

Alcohol, Other Drugs, and College: A Parent's Guide



So, your child is going off to college. This is a huge step for both of you, and you want to be sure your son or daughter chooses the "right" school. There are so many factors to consider: A large or small school? A rural or urban

campus? How far from home? What majors are available? Costs?

As a parent you want to provide guidance in answering these questions. You will also have additional concerns that may not occur to your son or daughter. One important question is "What is the alcohol and other drug scene on campus?" Naturally, you will want your son or daughter to attend a college where he or she can focus on learning and enjoy a positive, healthy social life.

How can you tell whether a particular college is one where weekend alcohol-fueled partying regularly begins on Thursday night? Or where attendance is poor at Monday morning classes because too many students are hungover? Or where your son or daughter will have trouble studying or sleeping because of a roommate's involvement with high-risk drinking?

There are no guarantees, but there are ways you can learn about a school's efforts to prevent problems related to student alcohol and other drug use.

College Students Encounter Problems When Others Drink Too Much

60.5 % had study or sleep interrupted

53.6 % had to take care of a drunken student

29.3 % had been insulted or humiliated

20.1 % experienced an unwanted sexual advance (women)

18.6 % had a serious argument or quarrel

13.6 % had property damaged

9.5 % had been pushed, hit, or assaulted

1.3 % had been a victim of sexual assault or date rape (women)

Ask Questions!

You have a right to know that a college is serious in its efforts to address alcohol- and other drug-related problems. Here are questions you should expect college officials to answer, with hard evidence to support their claims.

- What steps has the college president taken to provide visible, consistent leadership on this issue?
- Does the college have a clearly defined alcohol and other drug policy? What is it? What are the consequences for infractions?
- Will the administration inform parents if a student is disciplined or arrested for alcohol- or other drug-related infractions, or hospitalized for drug or alcohol use?
- What percent of students join fraternities or sororities? What is the school doing to reduce alcohol use among these groups, whose members tend to drink more heavily than others?
- What proportion of the athletics budget comes from the alcohol industry? (Accepting such money sends a mixed message to students.)

- What training do residential advisers have in identifying and helping students who may have alcohol or other drug problems?
 - What percent of students are involved in community service? (Students who are involved in such activities tend to have fewer alcohol- and other drug-related problems.)
 - What treatment and other services are available for students who have alcohol- and other drug-related problems?
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Visit the Campus

A visit to the campus is one of the best ways to find out about the alcohol and other drug scene. Be sure to discuss your concerns with your son or daughter before the visit. Help him or her understand why this issue is important.

Talk to current students and residence hall advisors.

Ask what students do for fun on campus. Do many students participate in community service activities?

Check out bulletin boards and campus newspapers. Look for mention of alcohol and other drugs in notices, ads, articles, editorials, and letters to the editor.

Wander through the residence halls. Notice how students decorate their rooms. Are there many alcohol-related posters or pyramids of beer cans? Are trash cans filled with beer cans or bottles?

Talk to faculty members and campus security officers. Do they feel the administration is committed to dealing with problems related to alcohol and other drugs? How serious do they think these problems are?

Walk through the commercial neighborhoods near campus. Do bars and liquor stores seem to target students? Do they offer low-price "specials" that encourage drinking?

Talk with Your Son or Daughter!

Campus climate is important, but ultimately it is up to your son or daughter to make responsible choices. Studies show that parents remain a key influence on college students. Your opinions and guidance can make a difference!

Listen. You won't get far by lecturing. Ask your child to talk about alcohol and other drugs. Find out what concerns he or she has.

Make your expectations clear. College is a huge investment of time and money. Set clear expectations that your son or daughter will focus on academic work and personal development. Underage alcohol consumption and alcohol-impaired driving are illegal. Make it clear that you do not condone breaking the law.

Offer information. Alcohol is toxic. Far too many students die every year from alcohol poisoning. Discourage dangerous drinking such as drinking games or fraternity or athletics hazing. Encourage your son or daughter to have the courage to intervene when someone else is engaging in dangerous drinking.

Help them take a stand. Every student has the right to a safe academic and living environment. Discuss ways to handle situations ranging from interrupted study time to assault or unwanted sexual advances. Help your son or daughter think about whether to approach the offender directly or whether to notify residence hall staff or other college or law enforcement officials.

Get and share the facts. Students grossly overestimate the use of alcohol and other drugs by their peers. Young adults are highly influenced by peers and tend to drink in amounts they perceive to be the norm. You can play a vital role in providing accurate information.

Encourage community service. Students who volunteer are less likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs. Point out the benefits of volunteer work—forming friendships, developing job-related skills, and knowing the satisfaction of helping others.

Be a good role model. Evaluate your own use of alcohol, tobacco, prescription medicines, and even over-the-counter drugs. Consider how your attitudes and actions may be shaping your son or daughter's choice about whether or not to use alcohol or other drugs.

For more information about alcohol, other drug, and violence prevention on college campuses, contact:

U.S. Department of Education
Safe and Drug-Free Schools
Program

**The Higher Education Center for Alcohol
and Other Drug Prevention**

www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/ www.higheredcenter.org/