

# TALKING WITH YOUR **COLLEGE-BOUND** YOUNG ADULT ABOUT ALCOHOL



- TRANSITIONING INTO COLLEGE
- STARTING THE CONVERSATION
- KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

***SAMHSA***

Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration



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Students preparing to attend college have already taken several steps toward independence. Deciding where to go to college, what career path to pursue, and how to finance an advanced education are all choices in learning how to be an adult. But they are not there yet. Young adults still need and value their parents' guidance as they make decisions about their future. One of these decisions will be about alcohol use at college—and parents represent the best source of advice on the issue.

Talk with your young adult about avoiding underage drinking, even if you suspect alcohol use during high school. Research suggests that teens who talked with their parents about alcohol avoidance strategies before they began their first year of college were more likely to avoid alcohol, limit its use, and spend less time with heavy-drinking peers.<sup>1</sup>

**Alcohol avoidance can help a student keep academic plans on track; alcohol use can disrupt a future.**

## TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE

College can overwhelm new students as they deal with changing social and academic expectations and the responsibilities that come with being on their own. It can be so challenging that about one-third of first-year students fail to enroll for their second year.<sup>2</sup>

Some students may use alcohol as a way to cope with college pressures. They also might believe that alcohol use is common and socially expected among their new friends, and drink to fit in. Students, however, tend to significantly overestimate how often their fellow students use alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

Due to these and other reasons, your young adult is entering an environment where alcohol use among 18- to 20-year-olds escalates dramatically. Overall, full-time first-year students tend to drink more than their peers who do not attend college—and suffer significantly more alcohol-related consequences.<sup>4</sup>

**New students appear most likely to initiate or increase alcohol use during their first six weeks of college.**

## STARTING THE CONVERSATION

In talking with your young adult about alcohol, look for opportunities to raise the topic naturally. Discussions about majors and course selection can lead to a conversation about the ways in which alcohol use can disrupt academic success and career options. Housing selection can generate a discussion about whether substance-free residence halls are an option. Discuss ways to handle situations where alcohol use by other students might create a problem, such as interrupted study time or unwanted sexual advances. As you tour the campus area, note how many alcohol outlets are in the community. Emphasize that no matter where alcohol is available, underage drinking represents a risk and a choice that has consequences.

LEARN ABOUT COLLEGE ALCOHOL POLICIES AT  
[WWW.COLLEGEDRINKINGPREVENTION.GOV](http://WWW.COLLEGEDRINKINGPREVENTION.GOV)

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## CONVERSATION GOALS:

- Emphasize how underage drinking can undermine health, safety, and academic achievement.
- Make your no-alcohol use position clear.
- Demonstrate your willingness to help find constructive alternatives to drinking.

Become familiar with the school's alcohol use policy together.

- Does the school have different sanctions for student athletes and those attending on scholarship?
- Does the school require new students to complete an online course in alcohol use prior to arriving on campus?
- How might eviction from a residence hall, being released from a team, or loss of a scholarship affect your young adult's ability to remain in school?

Many colleges and universities are aware that communication between parents and students can support academic success. Contact the college your young adult will be attending for materials that offer tips on maintaining contact with students or talking about alcohol.

Discuss the many serious and potentially life-changing consequences of underage drinking (see page 4). Point out that associating with students who drink heavily raises the risk of alcohol-related consequences, even for students who do not drink.

Make your position about alcohol use clear. Zero-tolerance messages appear to be most effective in preventing alcohol use and related consequences, even if a young person already is using alcohol.<sup>5</sup> Describe your expectations for your young adult's behavior while at college.

**Instead of lecturing or issuing ultimatums to your young adult, talk in ways that show caring, trust, and respect.**

If asked about your own past drinking behavior, be honest. Acknowledge the risks you took—and the consequences you may have experienced, from missing classes or exams to forgetting periods of time. Be prepared to answer such questions in ways that do not suggest that alcohol use is permissible.

## KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

Continue to keep the lines of communication open throughout all college years. Regular conversations show your continuing concern about your young adult's well-being and also provide an opportunity to reinforce your zero-tolerance stance of underage drinking. Regular communication also makes it easier to check for any potential alcohol use or early signs of a problem. Academic, social, or emotional difficulties can be signs of heavy drinking as well as risk factors for alcohol use.

College is a significant investment of time and money. Help ensure that your young adult gets the most out of the college experience. What you say, or do not say, about alcohol can make a lifetime of difference.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION  
AT [WWW.SAMHSA.GOV/UNDERAGE-DRINKING-TOPIC](http://WWW.SAMHSA.GOV/UNDERAGE-DRINKING-TOPIC)**

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## Annual Alcohol Use Consequences Among College Students

### ACADEMIC

About **25 percent of students report academic consequences** of drinking, including:

- Missing class,
- Falling behind,
- Doing poorly on exams or papers, and
- Receiving lower grades overall.

### HEALTH

- **1,569 students die** from alcohol-related injuries, including motor vehicle crashes.
- 599,000 students are injured.
- 19 percent of college students meet the criteria for alcohol abuse or dependence.

### SAFETY

- 696,000 students are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- **97,000 students are victims** of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.
- 400,000 students have unprotected sex.
- 100,000+ students report having been too intoxicated to know if they consented to having sex.
- 3,360,000 students drive under the influence of alcohol.

### LEGAL

- 5 percent of students are involved with the police or campus security as a result of their drinking.
- **110,000 students are arrested** for an alcohol-related violation.

#### Sources

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2013). A snapshot of annual high-risk college drinking consequences.

Hingson, R. (2015). *Recent Trends and Findings Regarding the Magnitude and Prevention of College Drinking and Drug Use Problems*. Presentation at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Summit on Behavioral Health Issues Among College Students, March 16, 2015, Rockville, MD.

#### Sources

<sup>1</sup>Turrissi, R., Mallett, K. A., Cleveland, M., Varvil-Weld, L., Abar, C. C., Scaglione, N., & Hultgren, B. (2013). An evaluation of timing and dosage of a parent based intervention to minimize college students' alcohol consumption. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 74(1), 30–40.

<sup>2</sup>National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. (2010). Fall semester—A time for parents to revisit discussions about college drinking. Rockville, MD.

<sup>3</sup>2009–2011 National Data Executive Summary Core Alcohol and Drug Survey Long Form—Form 194. (2013). SIUC/Core Institute Carbondale, IL.

<sup>4</sup>Hingson, R. (2015). *Recent Trends and Findings Regarding the Magnitude and Prevention of College Drinking and Drug Use Problems*. Presentation at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Summit on Behavioral Health Issues Among College Students, March 16, 2015, Rockville, MD.

<sup>5</sup>Abar, C. C., Morgan, N. R., Small, M. L., & Maggs, J. L. (2012). Investigating associations between perceived parental alcohol-related messages and college student drinking. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 73(1), 71–9.

View the companion video, *The Sound of Your Voice*, and download this guide at [WWW.STOPALCOHOLABUSE.GOV](http://WWW.STOPALCOHOLABUSE.GOV)