

# Friends . . .

Most college students are well-informed about the risks of drinking, but, like most people, are less knowledgeable about what to do when someone is in trouble. And many assume that 'everyone' drinks a lot in college, making it difficult to know what qualifies as 'too much'. In fact, it is not true that 'everyone' drinks a lot in college. Most students do not, but the myth blurs the reality. In this mix of information and confusion, students often turn to friends and roommates when worried about drinking.

When asked who they would talk to if concerned about their own drinking, Wellesley students most often said 'friend or roommate' - someone who would understand and not judge. Friends and roommates were also the first choice when students were asked who they would listen to if someone were concerned about their drinking. Many students tell of helping or being helped by friends to safely return to campus after a party. And when the 'Good Samaritan' policy is used, it is usually because a friend is looking out for a friend. Given the power of friendship, it is worth considering how friends can help in avoiding or reducing harm from risky drinking.

## PLANNING FOR THE PARTY

First, think about planning ahead for the party - especially the first big party of the year. This is when students who already drink are likely to drink more, and students who have little experience with drinking can get in trouble. Here are some tips for planning ahead:

- Go as a group
- As a group, decide ahead of time to:
  - ✓ Watch out for one another
  - ✓ Check-in: find a way to check with each other during the party to be sure everyone is okay
  - ✓ Rendezvous points: a time and place to meet both during and at the end of the party
  - ✓ Agree that one or two students will not drink - but make sure it is not the same people for every party
- Remember the point is to have a good time, with no regrets afterwards.

One benefit of this kind of planning is that the topic of safe drinking is out in the open - so friends can talk about drinking (benefits and risks) as a normal part of conversation.



## RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

It may happen that a friend will come to you, worried or distressed over her drinking. What should you do?

You do not have to be an expert about drinking in order to respond in a helpful way. Here are a few tips:

- Listen (the Stone Center Web page has 'Tips for Effective Listening').
- Acknowledge that you care about your friend and her worries.
- Recognize the wisdom and courage it takes to ask for help.
- Acknowledge her concerns and help her explore them, by asking questions.
  - What causes the worry - an event, a pattern, a feeling?
  - Has anyone ever suggested she cut down on her drinking?
  - Has she ever found herself in a risky situation as a result of drinking - e.g., driving drunk, or with a drunk driver; in danger of injury or assault?
  - Has she ever been unable to recall what happened while drinking?
  - Is there something bothering her that causes her to drink - stress, anxiety, depression?
  - In what way would she want it to be different?
  - What kind of plan would she like, and how can you help?

*You wouldn't want to talk to someone you don't know who might judge you on what you did. . . . And friends are not going to judge you.*  
--- **First Year Student**

*. . . friends, who you're close to . . . and I think they understand . . . and they would have been there with me the night before, I want them to understand why, another night, I won't do the same thing. And perhaps that will help stop.*  
--- **First Year Student**

***Students report they appreciate friends who:***

- *Do not judge*
- *Have seen their drinking*
- *Help them change by understanding how they might behave differently at the next party, and why they are making that change*

### **WHAT IF YOU ARE WORRIED AND YOUR FRIEND IS NOT?**

This poses a real challenge. You might wonder 'how will it affect our friendship if I say something?' and wonder 'how will it affect our friendship if I am silent?' Despite your doubts, understand that students say they would listen to a friend.

If you are considering raising your concerns with a friend, here are some things to think about:

- Are you knowledgeable and 'credible' about your friend's drinking? Describe your first hand observations or experiences of your friend's drinking
- Can you describe consequences that are harmful to your friend - vomiting, black outs, injury or assault?
- Acknowledge that your 'expertise' is in being a friend
- Ask what your friend thinks - is there something troubling her?

### **GET HELP FOR YOURSELF.**

If you are worried about a friend, you might benefit from talking to someone who does have expertise. You can contact the Stone Center or Health Services. The Stone Center has information about 'How to Help a Friend', and Health Services have information about safe drinking. These are available on the web as well as in person.

### **COLLEGE RESOURCES:**

Health Services, Counseling at the Stone Center, Residential Life and Public Safety can all support you in being a friend:

Health Services: See the Alcohol Education Resources on the web page, and booklets "Wellesley Women and Alcohol" and "Health Tips for Wellesley Women". Call x2810 to make an appointment with someone who can help you help your friend.

Counseling Services at the Stone Center: See 'Self Help Information' on the web page, and call x2839 to talk to someone over the phone or make an appointment.

Residential Life: There are two Resident Directors on call 24/7 to help you in making decisions about your safety and that of your friends. You can find out how to contact the RD on call by checking the sign on your RD's office door, or by calling Campus Police. You may also want to talk with the RA on your floor.

Campus Police/Public Safety: The Good Samaritan policy is:

No student seeking medical treatment for abuse of alcohol or use of drugs, or assisting another student in obtaining such medical treatment, will be subject to College discipline for using alcohol or drugs or for providing alcohol or drugs to the student she has assisted.

Call x5555 or x2121 if a friend needs help.



*A friend wouldn't really bring it up unless it was actually a problem.*

--- **Sophomore**

*If I heard it from my friend I would be most influenced. Because . . . I know that if she had the guts to stand up to me and say 'look, I know you might not want to hear this, but you have a problem' I think that would make a really big impact on me.*

--- **Sophomore**

### **FORM GOOD FRIENDSHIP HABITS:**

Any time is a good time to be a good friend, but First Year is an especially good time to build skills in watching out for each other.

*Friends are the first to acknowledge that there's a problem.*

--- **Sophomore**