

Parent Resources

Alcohol & Drugs



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According to recent studies done by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 53 percent of full-time college students between the ages of 18 and 22 drank alcohol in the past month and about 33 percent engaged in binge drinking during that same timeframe. You may be surprised to learn that the prevalence of alcohol on campus is that low. The truth is that the portrayal of binge drinking and alcohol use on college campuses in the movies and media makes many students believe that it is far more standard than it is.

Despite the seemingly low rate of use, there is no doubt that alcohol remains one of the most difficult challenges on college campuses today. Universities and the fraternal community continue to educate undergraduate members on the dangers of drugs and alcohol, but these remain a top concern as the single largest source of both behavioral issues and threats to physical and mental health.

All college students, including fraternal organization members, are expected to comply with local, state, and federal laws regarding drug and alcohol use, including the prohibition of underage drinking. Universities set strict standards in their student codes of conduct and every fraternity also has specific policies pertaining to the use of substances. Alpha Epsilon Pi's Health and Safety Policy outlines expectations for our members that align with the law as well as practices that promote safe fraternal environments. The Fraternity also recognizes the prevalence of alcohol on campuses and provides educational resources, training, and guidance on this topic to each and every member. No matter what is portrayed in the movies, the fraternity experience is not about drinking or drug use. Members do not need to drink or use drugs in order to have a great fraternity experience.

Parents can play an important role in helping their student navigate the choices and challenges they will face when making choices about alcohol and drug use. We recommend sitting down with your student and having a candid conversation about alcohol use, especially about the risks associated with high-risk drinking and binge drinking.

Research suggests that young adults who talk to their parents about drug and alcohol avoidance strategies before they begin their first year of college are more likely to

avoid pitfalls, limit use of alcohol and drugs, and/or spend less time as substance users. The goals of these conversations are to be supportive, share your experience, create open lines of communication, and convey important information that will help your student stay safe and achieve their full potential.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE DISORDERS

What initially begins as social, casual, or experimental use of substances (including illegal drugs, medication taken in a way that is not prescribed and/or cigarettes) can escalate into a substance use disorder. What starts out as a way to party, let loose, relax, or experiment with feeling the effects of different substances can lead to abuse and “addiction” – what we currently call a substance use disorder.

The transition to college life can be difficult for many students. There is both newfound independence and also new academic, social, and financial pressures. Many students have to self-regulate for the first time and balance schoolwork, athletics, work, and social outlets. These new pressures can often manifest in mental health disorders and “self-medicating” with repeated substance use and can lead to changes in the brain that affect impulse control and decision making.

In its most serious form, a substance use disorder causes significant impairment at school and in relationships and can have serious, sometimes life-threatening effects on a person’s physical and emotional well-being. Substance use disorders are difficult to overcome without support and treatment. Substance use disorders (and the consequences of what people used to call addiction) can be a chronic struggle throughout a person’s life, but treatment can restore emotional and physical well-being and help a person live without substances.

Here are a few tips for parents to prevent, respond to, and treat common campus challenges. Remember the five Ts: Tell, Test, Teach, Talk, Take Action.

- 1. Tell your student they can come to you with any problem.** Your student may avoid sharing problems with you because they think they should be independent or they worry about burdening you. Explain that you can help them handle any problem they present to you. They can come to you day or night.
- 2. Test their academic health by checking their end of semester grades.** At the start of college, request your child sign a FERPA waiver form allowing you to

view grades. Students may not tell parents that they are doing poorly or failing, thinking they should be able to solve academic problems on their own. Struggling academically could indicate mental health or lifestyle issues. Likewise, when grades continue to slide, students can develop symptoms of depression and anxiety. If you're aware of their academic struggles early on, you can help to link your child to campus resources such as advisors, tutors, professors, success coaches and therapists.

- 3. Teach them how to recognize substance abuse.** You can teach your student the skills required to lead a healthy lifestyle and to self-monitor for the [warning signs](#) of substance abuse issues. By reminding your student that these are common and treatable conditions, you can help remove the stigma attached to health issues. With this knowledge, they may seek help more quickly.
- 4. Talk with them more often or visit if they are in distress.** Some students will inform their parents that they are in distress and ask for help, while others won't tell parents until the situation is more serious. Keep in touch using video conferencing apps, so that you can both see their face and hear their voice. Ask about friends, clubs and social outlets, activities and their classes. If they tell you that they are in distress or are using substances, encourage them to speak with a counselor and help them to locate university or local resources. You can also call more often or visit if you are concerned. A visit might provide them with enough support to work through a problem and continue to keep up with schoolwork. A visit during the fall of freshman year, either at parents' weekend or another time, can be particularly valuable since the first semester of college is a time of high stress.
- 5. Take action if your student is experiencing high-risk mental health issues.** If your child is experiencing severe symptoms of substance abuse such as it's essential to ensure they're actively engaged in treatment. If you feel your child's safety is at immediate risk, contact campus police, administration, and mental health services.

For more information, check out our partner's website [here](#).