

alcohol
and
college



a guide

for PARENTS



PARENTS



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please pass this information on to your college student



Whether your teenager was exposed to alcohol in high school or not, it's almost inevitable that he or she will be during college. The number of student drinkers nationwide and in Michigan is slowly decreasing, but a recent survey of students at one Michigan college shows that 75% have consumed alcohol within the past month—about the same as on campuses around the country.

So, what's the big deal? Aren't a few beers just part of the college experience? Not necessarily. Times have changed. The environment has changed. More is known about the effects of alcohol and how it is used by young people. Laws intended to discourage alcohol consumption are more numerous and the penalties are more severe. Students have more opportunities to drink off-campus and more pressure from friends to do so. Now more students have cars.

The faculty and staff at Michigan's colleges and universities want every student to have a rewarding experience and to perform at a high level of achievement. For that reason, we urge you to take a few minutes to discuss with your incoming freshman the risks and consequences of drinking and the advantages of abstaining. Let him or her know you care and that the choice you are asking sometimes may be a difficult one—ask them to choose not to drink.

Here's the situation...The vast majority of Michigan college freshmen are under the age of 21. For them, drinking is illegal. Even if your son or daughter has consumed alcohol with your permission in your home, they face a very different environment and pressure at college. There are city, state and federal laws that affect underage drinkers and can give them a permanent criminal record if they are convicted. These laws are discussed in more detail later.

But there is another equally important reason to avoid alcohol consumption: binge drinking. A "binge" is a pattern of drinking alcohol that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 or above. For the typical adult, this pattern corresponds to consuming 5 or more drinks (male), or 4 or more drinks (female), in about 2 hours. Binge drinking is clearly dangerous for the drinkers and for society. On-going national research estimates that 49 percent of college students binge drink once every two weeks. Whether it results from peer pressure, celebratory drinking or simply losing track, students may drink excessively and not realize how that much alcohol can affect them. A particularly frightening ritual is drinking 21 shots of hard liquor on the student's twenty-first birthday, which for most people is a lethal dose.



Nothing is a substitute for the conversations between a student and his/her parent(s). The conversations may look different if your student is going to continue living at home or set up residence somewhere else but it is important in both cases. Use of alcohol and other drugs, including tobacco, is just one of many topics that should include: changing expectations of each other; financial support; health insurance and property insurance (if setting up another residence); sexual activity.

Some of these topics may seem more difficult than others and may not have been previously discussed. Now is the time to acknowledge that the parent-child relationship is moving toward an adult-adult relationship and to use this change as a way to begin discussing “adult” topics in an “adult” manner. If a student isn’t quite ready to handle this big of a change right now, simply having the topics on the table ready for discussion next month, this summer and in the future is a good plan.

If the transition to college involves going away to school, your student may be challenged not only by the loss of daily reminders of your values but also the loss of a peer group who has known your student and his/her personal values for a while. This knowledge has been incorporated into peer group expectations of how your student will behave. Members of most high school peer groups share the same values when it comes to use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Students frequently express surprise and disapproval if someone violates the chosen “norms” of the group and behaves unexpectedly by using (or not using) alcohol, tobacco or other drugs according to the group norms. When a student goes away to school, they most often lose the daily contact with this informal but powerful set of peer expectations. This can make a student particularly vulnerable to other peer influences. Many college freshmen have not actively practiced peer resistance skills since their freshman year in high school.



Explain the consequences.

The academic arena

As a parent, you should set clear and realistic expectations about your student’s academic performance. A national study showed that students who drink heavily are more likely to get poor grades. While drinking is not the only reason for low performance, many college students admit that they have done poorly on tests or important projects because of alcohol, and even more acknowledge that they’ve missed classes because of it.

Career path

College drinking can affect performances not only in class, but also in the workplace. There have been incidents of students or graduates being denied employment opportunities as a result of alcohol-related criminal convictions during college. And the number of companies conducting background checks on recent graduates is increasing.

The legal landscape

For individuals under the age of 21, deciding to drink is about as precarious as taking a walk in a minefield. Just about every college student knows that driving after drinking is illegal, yet some students take a chance by driving under the influence. Most college students also know that it is illegal to drink if they are under 21. Yet a majority of undergraduates admit to underage drinking.

Here are a few more alcohol related criminal offenses for which minors may be prosecuted.

- It is illegal for anyone under 21 to buy alcohol.
- It is illegal to purchase alcohol for or provide it to anyone under 21. A person who does can be charged with a felony.
- It is illegal for persons under 21 to have alcohol in their possession at any time and regardless of whether they’ve consumed any of it.
- It is illegal for anyone under 21 to use a fake I.D. to buy alcohol

- It is illegal to provide a fake I.D. to anyone under 21.
- It is illegal for anyone under 21 to possess an unopened alcohol container in a motor vehicle.
- It is illegal for anyone under 21 to transport an unopened alcohol container in a motor vehicle.
- It is illegal for anyone to possess or transport an open alcohol container in the passenger area of a motor vehicle. Both the driver and the passenger can be charged regardless of age or whether they consumed any alcohol.
- It is illegal to allow any person to use your motor vehicle after they have been drinking.
- Most college towns also have ordinances that prohibit public drunkenness. That means an intoxicated student can be arrested just walking home from a bar or party.

If your son or daughter thinks they'll get off with just a slap on the wrist if they break the law, please urge them to think again. The State of Michigan has zero-tolerance laws for alcohol-related offenses. This means the state legislature has mandated no warnings and no second chances. Violation of any alcohol-related offense will result in an arrest. Both campus and community police departments can strictly enforce these laws. Convictions carry fines ranging from \$100 to \$5,000 plus court costs and the cost of mandatory substance abuse education, assessment and treatment programs. Some of the laws also carry mandatory driver's license suspension or even impounding of the motor vehicle. Up to 90 days of jail time is yet another option courts have for punishing offenders under some of these laws. The penalty isn't just immediate either. An alcohol-related misdemeanor conviction—such as a minor-in-possession (MIP) violation—remains on the student's driver's license record for seven to ten years. According to Michigan's repeat offender laws, an MIP or any zero-tolerance conviction counts the same toward a DUI (driving under the influence) as with an adult offender.

Up close and personal

There are also many physical, psychological and social reasons for choosing to abstain from underage drinking. Sixteen percent of student drinkers report that they have been hurt or injured as a result of alcohol consumption. The injuries range from bumps and bruises to broken bones from falls. One student was hospitalized for exposure after he passed out in the snow and wasn't discovered for hours.

Additional physical effects, especially of high-risk drinking, range all the way from severe hangovers to alcohol poisoning, convulsions and death. An unconscious drunk may choke or suffocate without the ability to prevent it.

While many students drink because they think it's the sociable thing to do, survey data shows that more than one out of every three student drinkers attribute a fight or serious argument to alcohol. At least as many say they've suffered memory loss. Ten percent of female students report that they have been taken advantage of sexually while intoxicated or by someone who was. Eighty percent of coeds who've experienced a sexual assault say that alcohol was involved.

Outline the options

Being social and being part of the group are among the strongest incentives for student drinking. But students often perceive that their friends drink a lot more than they actually do. One college survey showed that 92% of students thought their peers drank alcohol at least once a week, while only 52% actually did. Research indicates that this misperception often leads students to drink more than they would otherwise. Of course, there are plenty of nondrinkers on college campuses. The number may be as high as 35%. They are as social as anybody else and often highly respected by their peers. There are lots of things to do on campuses that are fun and don't involve drinking. Here are a few for starters.

There are programs and activities in the residence halls. Collegiate sports events usually



offer discounts for students. Thousands of students play intramural sports. There are plays, concerts and lectures. Some campuses feature additional facilities like a planetarium, bowling alley or skating rink. Students can browse exhibitions and art shows, and check out a museum. There are clubs for just about everything from art to volleyball. There are also campus student centers and dozens of local agencies that really appreciate having student volunteers. Coffee shops are great places to hang out with friends. Some even have live music. (For more information on specific campus programs, contact Prevention Network at 1-800-968-4968 or visit www.prevention-network.org.)

Here are a few ideas to share with your student for attending and still staying sober:

- Arrive late and leave early.
- Arrive with a soft drink in your hand, the bigger, the better, and never leave it unattended.
- Volunteer as the designated driver—a service to friends and a well-respected reason for staying sober.
- Attend with nondrinking friends—a great support system
- Pick friends who aren't big boozers.

Tell them to get help

Hopefully, your student will come to you if he or she recognizes a drinking problem. But sometimes young people fear parents' anger or disapproval. You can help them in any event by giving them permission to seek help if they suspect their drinking has become a problem. Above all, let them know you care.

Encourage your son or daughter to stand up for their right to a safe academic environment. Nondrinkers can be affected by the behavior of peers who do, ranging from interrupted study time to unwanted sexual advances. Students should confront these problems directly with the offender or notify the residence hall staff.

For a few students, drinking may become a serious problem. Common signs of trouble are: **1)** regularly needing a drink to unwind, relax or calm down; **2)** drinking a lot without showing

signs of it; **3)** having memory losses or black-outs; **4)** drinking alone; **5)** can't stop once they start drinking; **6)** needing a drink to get going in the morning.

Alcohol-related services are provided by nearly all Michigan colleges and universities. They may be alcohol and drug information offices, residence life staff, health services or counseling centers.

Call the MDCH Substance Abuse Treatment Referral Hotline to find out resources anywhere in the State of Michigan, 888-736-0253.

Statistics in this brochure are cited from the National CORE Survey and the CORE institute, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (www.siu.edu/~coreinst/)

Additional resources for parents

We hope you've found some words in this brochure that will inspire you to talk about alcohol consumption with your college bound son or daughter. Your advice and example mean a lot to your students. Today, it's more important than ever for parents to be concerned and well informed about college drinking.

For more information, you may contact Prevention Network at 1-800-968-4968 or visit their website at **www.preventionnetwork.org**

Other web resources include:

www.edc.org/hec/parents This web site is put together by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention. It includes many web links.

www.collegeparents.org/ College Parents of America put together this web site as well as many other resources for parents of college students.

www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/ This website about "A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges"—the report from the Task Force of the National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism published in April 2002. It includes a publication for parents.

www.michigan.gov/mdch Click on "Mental health & Substance Abuse" then go to "Drug Control & Substance Abuse" and Click on "Binge Drinking" for information.

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PO Box 4458, East Lansing, MI 48826-4458

Phone 800 968-4968, FAX 517 393-6931

www.preventionnetwork.org

E-mail: pnoffice@preventionnetwork.org



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Recipients of substance abuse services have rights protected by state and federal law and promulgated rules. For information, contact Prevention Network at 800/968-4968 or write P.O. Box 4458, East Lansing, MI 48826-4458. Or contact MDCH/Office of Drug Control Policy, Recipient Rights Coordinator, Lewis Cass Building, 5th Floor, 320 S. Walnut St., Lansing, MI 48913.