

Warning Signs of a Problem with Alcohol

What should you do if you are concerned that your student may have a problem with alcohol? Following are some signs that you can look for, as well as ways that you can talk with your student.

It's not always 100% clear that a student has developed a drinking problem. Often what you may observe are overall changes in behavior, attitude, or activities.

Some potential warning signs include:

- A change in academic performance, such as lower grades or consistently skipping classes.
- Hearing concerns about your student's drinking from friends or other family members.
- Hearing your student talk about "needing to cut down" on alcohol.
- Sensing that your student is lying about drinking, or is thinking about drinking alcohol throughout the day.
- Loss of interest in regular activities.
- Not noticing – or caring – how their drinking affects others.
- Lack of care for personal health and hygiene.

If you are concerned about your student, the most important step you can take is to talk to your student and share your concern. A few things to consider when beginning this conversation:

Be specific about the behaviors you have observed and share your concerns.

By offering your observations, you can open a dialogue that is non-judgmental. This may help your student feel more comfortable sharing their honest thoughts and reflections.

Urge your student to seek help.

You may want to remind your student of resources that are available on campus or in the local community. Assure your student that you will offer support as he or she seeks help.

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Understand the situation, and focus on getting your student safe and healthy.

Your patience and active listening will reinforce that you are committed to your student's health and well-being.

You may want to consider contacting your student's institution to learn about available resources. Familiarizing yourself with the range of options could be helpful and offer encouragement to both you and your student. If you are not sure where to start, you may want to explore the college's website.

References

1. Martin, C.S. and Winters, K.C. (1999). Diagnosis and assessment of alcohol use disorders among adolescents. *Alcohol Research and Health*. 22, 95-106.
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3. Signs and Symptoms. Retrieved December 11, 2006, from Phoenix House. Website: www.phoenixhouse.org/National/DrugFacts/drugfacts_symptoms.html.