

ALCOHOL, PARTIES AND CHOICES, OH MY

Eight Talking Points to Empower Your Student to Choose Responsibly

Exposure to alcohol and opportunities to drink are likely to occur during college. National studies tell us that four in five college students choose to drink alcohol. Fortunately, knowing and recognizing in advance that this temptation is present allows you the opportunity to equip your student to make responsible decisions.

Students make their own choices in college, and live in close proximity to roommates and other friends making their own independent decisions. Therefore, whether or not you expect your student to drink, it is wise to share some important facts about alcohol. Rather than telling your student what to do or not do, have an open discussion that assists your student in evaluating possible positive and negative outcomes of scenarios he or she might face.

You might not be sure what those scenarios and choices look like, but that's okay. We have you covered. Check out these eight conversation pointers adapted from College Parents of America and then get to talking!

- 1. DO discuss the culture.** College students generally misperceive the amount of alcohol and other drugs used by their peers. A recent survey found that University of Oregon students believed 96 percent of their peers drink alcohol at least once a week, when the actual rate was 52 percent. Students are highly influenced by peers and may try to drink up to what they perceive to be the norm rather than reality. The truth is heavy drinking is not normal in college, not normal at TCU and, in fact, not all students even drink. According to TCU data, one in four students choose not to drink alcohol at all. Those who do choose to drink consume an average of four or less drinks per week.
- 2. DO affirm state laws and university policies.** In Texas, it is illegal for individuals under the age of 21 to purchase, attempt to purchase, possess or consume alcohol; be publicly intoxicated; or misrepresent his or her age. Policies at TCU align with state laws. Make it clear that you do not condone the breaking the law in any fashion and remind your student that doing so comes with repercussions from the state and university.

3. **DO stress that excessive alcohol consumption can be fatal.** This is not a scare tactic. Sadly, over one thousand college students die every year from alcohol poisoning. Help your student avoid this danger by sharing responsible drinking tips. Talk about how to count drinks and set a limit as well as the importance of using the buddy system and knowing exactly what is in your cup (i.e. don't ever drink the punch). Also figure out easy refusal phrases such as "Thanks but I'm okay for now."
4. **DO encourage your student to intervene when fellow students could be in trouble with alcohol.** Nothing is more tragic than an avoidable death, so it is important for students to actively look out for each other's wellbeing as well as their own. If anyone is passed out or unconscious after drinking alcohol, other students should call for immediate help. If a student has had any alcohol and is ready to leave a party, other students should offer to call an Uber or give the fellow student a safe ride home.
5. **DO set clear and realistic expectations about academic performance.** National studies demonstrate that partying contributes as much to grades as the difficulty of academic work. Students who know their parents expect sound academic work are more likely to be devoted to their studies and have less time to get in trouble with alcohol.
6. **DO encourage your student to stand up for their right to a safe campus environment.** Students who do not drink — or even students who do drink responsibly — can be affected by the behavior of those who make riskier choices. This could look like interrupted study time, unwanted sexual advances or a myriad of other scenarios. If every student calls out and interrupts violence, derogatory or disrespectful speech, peer pressure, inappropriate jokes, harassment, etc., then everyone is working together to make TCU and the world kinder and safer.
7. **DON'T tell tales of any drinking escapades from your college years.** Entertaining your student with stories of drinking back in "the good old days" can normalize risky behavior and appear to give approval to dangerous alcohol consumption. On a related note, if you drink, make sure to be a positive role model in the responsible use of alcohol.
8. **DO encourage your student to get involved.** In addition to structuring free time, campus involvement in student organizations or volunteerism provides students with extra opportunities to make new friends, develop valuable job-related skills, connect with the local community, and gain a broader world perspective.

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