Alcohol on Campus

A Message to Parents

Funded by:
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health-Bureau of Substance Abuse Services and the Colleges of Worcester Consortium, Inc.
Parents: You Can Help Influence Your Student’s Decisions Regarding Alcohol Use at College

Dear Parents & Guardians:

The members of the Colleges of the Worcester Consortium welcome you and your student to the Greater Worcester area.

The college experience is a time when students will make new friends, try new things, assume new responsibilities, and sometimes face peer pressure and difficult life choices. Among these difficult life choices is the use of alcohol. Many consider the use of alcohol during the college years as a “Rite of Passage.” While the number of college students who choose not to drink continues to rise, heavy drinking by students remains a significant national concern for colleges and universities.

We are acutely aware that a parent or guardian plays an important and influential role in the life of a student throughout the college years. This brochure is designed to facilitate discussions between parents or guardians and their students about making educated and safe choices in regard to the use of alcohol. We hope you will find the information provided in this brochure helpful in these ongoing discussions.

Sincerely,

[Signatures of college presidents and officials]
Alcohol Use and Abuse by College Students

National research indicates that some students choose not to drink. However, many college students (89%) do drink alcohol, and some of these students engage in heavy (high-risk) drinking.¹

High-risk drinking negatively affects academic success, involvement in campus life, and often includes behavior associated with physical violence. Colleges nationwide estimate that in 41% of crimes experienced by college students, the offender was perceived to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.² Students tell us that as a result of their alcohol use, they have experienced memory loss (34%), done something they later regretted (39%), missed a class (34%), or have been in an argument or fight (32%).³

These behaviors effect not only the user but also the moderate drinker and non-user. When others drink too much, second-hand effects experienced by the moderate drinker or non-user include; disrupted study or sleep time, the need to take care of an intoxicated person, and property damage.

Consider this formula:

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New Freedoms + Students' Perception of College Life + Accessibility of Alcohol = Potentially Risky Drinking Decisions
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Source:
¹CORE Survey data, 2004
²ACHA Campus Violence White Paper, 2/5/05
³CORE Survey, 2004
Communication and Involvement
Some suggestions…

For many parents, talking with your student about alcohol is not easy. Although ultimately your student will make his or her own choice about alcohol use, research shows that teens’ relationships with their parents effects their drinking choices.

One study reported that teens who have an excellent relationship with one parent have risk scores 25% lower for binge drinking and teens who have an excellent relationship with both parents have risk scores 40% lower for binge drinking.\(^1\)

Discuss your student’s perceptions and your expectations regarding his/her choices about alcohol use.

♦ Set clear expectations that your student will focus on his/her academic work and maintain a reasonable balance regarding involvement in campus life and socializing.

Discuss how peer influence may effect decisions.

♦ Support your student in his/her efforts to not drink or drink moderately.

Work together to agree upon reasonable limitations and develop a plan for safety of self and others.

♦ Discuss how your student will make his/her decisions about using alcohol.

♦ Discuss what your student will do if he/she attends a party where only alcoholic beverages are available.

♦ Ask your student to watch out for his or her peers who may be engaged in dangerous drinking.

♦ Enclosed is a list of resources for you and your student to use if help is needed.

Emphasize to your student that excessive alcohol consumption can have serious consequences.

♦ Discourage dangerous drinking and drinking games.

♦ Encourage your student to socialize without alcohol.

Encourage involvement in other aspects of campus life.

Research shows involvement in campus life enhances retention, student satisfaction and academic success.\(^2\)

♦ Talk to your student about how he/she can get involved in campus student organizations.

♦ College is an opportunity to join a club or sport, hold a leadership position or become involved in community service. Participation in these kinds of activities can lead to lasting friendships and increase leadership skills.

Source:

\(^1\) Wechsler, H., “Dying to Drink”, 2002

\(^2\) Astin, A.A. “What Matters In College? Four Critical Years”, 1997
Tips for Parents

Talk with your student about the freedoms and responsibilities that come with being at college.

♦ Call your student frequently to find out how he or she is doing.

♦ Ask about the social environment on campus.

♦ Avoid sharing stories that glorify college drinking.

♦ Share with your student if there is a family history of alcohol or drug problems.

♦ Continue to encourage open dialogue with your student.
If Your Student Chooses to Drink

To make informed decisions about drinking, students should know about the law, the policy at the school he or she is attending, and the risks associated with drinking. Can underage drinking ever be considered “responsible”? However you answer this question for yourself, acknowledging that college students typically engage in underage drinking at some level sets the stage for a discussion between you and your child. To help your student avoid becoming sick or getting into dangerous situations if he or she chooses to drink, here are some tips to share:

♦ Set a limit before you start drinking and stick to it

♦ Make sure you have eaten a full meal before you start drinking

♦ Drink slowly

♦ Alternate non-alcoholic and alcoholic drinks

♦ Avoid drinking shots and drinking games

♦ Keep track of your drink

♦ Don’t go to or leave parties alone

♦ Abstain from drinking if you are on medication
Did You Know That?

♦ Use of false identification is a felony in Massachusetts. Getting caught with a fake ID could effect your student’s ability to gain employment in the future.

♦ In the state of Massachusetts it is illegal to transport alcohol in your vehicle unless you are 21.

♦ Many students post pictures of themselves on Facebook. Sometimes, they include photos of themselves drinking and partying excessively. It has been reported that employers have rescinded job offers to students after viewing this type of material.

♦ Recent studies have shown that the brain is still developing in early adulthood. As little as three drinks a day can lead to loss of long term and procedural memory.¹ Your student’s poor academic performance may have just as much to do with lost brain cells as lost study time.²

♦ Medication, both prescription and over-the-counter, can be risky when used in combination with alcohol.

♦ Under the law, those who are incapacitated as a result of alcohol or other drug consumption may never give consent to sexual activity. (voluntary or involuntary)

♦ The Department of Justice estimates that between 50% and 80% of dating violence on campus is alcohol related.³

♦ 2.1 million students between the ages of 18 and 24 drove under the influence of alcohol last year.⁴

♦ The number of abstainers continues to increase on college campuses.⁵

♦ Eighty-five percent of athletes who reported using alcohol in the past year did so on an average of 2-3 times a week.⁶

Source:
¹Wechsler, H., “Dying to Drink”, 2002
²Meyerhoff, D. USCSF, 2004
³Department of Justice, 2002
⁴Hingson et al, 2002
⁵Wechsler, H., “Dying to Drink”, 2002
⁶NCAA Study of Substance Use Habits of College Student Athletes, 2006
To help you get through the years as a parent or guardian of a college student, we recommend these resources:

**Campus Resources**
For contact information at your student’s college, please refer to the insert in this booklet.

**Internet Resources**
The Higher Education Center helps college and community leaders develop, implement, and evaluate programs and policies to reduce student problems related to alcohol and other drug use and interpersonal violence.
[www.edc.org/hec/parents](http://www.edc.org/hec/parents)

College Parents of America is a valuable resource providing vital information and guidance leading to and through college.
[www.collegeparents.org](http://www.collegeparents.org)

Collegedrinkingprevention.gov is your one-stop resource for comprehensive research-based information on issues related to alcohol abuse and binge drinking among college students. This site is maintained by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).
[www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov](http://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov)

AlcoholScreening.org is a service of Join Together as part of its “Demand Treatment” initiative. Join Together, a project of the Boston University School of Public Health, is supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
[www.alcoholscreening.org](http://www.alcoholscreening.org)

Facts on Tap: Alcohol and the College Experience is a program designed to enhance campus-based alcohol prevention efforts.
[www.factsontap.org](http://www.factsontap.org)

The Core Institute is the leading research, assessment and development organization serving alcohol and drug prevention programs across the nation.
[www.siu.edu/departments/coreinst/public_html](http://www.siu.edu/departments/coreinst/public_html)

Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education provides confidential information about prevention and treatment in Massachusetts. Call 1-800-327-5050 or go to:
[http://www.helpline-online.com/Prevent_Treat_Recover_for_Life](http://www.helpline-online.com/Prevent_Treat_Recover_for_Life)

**Suggested Reading**

Savage, Marjorie. *You’re on Your Own (But I’m Here if You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child During the College Years*, 2003.

Seaman, Barry. *Binge: What Your College Student Won’t Tell You*

Volkmann, Chris. *Our Drink: Detoxing the Perfect Family*, 2004

Wechsler, Henry. *Dying to Drink: Confronting Binge Drinking on College Campuses*, 2002

Zailckas, Koren. *Smashed: Story of a Drunken Girlhood*, 2005