

# Alcohol Use By College Students

A G U I D E F O R P A R E N T S



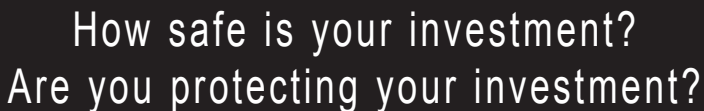
ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCE COUNCIL



**T**

he cost for a bachelor's degree in the USA today can easily be between \$50,000–\$100,000. For most students and their parents, this cost represents an investment in the future.

A college education opens doors to career opportunities, long-lasting friendships, and greater understanding of the world around us.



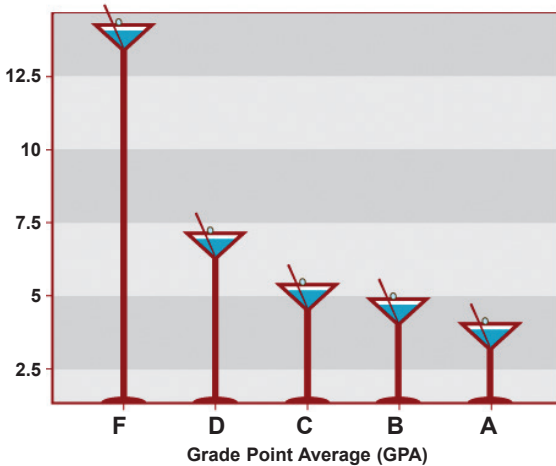
How safe is your investment?  
Are you protecting your investment?



There is probably nothing that presents a greater risk (or risks) to safe and successful completion of a college career than the high-risk use of alcohol. Drinking is directly related to lower academic performance, dropping out of college, high-risk sexual activity, sexual assault and rape, vandalism, violent behavior, and death and injury from alcohol-related car crashes.

## Alcohol & Academic Success

Overall Average Number of Drinks per Week by GPA for all Students



Source: Core Institute, Student Health Programs, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 2008. [core.siu.edu](http://core.siu.edu) and [www.echeckuptogo.com](http://www.echeckuptogo.com)



## What's going on out there?

Not all college students drink alcohol, and many use alcohol moderately and safely. However, as a group, they drink more than high school students, more than same-age peers not in college, and more than older adults. While people of all ages have some risk for alcohol-related problems, college students are at a significantly higher risk than almost any other population. Regardless of the size or location of their campus, young men and women of traditional college age (18–22 years) are involved much more frequently in drinking games and other high-risk drinking behavior.

...college students are at a significantly higher risk than almost any other population.

The risks are even greater for first-year students. The opportunity to be away from home and the control of parents for the first time, the need to fit in quickly in a new environment, and the expectations of drinking as an important part of college life, all combine with many other factors to make the first year of college a particularly risky time for alcohol use problems.

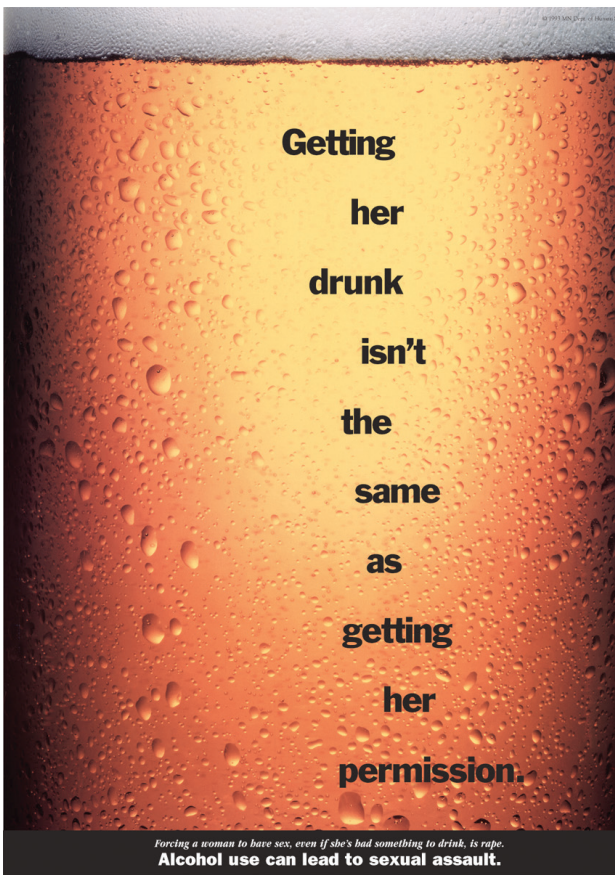
College students are a primary target for advertising and promotions of the alcohol beverage industry.

There are customs and traditions on many campuses that encourage high-risk drinking patterns. Drinking games and traditions are commonplace in some social groups, and alcohol is often combined with sports betting and other forms of gambling. College students are a primary target for advertising and promotions of the alcohol beverage industry.

Colleges and universities throughout the country are taking steps to reduce alcohol use problems. Yet, in spite of a significant increase in campus programs to prevent alcohol use problems, heavy drinking among traditional college-age students

has remained remarkably consistent over the past 28 years in spite of decreases among high school seniors and same age peers who are not in college. Currently, 30% report binge drinking. Dr. Lloyd Johnston and colleagues, researchers from the University of Michigan offer three possible explanations for their difference. “One possibility is that campuses provided some insulation to the effects of changes in the drinking age laws. Also, individuals who are under the legal drinking age in college are mixed in with peers who are of legal age to purchase alcohol in a way that is no longer true in high schools and less true, perhaps, for those 19 to 22 who are not in college. Finally, much alcohol advertising was directed specifically at the college student population.”

“...much alcohol advertising was directed specifically at the college student population.”  
Dr. Lloyd Johnston



**Some Parents Feel  
it's just a temporary period  
of life that all young people  
go through and that  
they will grow out of it.**

“  
**Drinking is a part of growing up. I did it and made it okay, so did a lot of others, and she will too.** –Father of a college student

**We've always told our kids to never drive after drinking.** –Parents of a college student

Other parents feel that if they drink alcohol, even if it is used moderately and appropriately, it is impossible for them to ask their son or daughter to abstain.

**Both of us like a drink once in awhile, so how can we tell him not to; isn't that a mixed message?** –Parents of a college-bound student

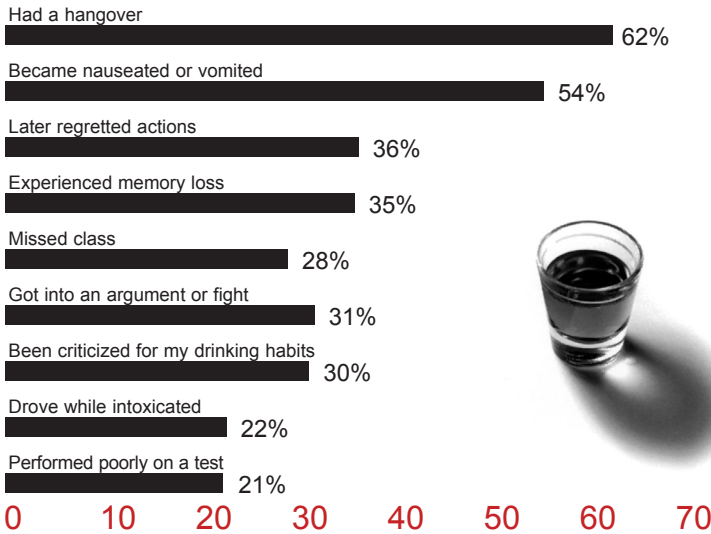
Many parents simply do not know what to say.

**Drinking is against the law. What else is there to say?** –Mother of a first-year college student”

**W**

hat parents and other significant adults say has a substantial effect on the choices their children make about the use and nonuse of alcohol and other drugs. Those who feel their parents will be very upset about their use, and whose parents have communicated clear expectations about nonuse, are much more likely to abstain or use infrequently.

## Negative Consequences of Alcohol and Other Drug Use Within the Past Year



Adapted from the Core Alcohol Drug Survey, Executive Summary, 2008 Annual Data. Core Institute, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 2010.

**Even though over half the adults in this country drink alcoholic beverages, many of us don't know what to tell young people about alcohol and other drug use—even our own sons and daughters.**

Some fear that if they talk with them about alcohol it will somehow encourage them to drink. Other parents feel that if they drink alcohol, it is impossible for them to ask their children to abstain. Even when their use of alcohol is within guidelines for safe, appropriate use, many parents simply do not know how to discuss the issue with their children for fear of giving them a mixed message. The result is that many simply say nothing or limit their comments to, “Don't drink, it's against the law.” By saying nothing parents risk that their children will think that they approve of their drinking or that they don't care.

## **First, abstinence from alcohol is a safe and acceptable decision.**

**M**

any parents and college students feel that virtually all college students either drink or want to drink, and as a result, question whether the message has any practical value. Yet, on many two- and four-year campuses, a third (28%) of the students indicate a preference for not having alcohol available at parties they attend. On many campuses, there are other students who are equally comfortable in social settings with or without alcohol. Clearly, there is support for students who choose not to drink. It is also important to note that abstaining from alcohol has benefits.

- Alcohol-free lifestyles allow people of all ages freedom to grow in their ability to manage stress and develop life skills without the interference of alcohol.
- People who abstain have no risk of developing alcoholism.
- Not purchasing alcohol means having money to do and/or buy other things.
- For those with a family history of alcoholism, a choice to remain abstinent will help break the cycle of addiction.
- Lastly, abstinence from alcohol is a lifesaving choice for people recovering from chemical dependency.



**Second,**  
the use  
of alcohol  
can be  
risky and is  
unnecessary.



**What You Learn In College Depends On  
What You Study.**

Party your way through school, and that's all  
you'll be good at when you get out.

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The consequences of heavy drinking by college students are clear and of great concern. Heavy drinking is associated with:

- Lower academic performance and failures.
- Sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy.
- Dropping out of college.
- Underage drinking and other legal problems.
- Sexual assault and rape.
- Student vandalism and violent behavior.
- Death and injury from alcohol-related car crashes and other causes.

Many times people who have been drinking too much say and do things that can hurt other people they care about or love. College is a time for building relationships, and alcohol can make that difficult.

## **Third, if you choose to use alcohol, do so safely, legally and appropriately.**

Just as there are benefits for people who choose to abstain from the use of alcohol, there are benefits for those who use alcohol safely and wisely.

- For many people, alcohol is a complement to social events, good food, and conversation with friends or family.
- For others, alcohol may be part of a family tradition or ritual.
- Some people simply like the taste of wine with a meal, or a cold beer on a hot summer afternoon.

Remember that the primary source of alcohol for young people under the legal drinking age is adults. Adults either sell it to them, buy it for them, or give it to them free. Parents can reduce the likelihood that their children will have access to alcohol by refusing to buy alcohol for their children or their children's friends, and by not allowing their underage children to have parties where alcohol is served on their property. Parents can also support the enforcement of local laws and ordinances prohibiting the sale of alcohol to underage persons.



### **Setting Guidelines**

Most college students have already used alcohol by the time they first arrive on campus. Some students have only limited experience with the effects of alcohol. Many have already had problems related to alcohol use. And another group of students has not used alcohol at all.

For each of these groups of students, it is important to establish and follow personal guidelines for choices about alcohol use and nonuse.

**The following comments from college students are examples of guidelines that influence how some people use alcohol. A few of these comments offer clear guidance about if, when, and how much to drink; others do not.**

*“I only drink on weekends, and I always stop at three beers.”*

*“When my cup is empty, I fill it up.”*

*“I don’t like to throw up, so I try to stop drinking before I vomit.”*

*“Drinking age laws really don’t mean much to me. I don’t need somebody else to tell me when I’m ready to drink.”*

*“My friends and I never drink before we drive.”*

*“I like to feel in control, so I just don’t drink.”*



**Choices about using or abstaining from alcohol based on a clear set of guidelines will enhance health and reduce the risk of experiencing the wide range of alcohol-related problems that some college students have experienced.**

You need  
more than a  
little umbrella  
to protect  
your drink.



Watch for date drugs.

© 2011 U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

## **The following guidelines are suggested to help you think about the use and non-use of alcohol.**

**1.**

### **To use or not use alcohol is a personal choice.**

Despite the perception on many campuses that drinking is the norm, no one should feel pressured to drink or uneasy or embarrassed because of a personal choice to abstain. Most people will choose to use alcohol safely, moderately, and appropriately. Others will simply have no desire to experience the effects of alcohol. Some students with a family history of chemical dependency or alcoholism may choose not to risk any use of alcohol. The bottom line is that no one should feel that he/she has to drink to be accepted.

**2.**

### **Alcohol use is not essential for enjoying social events.**

The real value of parties and other social activities is being with friends and taking time out from the pressure of school and work. Drinking alcohol should not be seen as a necessary component for having fun and being with friends. If alcohol is used, it can be an enjoyable complement to other activities, not the only reason for socializing. Actually, focusing on alcohol use as the main reason for a party can result in intoxicated people who get sick, cannot carry on a conversation, and generally are not much fun to be with after a while.

### 3.

#### **Know when to abstain from alcohol.**

- When recovering from chemical dependency.
- When under the legal drinking age.
- When pregnant or breastfeeding.
- When operating equipment, cars, motorcycles, boats, firearms, etc.
- When studying or working.
- When performing in fine arts or competing in athletics.
- When taking certain medications.

Each of these situations presents specific risks and times when alcohol use should be avoided.

### 4.

#### **Drinking that leads to impairment or intoxication is unhealthy and risky.**

Getting drunk is not a condition to be admired, laughed at, or taken lightly. Rude, destructive, or just plain foolish behavior triggered by alcohol use is socially unacceptable. It may also indicate an alcohol use problem. Drinking games and traditions often result in drunkenness and can present serious risks for those involved.

### 5.

**Know personal limits of moderation.** It is essential that everyone who chooses to drink alcohol knows his/her personal limit of moderation. It is important that each person set a limit before having any alcohol, as judgement can be affected after even a small amount of alcohol intake. For example, the risk of being involved in an alcohol-related traffic crash increases significantly at Alcohol Concentration levels above .04.



**Play Hard Enough And You Will Earn A Letter.**  
Bars aren't the only places party animals get thrown out of.

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## 0-1-3

### 0 - 1 - 3 Weekends

#### **0 = Zero Alcohol**

Especially if you're...

- under 21,
- driving,
- chemically dependent,
- pregnant

#### **1 = One drink**

**per hour** sets the pace for moderate drinking.

**3 = No more than three** drinks per day and never daily.

**In recent years, the alcohol industry has developed advertising with simple messages about moderation.**

“Know when to say when” and “Think when you drink” are examples of slogans that seem to encourage moderation when consuming alcohol. However, neither of these messages offer specific guidelines about the frequency or quantity of alcohol use. Other organizations such as Enjoy Michigan Safety Coalition have developed campaigns that offer more specific advice about if, when, and how much alcohol fits the concept of moderation. The 0-1-3 campaign suggests specific times when alcohol should not be used, offers limits of how much alcohol to consume at any one time, and also suggests a maximum frequency of drinking. The federal government has published “Dietary Guidelines for Americans” which recommends that if Americans choose to drink alcohol, they should do so in moderation. Moderation is defined as no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men. Similar to guideline three described on page 12, the U.S. Dietary Guidelines also suggest that some people should not drink at all.



Concise guidelines such as these offer understandable guidance to the general public that, if followed, will reduce the risks of alcohol-related problems. Because these guidelines do not reflect individual differences in weight, age, time spent drinking, and other factors, they are often not completely accepted or followed. Despite criticism from some prevention specialists, Alcohol Concentration charts can also provide guidance about moderation for some people. Alcohol Concentration, or AC level, is the amount of alcohol in the blood in relation to other fluids in the body. The more alcohol in your blood, the greater the degree of impairment.

### **A variety of other factors may also influence the level of alcohol retained:**

- **Gender.** Because of differences in body composition and chemistry, males and females are affected differently by alcohol. Men generally have more muscle and women more fatty tissue per pound. Fatty tissue has a smaller blood supply than muscle tissue, so more of the alcohol goes into the bloodstream. The result is that when a man and woman of equal weight drink equal amounts of alcohol, the AC level will be higher in the woman than in the man.
- **Body weight.** Total body weight and the ratio of body fat to muscle affect the AC level. Lower weight and/or a higher ratio of fat to muscle result in a higher AC level.
- **Strength and quantity of drinks.** It does not matter what kind of alcohol you drink—what counts is how much. A standard drink is a 12 oz. beer, a 5 oz. glass of wine, a mixed drink with 1-1/2 oz. of rum, whiskey, gin, vodka, etc., and a 9 oz. wine cooler. It is very important to be aware that mixed drinks often contain more than 1-1/2 oz. of alcohol.

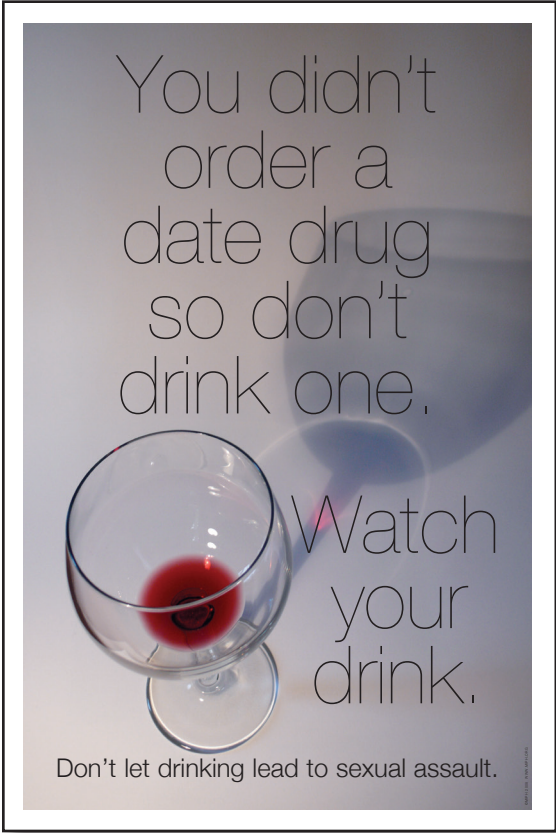
- **Time.** The number of hours you have been drinking affects your AC level. Unless you drink less than one standard drink per hour, your AC level will continue to increase over time. The body slowly eliminates the alcohol as follows: oxidation by the liver (95%), breath (2%), urine (2%), and perspiration (1%). The liver's rate of oxidation is constant and cannot be increased by drinking coffee, physical activity, or cold showers.
- **Food intake.** Drinking on an empty stomach can have a greater effect on judgement and behavior than expected. At the same time, although a full stomach will slow down the absorption of alcohol, it is much less important than most people believe.
- **Age.** Age is rarely considered in a discussion of AC levels, yet it is very important since the human body becomes less tolerant with aging. This is due to a gradual change or slowing down of the metabolic rate. The ratio of body fat to muscle also increases with age. The effect of these factors is that the same amount of alcohol intake per body weight consumed by older people can result in higher AC levels, and the effects may last longer.

Age is also a factor for young people. Research shows that adolescents are involved in fatal crashes at significantly lower AC levels than those found in adults. Young people are just developing many adult skills, including driving, and these skills can be negatively affected at lower AC levels than in adults.

- **Mood.** Although one's mood does not directly affect the AC level, the effects of alcohol can be greater than expected when a person is tired, stressed out, angry, lonely or dealing with any other strong emotion.

**For those who choose to use alcohol, the Alcohol Concentration Work Sheet can help establish limits of safe, moderate and appropriate amounts of alcohol to drink.**

It is important to remember that some people will show evidence of decreased performance, even at very low AC levels. There is evidence that some persons show impaired judgment at AC levels at or below .04. There is ample evidence that all persons show impaired behavior, including driving performance, at AC levels above .04.



# Alcohol Concentration Worksheet

To estimate your own personal limit to avoid problems related to drinking you can use the following steps to calculate the maximum number of drinks you can have at any time.

Remember, in order for this limit to be helpful, you must decide what is low-risk drinking before you begin drinking. Research has shown clearly that a person who has started to drink will underestimate his/her Alcohol Concentration (AC) level.

**Step 1** Determine your weight.

**Step 2** Using the appropriate AC chart on page 19, find the column that is closest to your weight. If your weight is between two columns, use the lower weight column to ensure that your calculations will be within limits that are legal and low risk.

**Step 3** Read down the column you located in Step 2 that is closest to your weight until you find an AC level of .04. This is the highest AC level you can reach without showing significant impairment of body functions and skills that affect your driving and other behavior.

**Step 4** To calculate your AC level subtract the time factor from the figure on the chart to obtain the approximate AC. For example, for a 160 lb. man who has had 4 drinks in two hours, take the figure .09 (from the chart for males) and subtract .03 (from the Time Factor Table) to obtain an AC of .06%.

**Body Weight:** Calculations are for people with a normal body weight for their height, free of drugs or other affecting medication and neither unusually thin nor obese.

**Driving:** There are two ways to ensure that your AC level does not impair your ability to drive: (1) pace your drinks at a rate that never results in a cumulative AC level greater than .04 or (2) allow enough time after drinking for the body to eliminate enough alcohol so that

the AC level remaining is not greater than .04 before you drive.

The only low-risk method is to pace your drinks so you never reach an AC level which will impair your driving. As stated earlier, judgment is one of the first areas impaired by alcohol, and once you have exceeded a .04 AC level it becomes increasingly difficult to accurately assess your level of impairment.

If you drink enough alcohol to go beyond an AC level of .04 or higher, the best thing to do is not to drive and find another person to drive you or call a cab. If neither of those options is available, the Time Factor Table below will help you determine when enough alcohol will have been eliminated from your body to reduce your AC level to below .04.

This is extremely important because it is possible for a person who has consumed a large amount of alcohol to stop drinking late at night, sleep for several hours and still have an AC level high enough to significantly impair their driving, work or classroom performance the next morning.

**Step 5** Now calculate the maximum number of drinks you can have without reaching an AC level of .04 in

- 1 Hour \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 Hours \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 Hours \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 Hours \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 Hours \_\_\_\_\_

Hours since first drink	Subtract from AC level
1	.015
2	.030
3	.045
4	.060
5	.075
6	.090
7	.105
8	.120

**Time  
Factor  
Table**

Note: Be sure to subtract .015 for each hour after drinking including the first.

Drinks	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	.05	.04	.03	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02
2	.09	.08	.06	.06	.05	.05	.04	.04
3	.14	.11	.10	.09	.08	.07	.06	.06
4	.18	.15	.13	.11	.10	.09	.08	.08
5	.23	.19	.16	.14	.13	.11	.10	.09
6	.27	.23	.19	.17	.15	.14	.12	.11
7	.32	.27	.23	.20	.18	.16	.14	.13
8	.36	.30	.26	.23	.20	.18	.17	.15

Drinks	100	120	140	160	180	200	220	240	260
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1	.04	.03	.03	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.01
2	.07	.06	.05	.05	.04	.04	.03	.03	.03
3	.11	.09	.08	.07	.06	.06	.05	.05	.04
4	.15	.12	.11	.09	.08	.07	.07	.06	.06
5	.19	.16	.13	.12	.10	.09	.08	.08	.07
6	.22	.19	.16	.14	.12	.11	.10	.09	.09
7	.26	.22	.19	.16	.15	.13	.12	.11	.10
8	.30	.25	.21	.19	.17	.15	.14	.12	.11

Disclaimer: This worksheet is an estimate and actual BAC may vary.



**It's Caused More Dropouts Than Calculus,  
Prelaw And Organic Chemistry Combined.**

Many academic problems are alcohol related.

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**6.**

**There are ways to minimize health and safety risks when serving alcohol. Examples include:**

- Do not serve alcohol to underage youth.
- Emphasize other activities besides drinking.
- Offer a variety of attractive non-alcoholic drinks that are easily available.
- Provide a variety of foods.
- Be sure to have designated drivers who abstain from alcohol.
- Inform guests whether beverages such as punch contain alcohol.
- Stay alert and assume responsibility for helping a guest who may have had too much to drink.
- Create an environment that allows guests to feel comfortable making personal choices about alcohol use or nonuse.
- Avoid drinking games that can quickly lead to intoxication.

**7.**

**There are situations where someone else's alcohol or other drug use may put you at risk. Always remember these points:**

- Riding with an impaired or intoxicated driver is always dangerous.
- Using seat belts at all times can protect both drinkers and non-drinkers against being injured or killed in an alcohol-related crash.
- Exercise caution in unfamiliar environments.
- Recognize and avoid high-risk sexual situations.

Alcohol use that is outside these seven guidelines is clearly risky. The personal choices people make about alcohol use are clear messages to others. You can be a positive and healthy model to young people if you choose not to drink, or if you choose to use alcohol moderately, legally, and appropriately.

## **What to say if your son or daughter's alcohol use concerns you...**

In spite of our best efforts to prevent problems, it is possible that you will experience times when your son/daughter may be using alcohol in ways that do not follow these guidelines and seem to be risky. When that happens, what is your role? What should you do when a family member or friend is drinking too much, or at inappropriate times, or is acting in ways that are upsetting? What should you say?

A simple and straightforward approach to letting him/her know you are concerned is often most helpful. Yet, it can sound easier to do than it really is. Not everyone will be thankful that someone cares enough to share his/her concern. None of us can control what a person says or does in reaction to what we say. But we can control what we say, how we say it, and where and when we talk to a person we are concerned about.

While there is no foolproof way to share concern with another person, the following process has worked well for many people.

Read through the ideas on page 23 and try them out the next time you want to tell a family member or friend that you are concerned about something he/she is doing.



**1. Tell your son/daughter that you care about him/her.**

*“You are very important to me, and I’m upset because I see you doing things that are really risky.”*

*“I love you and don’t want you to hurt yourself.”*

**2. Tell the person exactly what he/she has done that concerns you.**

*“Last night when you came home I smelled alcohol on your breath and I knew you had been drinking.”*

*“When we stopped by your room in the dorm I saw beer bottles everywhere.”*

**3. Tell the person how you feel about the way you see him/her acting.**

*“I get really angry when.....”*

*“I get really scared when.....”*

**4. After you tell the person that you care, what you’ve seen, and how you feel, it’s important to be willing to listen to what he/she says.**

You may find that the person will say nothing. He/she may not have been prepared for this and will not be ready to talk with you. Or he/she may become angry and tell you it’s none of your business. The person may thank you and say he/she will make changes. Others may tell you about a problem that goes well beyond your ability to be helpful. In all cases it is important to listen to what he/she says.

**5. Tell the person what you would like to see him/her do.**

*“Even though you are 21, when you are using our car, I do not want you to do any drinking.”*

*“This is the third time this summer that you have come home drunk and I want you to talk to someone about your drinking problem.”*

**6. Tell the person what you are willing and able to do to help.**

Our responses can range from simply being available as a good listener to helping arrange a meeting with someone who can help. If the person chooses to say nothing, let him/her know that the door is open to discuss this at a future time.

*“I’m always here if you need someone to talk to.”*

*“I’ll help you find someone who can help.”*

*“I will not allow you to use the car.”*

**Remember,** the best time and place to talk with someone about an important topic is when you feel comfortable and private, when you’re likely not to be disturbed, and when you have time to talk things through. It is also important to talk when neither of you have been drinking.

If the behavior that concerns you does not change or if you discover a serious problem, additional help may be necessary. Assisting a person to get the best professional help available is often the most caring action anyone can take. Many campuses have alcohol and other drug educators or specially trained counselors who can be helpful. In addition, a variety of self-help groups including Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon, can provide help for many students.

The need for **guidelines** about alcohol **use** is clear and the responsibility for establishing and following them is shared by all of us. Parents, faculty members, college staff, friends and others each have a role to play. In order to best protect our investment in our children's future, we can encourage discussions in our families about alcohol use and be role models for healthy, and appropriate choices about if, when, and how to drink.

### **Other publications that you may find helpful.**

- Gambling Choices and Guidelines
- What to Say, What to Do: When Someone's Alcohol or Other Drug Use Concerns You
- Choosing Not to Use Alcohol: Benefits for Adolescents
- Alcohol Choices and Guidelines for College Students
- Nonalcoholic Party Drinks Recipe Book
- In the Know: A Parents Guide to Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Walking the Talk: A Program for Parents About Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Use and Nonuse
- See It, Say It DVD (includes following scenerios)
  - *Calm Down and Follow the Moves (For Parents)*
  - *What To Say: A Lesson (For School Staff)*
  - *What Would You Do? (For Youth)*
- ¡Hablemos Ahora! [Let's Talk Now!] (for parents/Spanish)
- Pom Ces Hais (See it, Say it in Hmong)
- Rape and Alcohol—The Connection
- Where Do Most Teens Get Alcohol?
- Social Media or Social Mania
- Shoulder to Shoulder. Raising Teens Together

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