

Alcohol and Drug Q & A for Parents

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

AlcoholEdu is an online alcohol education course. All incoming students to the UI will be required to complete the course. Students will receive information later this summer in the mail with instructions for logging on to the program. The first portion of the course needs to be completed prior to coming to campus in the fall. Watch your mail for more information about this informative and effective course!

Are students made aware of the reality of alcohol use?

Health Iowa/Student Health Service provides a number of outreach activities such as health fairs, a web page, and educational programs to student groups. We are a very busy unit, with over 25,000 student contacts yearly -- most likely your student will have contact with Health Iowa during their first year. Health Iowa 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. Watch for a handbook that will be mailed each summer to parents of first year students titled, "A Parent Handbook for Talking with College Students About Alcohol."

What are you doing about the alcohol problem on campus?

Health Iowa/Student Health Service is very involved in efforts to decrease high-risk drinking at Iowa. Tanya Villhauer, Health Iowa Coordinator, and 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 building a more vibrant, secure community. Health Iowa, the educational branch of the SHS, provides a continuum of services in the area of alcohol and other drugs. We present informational programs for residence halls and student organizations and media campaigns to promote healthy behavior. We provide early intervention programs for students that may have had a residence hall infraction or a legal charge. We also employ a full-time substance abuse counselor who provides evaluations, short-term outpatient treatment, and aftercare for students who need assistance.

We have all these 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. In the past parents have asked us for suggestions on discussing alcohol with their students. Here are some things we have found helpful:

1. **Encourage your student to take responsibility for his/her 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.
2. **Support socializing without alcohol:** There are a whole host 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 that aren't alcohol focused.

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. **Support your student in taking charge of his/her health:** For the first time, your student will begin making important health decisions without quite as much guidance from you. This is an important part of their development. Offer support and encouragement to them as they navigate this challenging time.
5. **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 son/daughter is also very important.

Above all, reinforce the idea that there are 28,000 students at Iowa and 28,000 different approaches to alcohol. Not "everyone's doing" anything, least of all drinking!

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 Vice President for Student Services and Dean of Students. The number to contact them is (319) 335-3557.

What services are available for students?

Health Iowa/Student Health offers a wide range of [services](#) for students.

How do I talk to my son/daughter about alcohol use?

Each year, Health Iowa/Student Health Service staff members provide parents of incoming students with an overview of our services. As a part of that conversation, we discuss the role of alcohol on college campuses, including Iowa's, and share some tips that past parents have given for having conversations with their college student around alcohol use. We hope these will be helpful for you as well.

As parents, although it might not seem like it, you still have an important influence on your son/daughter 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 Service and Health Iowa as highly credible as well. Given this, we can have an important partnership in keeping your student safe and healthy.

Support socializing without alcohol. Many of your sons and daughters are coming from being very involved in high school – we have over 400 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.

Help your student take charge of their health. This is the first time they will be making many health decisions on their own. It is important for them to do this and we have many supports in place to assist in this process. Let them know that you support them, but that they are responsible for the consequences of their decisions. It's also important to help students understand the magnitude of the risks they take if they use alcohol irresponsibly.

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.

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 son/daughter is also very important.

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 1980.

Be a role model. It's important for students to see the adults that they respect enjoying themselves at events without alcohol, and drinking sensibly when alcohol is present.

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 their drinking. Discuss specific behavioral limits that you expect your son or daughter to follow, such as no more than three drinks in one night, using a designated driver, and avoiding sexual activity while under the influence.

Mention these other strategies for low-risk consumption: eat a meal before drinking, consume no more than one drink per hour, always know what is in a drink, alternate nonalcoholic drinks throughout the evening, and plan in advance how to get home safely.

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 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 their unhealthy or problematic behavior.

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 is lower in young men and women 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're spending their time can contribute positively to their success.

Set clear and realistic expectations regarding academic performance. When students do not succeed at The University of Iowa, alcohol is often a major factor. A balanced set of academic goals that is reasonable for your student may help them maintain a healthy campus life.

How do I talk to my son/daughter about drug use?

These are difficult conversations - but as a parent, you are one of the most credible and trusted sources of health information for your son or daughter. Drug use can quickly interfere with a student's academic goals. Some things to consider as you talk with your son or daughter:

Emphasize your expectations. Be clear with your student about what you will and will not accept. For instance, tell your son or daughter that they need to take positive steps to dealing with the issue, such as having a substance abuse evaluation or completing a marijuana education course, vs. just 'promising to do better'. Communicate clearly that drug use is illegal and risky.

Help your student take charge of their health. This is the first time they will be making many health decisions on their own. It is important for them to do this and we have many supports in place to assist in this process. Let them know that you support them, but that they are responsible for the consequences of their decisions. It's also important to help students understand the magnitude of the risks they take if they use drugs. 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 10 years to a career, they generally respond well to information about how this issue could interfere with their goal of graduate school or a scholarship.

Allow your son or daughter to experience the natural consequences of their behaviors. We have all made painful mistakes in our lives, and for the most part, these can be the most impactful aspects of our learning and growth toward adulthood. 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 your son or daughter.

Set boundaries. These may be different depending on where your student is in their drug use - for instance, if you have a student really struggling with abuse or dependence, don't be afraid to set clear rules for what you will and will not accept. For example, 1) do not come to my home high or with drugs on your, 2) if you come high or with drugs on you, we won't let you in.

Get to know your son/daughter's friends. Your student's peer group can tell you a lot about what level of support is available for your son or daughter in establishing healthy behaviors. Take the opportunity to point out examples of good friendship and supportive relationships.

Get support for yourself. The staff at Health Iowa (319-335-8392) or University Counseling Service (319-335-7294) are available for consultation. 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.

Continue the conversation. Especially if you feel your student has a drug problem, it is important to know that you may need to have ongoing conversations about your expectations and boundaries before your student agrees to get help. Let your son/daughter know that you will continue to hold him/her accountable and will continue to offer options for help.

If you have other questions or concerns, please browse our website or contact us at (319) 335-8392.