Alcohol and Other Drugs Q & A for Parents

Are students made aware of the reality of alcohol use?

The student wellness unit within Student Health & Wellness provides a number of outreach activities such as health fairs, a website, and educational programs to student groups. We are a very busy unit, making over 25,000 student contacts yearly -- most likely your student will have contact with us during their first year. Student Health & Wellness staff are also involved in training student leaders who work with students on personal development issues, such as resident assistants and orientation staff. As always, it is important that parents are providing this information as well.

There are a lot of misperceptions about alcohol use and college life. Most research indicates that students come to college with well-developed attitudes and habits in the area of alcohol use - most of which were already in place during the high school years. Having conversations early and often about your current and future expectations of your student can help to provide them with information to make healthy choices. Students need to hear from as many sources as possible that high-risk alcohol use can lead to negative consequences that will interfere with their college experience. A handbook is given to parents at Orientation titled, “A Parent Handbook for Talking with College Students About Alcohol” and is available here (http://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/assets/Uploads/parent-handbook.pdf) for U of I parents.

What are you doing about the alcohol problem on campus?

Student Health & Wellness is very involved in efforts to decrease high-risk drinking at Iowa. Several staff members serve on sub-committees of the Partnership for Alcohol Safety (http://www.alcoholpartnership.org). This is a community-wide effort to reduce harm associated with drinking and to build a more vibrant, secure community. The student wellness staff provides a continuum of services in the area of alcohol and other drugs. Educational programs, media campaigns, and other events are provided in the residence halls, student organizations, the Greek community, and academic courses to promote healthy behaviors. Early intervention programs are also provided for students who may have had a residence hall infraction or a legal charge. A full-time substance abuse counselor provides evaluations, individual counseling sessions, and appropriate referrals for higher level care.

How do I talk to my child about alcohol or other drug use?

There are many services available when your student arrives at Iowa. However, we know that most students have well-established attitudes and behaviors around alcohol by the time they graduate from high school. As parents, although it might not seem like it, you still have an important influence on your child as they go through these transitions. In fact, students tell us that parents are not only one of their most utilized sources of health information, but also one of their most trusted. The good news is that students rate the staff of the Student Health & Wellness as highly credible as well. Given this, we can have an important partnership in keeping your student safe and healthy. In the past, parents have asked us for suggestions on discussing alcohol and other drug use with their child. Here are some things we have found helpful:

1. **Encourage your student to take responsibility for their actions:** This is a time your student will make many decisions and many mistakes (a part of growing up!). Let them know that you support them, but that they are responsible for the consequences of their decisions. Resist the strong parental urge to 'fix' things or try to protect your student from the outcomes of their decisions. Doing so greatly reduces the impact of these experiences on them.

2. **Support socializing without alcohol or other drugs:** There are hosts of ways to have a great, exciting, and fulfilling college experience at Iowa. Encourage your student to be creative in socializing and to investigate ways to make friends and get involved in activities that aren't centered around alcohol or
other drugs. Many students are coming from being very involved in high school – we have nearly 500 student organizations at Iowa – truly something for everyone. Students who engage in this environment in ways that are not alcohol-centered are much more likely to succeed. Here are some great resources to get your student started: Campus Activities Board (http://csil.uiowa.edu/), Center for Student Involvement & Leadership (http://csil.uiowa.edu/), and Recreational Services (http://recserv.uiowa.edu/).

3. **Encourage your student to balance social and academic life:** Students who successfully graduate have developed a lifestyle of moderation. Successful college life includes a little studying (ok, maybe a lot), a little socializing, a little relaxing, etc.

4. **Be a role model:** It’s important for students to see the adults that they respect enjoying themselves at events without alcohol/other drug use, or drinking sensibly when alcohol is present.

5. **Support your student in taking charge of their health:** For the first time, your student will begin making important health decisions without quite as much guidance from you. It is important for them to do this and we have many supports in place to assist in this process. It’s also important to help students understand the magnitude of the risks they take if they use alcohol irresponsibly or if they choose to use illegal substances. For example, drug violations can have serious ramifications on obtaining financial aid to continue in school, getting admitted to competitive programs or graduate schools, and even obtaining licenses in a chosen profession. While it may be difficult for a 20 year old to think ahead to their future career, they generally respond well to information about how this issue could interfere with their goal of graduate school or a scholarship. Offer support and encouragement to your child as they navigate this challenging time.

6. **Discuss expectations:** The University of Iowa is a community and, as such, we have community norms of accountability, civic engagement, and intolerance to violent, abusive or destructive behavior of any kind. We work hard to communicate these expectations to students in a variety of ways. Communicating your own expectations to your student is also very important. Be clear with your student about what you will and will not accept. For instance, tell them that they need to take positive steps to deal with the issue, such as having a substance abuse evaluation versus just ‘promising to do better.’

7. **Avoid tales of drinking exploits from your own college years:** Laughing about the “good old days” appears to give your stamp of approval to irresponsible behavior. Today’s college students do not drink for the same reasons that students drank 25 years ago. Today, twice as many students drink with the intention of getting drunk compared to students in the 1980s.

8. **If your student chooses to drink, focus on strategies for low-risk alcohol consumption:** Vague messages about “being a responsible drinker” lack clear direction about how to moderate your child’s drinking. Discuss specific behavioral limits that you expect them to follow, such as no more than three drinks in one night, using a designated driver, and avoiding sexual activity while under the influence.

9. **Talk about the importance of friendship and individuality:** Remember that young adults truly want to be accepted by their peers and perceived as “normal.” Research indicates that students often engage in more risky behavior when they are with others than they would normally undertake if they were alone. Talk about the true meaning of friendship, and share an example of a time when you have confronted a close friend about his or her unhealthy or problematic behavior.

10. **Stay in the loop:** Research strongly indicates that your engagement, interest in and connection with your student can make a difference in their alcohol use. Alcohol and other drug use are lower in young students whose parents know their friends and know what they're up to. Just as you probably did in
high school, keeping up-to-date on who your student is friends with and how they are spending their time can contribute positively to your their success.

11. **Get support for yourself:** The staffs at Student Health & Wellness (319-335-8392) or University Counseling Service (319-335-7294) are available for consultations. Your local community also has resources such as Al-Anon (a family support group for those concerned about someone's alcohol or drug use) or professional counselors.

*Above all, reinforce the idea that there are 31,000 students at Iowa and 31,000 different approaches. Not everyone is doing it!*

*If you have other questions or concerns, please browse our website ([http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/](http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/)) or contact us at (319) 335-8392. Some information adapted from PACE, The University of Wisconsin-Madison*

**Is there a problem with fake ID's?**

Many students have access to fake ID's. Some just borrow a friend's driver's license while others may buy a counterfeit one from a variety of sources. What some students don't realize is that many states have strict consequences if one is caught with a fake ID. For example, students with an Illinois driver's license will have it revoked for a year, even if they're arrested in Iowa. It seems that students have an easy time using a fake ID, especially if we're relying on their peers to check the identification at bars.

**Are parents ever notified of drunken conduct?**

Questions about parental notification are handled by the Office of the Dean of Students ([https://dos.uiowa.edu](https://dos.uiowa.edu)). Their contact number is (319) 335-1162.

**I heard the University is requiring new students to complete an alcohol course. What is it?**

eCHECKUP TO GO is an online alcohol profile that provides personalized feedback on risky behaviors and strategies for reducing negative consequences. All incoming students to the UI will be required to complete eCHECKUP TO GO, which is one of the components of the Success at Iowa Online course ([http://fye.uiowa.edu/admitted-now-what/success-iowa-online-course](http://fye.uiowa.edu/admitted-now-what/success-iowa-online-course)). Students will receive information in their e-mail in late summer with instructions on how to log on to the program. Students should be checking their e-mail to keep up-to-date on information.

**What services are available for students?**

Student Health & Wellness offers a wide range of services ([http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/services](http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/services)) for students. Our office offers free fitness, nutrition, sexual health, alcohol and other drug prevention and education, stress management, and tobacco cessation consultations. All of our services are free except fees for some substance abuse services. Student Health & Wellness also offers many opportunities your student can get involved on campus. For example, Student Health & Wellness offers the Red Watch Band program, where students receive free CPR and alcohol bystander training. Students can also get involved in other free health education programs such as Refresh and Health Ninjas. Encourage your student to get involved by checking out the website: ([http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/](http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/))