

Talking to a Friend about Alcohol or Other Drug Use

It's hard to know when to say something when you're worried about a friend's alcohol or other drug use. Ask yourself...

How does it affect you?

- Have you ever had to take care of your friend because of their alcohol or drug use? Does it happen often?
- Have you ever felt embarrassed or hurt by something they said or did while intoxicated?
- Have you lost time from classes, studying, or a job in order to help your friend deal with problems caused by drinking or drug use?
- Do you worry about your friend's use?

How does it affect your friend?

- Does your friend drink just to get drunk?
- Has your friend ever forgotten things they said or did while drinking?
- Has your friend ever received medical care for something related to drinking or drug use?
- Is your friend doing dangerous things because of drugs or alcohol?
- Has your friend ever wanted to cut down on drinking or drug use?
- Does your friend ever drink to steady their nerves or to get rid of a hangover?
- Has your friend ever been in trouble because of drinking or drug use?
- Does your friend find it necessary to drink or get high in order to enjoy a party?
- Are drugs or alcohol affecting your friend's grades?
- Does your friend drink to escape from or to cope with problems or stress?
- Has your friend ever had a scary experience with alcohol or other drugs but continued to use?
- Is your friend annoyed when people criticize their drinking?
- Does anyone in your friend's family drink to excess regularly? Do any close relatives have a drinking or drug problem?

The more times you answer yes, the more likely it is that your friend has a problem. A caring conversation can help your friend learn about how their behavior affects others and get the help they need.

There are many ways to help someone who's having trouble with alcohol or drugs. Some people just need the wakeup call of your honest opinion; others can benefit from professional help to make changes in their behavior. Still others need professional help to maintain complete abstinence through rehabilitation programs and/or recovery programs.

Before you talk to your friend:

- Learn about drug and alcohol abuse and local support services.
- Make a list of specific problems that have occurred because of your friend's drinking or drug use. Be as specific as possible. "You're so antisocial when you drink" will not mean as much as, "When you were drunk, you made fun of me and were mean to me. You hurt me." Bring the list with you and keep the conversation focused.
- Choose a private location where you can talk without embarrassment or interruption. A talk in your room with the TV and music off will be more successful than one in your friend's room where they can easily create distractions while you talk.

How to talk to your friend

- Talk to your friend when they are sober. The sooner you can arrange this after a bad episode, the better. Your message will have more impact while your friend is hung over than it will a week later.
- Restrict your comments to what you feel and what you have experienced of your friend's behavior. Express statements that cannot be disputed. Remarks like, "Everyone's disgusted with you," or, "So-and-so thinks you have a real problem," will probably lead to arguments about So-and-so's problems or who 'everyone' is. Avoid generalizations.
- Communicate your concern with specific statements. "I want to talk to you because I am worried about you," or "Our friendship means a lot to me. I don't like to see what's been happening."
- It is important to openly discuss the negative consequences of your friend's drinking or drug use. Use concrete examples from your list. "At the party I was left standing there while you threw up. The next day you were too hung over to write your paper. It makes me sad that these things are happening in your life."
- Emphasize the difference between sober behavior that you like and intoxicated behavior that you dislike. "You have the most wonderful sense of humor, but when you drink it turns into cruel sarcasm and you're not funny anymore."
- Be sure to distinguish between the person and the behavior. "I think you're a great person, but the more you drink, the less you seem to care about anything."
- Encourage your friend to consult with a professional to talk about their problems. You can offer to find out more about the resources or go with them to an appointment.

Adapted from [Brown University](#)