

Alcohol and Other Drugs Q & A for Parents and Families

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. They are a very active office unit, making over 25,000 student contacts yearly -- most likely your student will have contact with them 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 trustworthy 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 U of I families at Orientation titled, "A Parent Handbook for Talking with College Students About Alcohol" and is available here (<http://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/parent-handbook>).

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. Student Wellness and the Dean of Students has representation on the Alcohol Harm Reduction Advisory Committee (AHRC). This multidisciplinary group of faculty, staff, and students advise the Vice President for Student Life on a comprehensive and research-based plan to create conditions on our campus which decrease high-risk drinking and the related harmful consequences. To view the 2016-2019 plan, go to: <https://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/initiatives/alcohol-harm-reduction/>. A campus-community partnership was also created between The University of Iowa campus and the City of Iowa City, called the Partnership for Alcohol Safety (<https://vp.studentlife.uiowa.edu/initiatives/partnership-for-alcohol-safety/>). 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 Fraternity and Sorority Life 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 student 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 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 student. 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 many ways to have a fulfilling and full college experience at Iowa without drinking. Encourage your student to get involved on campus. Students who engage in this environment in ways that are not alcohol-centered are much more likely to succeed, and make peer connections that don't center around alcohol or substance use. Many students are coming from being very involved in high school, and that is something they should continue and build upon when they get to campus. We have nearly 500 student organizations at Iowa – truly something for everyone. The following website is a current database of all the student organizations on campus and information about how to connect with any of them: <http://uiowa.orgsync.com/>. "After Class" is a website that lists hundreds of fun and engaging events for students on campus and in town: <https://afterclass.uiowa.edu/events/>. Here are some other great resources to get your student to seek out ways to get engaged on campus: 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. Your student may be more independent now than when they were younger, but they still see and are influenced by your actions.
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 student as they navigate this challenging time.
6. **Help students recognize the link between their actions and impacts:** The risks of alcohol use can be serious life and death matters, but that's not the only reason to talk to your student about alcohol. In fact, the far more common impact of alcohol, that often gets overlooked, is the influence it has on a student's ability to be successful in college and beyond. A night of drinking can have impacts on memory, attention and focus several days later. That lingering impact is going to impair how well a student is able to retain information from class, and how efficiently they are able to study or complete their homework.
7. **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. They need to hear more than "make good decisions." 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.'

8. **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 in the same way that students drank 25 years ago. Today, twice as many students drink with the intention of getting drunk compared to students in the 1980s.
9. **If your student chooses to drink, focus on strategies for low-risk alcohol consumption:** Vague messages about “being a responsible drinker” or “knowing your limits” lack clear direction about how to moderate your student’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.
10. **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.
11. **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 their success.
12. **Get support for yourself:** The staff at Student Health & Wellness (319-335-8392) or University Counseling Service (319-335-7294) are available for consultations. Your local community also likely 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!

*Some information adapted from PACE, The University of Wisconsin-Madison

Is there a problem with fake IDs?

Many students have access to fake IDs. 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.

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 (<https://newstudents.uiowa.edu/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 and resources are available for students?

Student Health & Wellness offers a wide range of services for students (<http://studenthealth.uiowa.edu/services>). They offer free fitness, nutrition, sexual health, alcohol and other drug prevention and education, stress management, and tobacco cessation consultations. All of their 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/>). Check out this site for more information on legal terms and consequences: <https://legal.studentlife.uiowa.edu/protect-your-future/> .

