

Parents' Role in the Transition to College

Your student's transition into college is a time of excitement and opportunity. Here are some suggestions for supporting your student while he or she is adapting to the college environment.

Connect consistently.

Your student may feel a mix of emotions about beginning the college experience – enthusiastic, anxious, confused, and/or optimistic. By being consistently available to your student, you will reassure them that they can talk to you as they experience new challenges and raise new questions.

Support your student in making informed decisions and taking independent action.

Your guidance and insight provides an important foundation for your student as he or she grows and matures. It is important to balance your advice with a reminder that you trust and support your student's ability to make his or her own decisions. This will provide the support your student needs while developing his or her own identity.

Encourage your student to seek help and access supportive resources.

Facing new challenges, your student may feel overwhelmed or alone. Remind your student that asking questions and seeking answers is a proactive way of making decisions, and that there are campus resources available to help them, including student organizations, counselors, resident assistants, or members of the faculty and staff.

Finally, you may want to learn more about what your student's campus does to promote healthy growth and personal maturity and what you can do to support those efforts. Many of these resources can be found under the college's Student Affairs section of the website.

References

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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

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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.

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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.

References

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Warning Signs of a Problem with Alcohol

What should you do if you are concerned that your student may have a problem with alcohol? Following are some signs that you can look for, as well as ways that you can talk with your student.

It's not always 100% clear that a student has developed a drinking problem. Often what you may observe are overall changes in behavior, attitude, or activities.

Some potential warning signs include:

- A change in academic performance, such as lower grades or consistently skipping classes.
- Hearing concerns about your student's drinking from friends or other family members.
- Hearing your student talk about "needing to cut down" on alcohol.
- Sensing that your student is lying about drinking, or is thinking about drinking alcohol throughout the day.
- Loss of interest in regular activities.
- Not noticing – or caring – how their drinking affects others.
- Lack of care for personal health and hygiene.

If you are concerned about your student, the most important step you can take is to talk to your student and share your concern. A few things to consider when beginning this conversation:

Be specific about the behaviors you have observed and share your concerns.

By offering your observations, you can open a dialogue that is non-judgmental. This may help your student feel more comfortable sharing their honest thoughts and reflections.

Urge your student to seek help.

You may want to remind your student of resources that are available on campus or in the local community. Assure your student that you will offer support as he or she seeks help.

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Understand the situation, and focus on getting your student safe and healthy.

Your patience and active listening will reinforce that you are committed to your student's health and well-being.

You may want to consider contacting your student's institution to learn about available resources. Familiarizing yourself with the range of options could be helpful and offer encouragement to both you and your student. If you are not sure where to start, you may want to explore the college's website.

References

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Additional Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is an international fellowship whose primary purpose is to help alcoholics achieve sobriety. It is available almost everywhere, and membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem.

Al-Anon/Alateen

www.al-anon.alateen.org/

Al-Anon is an independent fellowship that helps relatives and friends of alcoholics. Al-Anon holds the view that alcoholism is a family illness. Groups share their experience, strength, and hope in order to aid recovery.

Substance Abuse Treatment Referral Locator

findtreatment.samhsa.gov/

This site helps people find alcohol and drug abuse treatment or mental health treatment facilities and programs around the country. It is sponsored by SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that aims to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

National Drug Treatment Referral Routing Service

1-800-662-HELP (4357)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) toll-free telephone number for alcohol and drug information and local treatment referral assistance. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization, Inc.

www.adultchildren.org/

Adult Children of Alcoholics is an anonymous program of women and men who grew up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional home. The program gathers and disseminates meeting information for members; creates and distributes literature for use in groups, and provides information to the general public.

The Center on Addiction and the Family

www.phoenixhouse.org/family/center-on-addiction-and-the-family

The Center on Addiction and the Family (COAF, formerly known as the Children of Alcoholics Foundation) is a unit of Phoenix House, the nation's leading provider of alcohol and drug abuse treatment and prevention services. Its mission is to ensure that individuals, families, and professionals receive information and services that support the healing process – for everyone.