



## Parenting for Prevention: Preparing Your Teen for College

### Parents are still the greatest influence

College can be overwhelming for parents and new students heading off for the first time. As with any new experience, children look to their parents for clues, support, and guidance on how to navigate safely through new waters. At the same time, your young adult is looking to be more independent. As your family approaches the first-time college experience think about ways to balance expectations, encourage autonomy, and emphasize the importance of choices and consequences.

#### Before the Big Day

*It's a big day for everyone and expectations are high, but one of the best things parents can do to prepare their teen is to be honest about the transition to college. It will be an adjustment and it may take time to make friends, adapt to classes, or adjust to a new schedule. It's important to be realistic about the early college experience.*

*Parents can take positive steps to help alleviate the natural feelings of stress or anxiety that some students may feel. By initiating these conversations in the weeks leading up to drop-off, you can create a space for your son or daughter to express their concerns or talk about their fears. Together, you can help your teen develop positive coping skills for dealing with difficult issues that may arise. Teens who employ healthy and productive strategies when confronted with challenge are less likely to use substances as a way to deal with a demanding situation.*

*Also remember that some teens are eager to start college life and are more excited than scared. That's OK too. You can still use this time to share in their excitement, answer questions, and help them prepare for change.*

#### How to Start a Conversation about Alcohol Use

- Look for opportunities to initiate a conversation naturally. When selecting classes, living arrangements, or a roommate, you can discuss how alcohol use may interfere with academic success, the quality of life, or relationships.
- Make your "No Alcohol" policy very clear.
- Emphasize how underage drinking can compromise physical, social, and emotional health and safety.
- Show your willingness to help find productive alternatives to drinking. Help them explore on-campus groups and activities or substance-free residence halls.
- Remind them to be aware of alcohol use by other students – drinking by others can interfere with their own studying, stable living conditions, or present unsafe situations.
- Reinforce the message that underage drinking is a risk and a choice that has consequences.

#### Tips for a Smooth Transition

- Be supportive without being overly involved
- Students should feel empowered to be independent and to advocate for themselves
- Listen to your teen's concerns
- Allow your teen to gather information, weigh the pros and cons, and make their own decisions
- Give them space to explore their new surroundings and establish relationships with professors, peers, and roommates
- Encourage on-campus involvement
- Encourage healthy eating, sleep, & exercise habits

#### The First 6 Weeks are Key

*New students appear most likely to initiate or increase alcohol use during their first six weeks of college. Stay involved during this critical time. Encourage healthy behaviors. Remind your teen about alcohol risks and look for subtle changes in behavior or habits that might be a predictor of a more serious problem. About one-third of first-year students do not enroll for their second year.*

- ✓ Check in.
- ✓ Make small talk. Ask about roommates, classes, and navigating campus.
- ✓ Pay attention to your teen's activities in the early weeks of school. With an increased amount of "down time" during the early days of school many students initiate heavy drinking, which can interfere with successful adaptation to campus life.
- ✓ Understand the school's "parent notification" policy regarding alcohol use.
- ✓ Make sure your teen understands the school's alcohol policies and penalties for underage drinking, using a fake ID, assault, driving under the influence and other alcohol-related offenses.
- ✓ Be certain they understand how alcohol can lead to violence, sexual assault, falls, alcohol poisoning, and other risky behavior.

## What Parents Need to Know: The Myth about Responsible Drinking

As parents, we are accustomed to preparing our children for what lies ahead ... teaching them how to cook, drive a car, or balance a checkbook. It may seem to make sense then that to prepare teens for "college life" parents should teach them how to "drink responsibly" at home before leaving for college. In fact, the opposite is true.

Parents who provide their teens with alcohol and a place to consume it may think they are teaching their children "responsible drinking." A new review of studies concludes this view is misguided. Researchers found parental provision of alcohol is associated with increased teen alcohol use. In some cases, parental provision of alcohol is also linked with increased heavy episodic drinking and higher rates of alcohol-related problems, the researchers report in the [Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs](#).

"We suspect there is a surprising amount of 'social hosting' going on—parents providing alcohol for their teens and their friends," said study co-author Ken C. Winters, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota Medical School. "Parents probably aren't aware that social hosting could have criminal implications in some states if things take a bad turn. I can appreciate that social hosting is often done with good intentions. Parents think they are preventing something worse by having their kids drink at home with their friends. But the risks are great."

Senior author Dr. Övgü Kaynak and her co-authors reviewed 22 studies that examined the association between parental provision of alcohol and teen drinking. Based on their findings, they recommend that parents discourage drinking until their children reach the legal drinking age of 21.

Parents influence their children's risk for alcohol use in both direct and indirect ways, Winters notes. Indirectly, parents can influence their teens' behavior by failing to monitor their activities while their child still lives at home, having permissive attitudes toward underage drinking, expressing direct approval of underage drinking, or simply by providing unguarded access to alcohol at home. More direct ways of influencing teens' drinking behavior include offering to buy alcohol for them, supplying alcohol for a teen party, or allowing their teen to drink at home, either supervised or unsupervised.

"The most worrisome things parents can do are to model poor behavior by drinking excessively in front of their teens, and to provide alcohol to their teens," Winters said. "I'm not talking about giving a sip of alcohol or an occasional glass of an alcoholic beverage with a meal for an older teenager. I'm referring to parents who host a drinking party and provide alcohol, thinking they will be able to make it safe. It creates more problems than it solves. "The researchers say there is little research to support the notion that it is possible to "teach" children to drink alcohol responsibly. They write their review "suggests that by allowing alcohol use at a young age, parents might increase the risk for progression toward unsupervised drinking more rapidly than it would otherwise have been." Allowing teens to drink may instill a sense of comfort in alcohol use, which could increase their tendency to drink, with or without their parents present. Parents may be giving their teens subtle messages about drinking without even realizing it, Winters notes. For instance, they may not take the opportunity to say something negative about underage drinking if they see it in a movie or TV show they are watching with their teen.

The researchers said they want parents to understand that allowing teens to drink underage, even when supervised by the parent, is always associated with a greater likelihood of drinking during adolescence over time. Social hosting is never a good idea, they emphasize. "Adolescents who attend parties where parents supply alcohol are at increased risk for heavy episodic drinking, alcohol-related problems, and drinking and driving," they wrote.

Source: <http://drugfree.org/learn/drug-and-alcohol-news/parents-teaching-teens-responsible-drinking-myth-study>

**Child Development Institute: 4 Ways to Help Prepare your Teen for College**

<https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/4-ways-help-teen-prepare-college/#ixzz3n42zytMZ>

**College Drinking: Changing the Culture**

<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/Default.aspx>

**College Drinking: Changing the Culture – Resources for Parents and Students**

<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/ParentsandStudents/Parents/Default.aspx>

**College Parent Central**

<https://www.collegeparentcentral.com>

**How to Say Goodbye to Your College-bound Teen**

<http://micheleborba.com/saying-goodbye-to-a-college-bound-teen/>

**National Center for Biotechnology Information: Can Parents Prevent Heavy Episodic Drinking by Allowing Teens to Drink at Home?**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2942998/>

**Talking with your College Bound Young Adult about Alcohol**

<https://www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/videos/soyv.aspx>

Portions of this tip sheet were adapted from some of these resources

*Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important issues youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.*

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.

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