

A Parents' Guide to Alcohol, Drinking, & Choosing a College

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[What to Do]

Parents have enough to think about as they prepare for their son or daughter's college education without having to worry about drinking or how to prepare him/her for what some think is a "collegiate rite of passage." This guide provides basic information about alcohol, drinking, and college. It includes simple suggestions intended to help prepare parents for the realities of alcohol and collegiate life.

1. Remember: Alcohol is a drug.

Do not discount the dangers of drinking compared to the use of other drugs.

Suggestion: Talk about "alcohol and other drugs." When you do so, try to stay open and calm, but reinforce the fact that "alcohol is a drug."

Suggestion: Familiarize yourself with the toxic effects of alcohol. For example, share how alcohol can continue to enter the blood stream even when the drinker has become unconscious or how intoxication can result in life-threatening situations from otherwise low-risk activities, e.g., accidentally falling in the water.

For additional information on alcohol and toxicity, see
<http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/> or
<http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/>

2. Explore your own attitudes, values, and beliefs about alcohol and drinking. We all learn what we are taught. Chances are your son or daughter first spoke in the language you speak at home. He or she probably practices "your" religion, has "your" political affiliation, and subscribes to and practices "your" cultural beliefs, rituals, etc.

Suggestion: Keep a log of your alcohol use. Note in the log when you drink, what is happening when you drink, how do you feel? What are your thoughts, as you get ready to drink?—pick up the drink?—after you have had the drink? Listen to and record how alcohol is discussed/referenced in the family. Note the number of alcohol products in the home, the "depth" of the liquor cabinet. Do you "stockpile" beer in the garage/basement? What messages do your actions send to your children? Has drinking become ritualized in any way—"happy hour?" with meals? to relax? to celebrate? How is alcohol used at these times and what is the implicit message contained in the ritual and way it is actualized? This is not to suggest that any one of these behaviors "is" a problem, just to explore how subtle practices can convey a message regarding "how important" alcohol is in a successful adult life. In short, this is an invitation to recognize the influence we have as parents on our children's alcohol and other drugs attitudes, values, and beliefs.

3. Talk with other family members and adult friends about how they view alcohol and drinking.

How do you/they model alcohol use and drinking? Remember, this is not about "do I have a problem," but rather about how do others see you modeling alcohol use.

Suggestion: When drinking is the topic of a TV program, movie, or news article ask those watching with you, "What do you think about that?"

4. "That was then; this is now."

Realize that the drinking you did in college and your reasons for it are not the same as what is done in college today. Twenty years ago, 20% of males and 15% of females drank to get drunk. Today, 40%+ of males and 30%+ of females drink to become intoxicated. Drinking is not just a rite of passage that is harmless and tantamount to sowing one's wild oats.

Suggestion: List several reasons why you did or did not use alcohol in college. Share your list with your family.

5. Ask questions.

Speak with Student Affairs professionals. Always probe several levels when asking questions about alcohol and collegiate life; what is the school's official policy (all schools receiving any federal funds, including student aid, are required to have an official policy)? How often is it reviewed/updated?

Suggestion: Call/email/visit the professional on campus who is responsible for AOD programming

6. Do a quick search of recent information on alcohol, and collegiate life.

Access the Internet or your local library.

Suggestion: Ask the AOD Program Coordinator to provide a current reading list of alcohol and collegiate life articles/chapters/books.

7. Familiarize yourself with underage laws.

Be sure you are aware of the laws governing underage alcohol use/drinking in BOTH your home state and the state in which your son or daughter will attend school. These laws can vary from one place to another. Once you are familiar with them, share this information with your son or daughter.

Suggestion: Contact your local state representative's office or the District Attorney's office in your county to find out about your home state. Contact the Dean of Student's office at those schools your son/daughter is thinking of attending.

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