspx>.

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. *What Parents Need to Know About College Drinking*. Available at:  
<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/Parents/default.aspx>.

Truman State University. *Most Dogs Don't*. Available at  
<http://mostdogs.truman.edu/parents.htm>