

DRINKING AT UNL

Important information about the drinking culture at UNL in 2009-2010 to help correct your sons and daughters' misperceptions

- First year males and females at UNL drink about the same amount of times per month.
- First year males and females at UNL engage in occasional binge drinking (two or fewer times in the last two weeks) at about the same rates.
- Engaging in meaningful volunteer activities will decrease the likelihood of high-risk drinking.
- While it's unclear why, students who were athletes in high school are more likely to drink in high-risk ways at college.
- The most commonly reported impact of drinking at UNL is doing something one regrets.
- Drinking is not allowed anywhere on the UNL campus without a permit.
- Students who violate any alcohol policy will be cited and sanctioned according to University policy.
- 91.4% of underage UNL students who drink report drinking at parties, *NOT* bars. Students who receive off-campus violations for disorderly house, selling alcohol without a license, and procuring to or for minors are in violation of the Student Code of Conduct at UNL.

TOPICS TO TALK ABOUT

Discuss these with your sons and daughters.

Family Values about Drinking

When drinking is and isn't appropriate:

- Is alcohol involved in family get-togethers? If so, how is safe drinking modeled by adults?
- What messages about drinking did you send to your sons and daughters as they were growing up?
- What are the family beliefs about drinking socially?
- What are some family values that may be affected if unhealthy drinking occurs? Some families have concerns that drinking may lead to problems related to sexual activity, physical health, productivity in school, and careers.

Underage and High Risk Drinking Dangers

The first section of this site explained some of the risks that your sons and daughters will be exposed to at UNL. We encourage you to use that information to talk knowledgeably to them about how that info relates to where they'll be living.

How to Stay Safe if Drinking

- Students who choose to drink can take steps to stay safe.
- The Communication section of this website presents strategies for dealing with different situations in greater depth.

Why People Choose to Drink

- Peer pressure.
- Escape from the stresses of college life.
- Misperception that everyone is drinking, or it's just part of college life

CAP DRINKING TIPS

Suggestions your college students will receive through the First Year College Alcohol Profile (CAP)

Ways to Help your Friends

1. Be the designated driver.
2. Be a role model for your friends.
3. Know and respond to alcohol poisoning.
4. Never leave an intoxicated person alone.

Drinking Tips

1. Know your limits, stick to them, and stay in control.
2. Determine how many drinks to have and stop at your number.
3. Eat right before and while drinking.
4. Learn from past mistakes and make adjustments.
5. Drink one or two an hour. Shots hit in about 20 minutes.
6. Check if your medicine interacts badly with alcohol.
7. Don't drink if you have a strong family history of alcoholism.
8. Drink for quality, not quantity (a 6-pack of imported or micro beer).
9. Be aware of your situation. If you feel unsafe, leave.
10. Watch your drinks while being made and after. Never leave your drink alone, even if you only have a soft drink.

SPECIFIC STRATEGIES for MAKING SITUATIONS SAFE

Choose a couple of the strategies to discuss with your sons and daughters, based on what you know about them.

Suggest Alternatives

Make sure your sons and daughters have a plan of some activities that could be used in place of drinking.

Plan Ahead

Most underage drinking occurs at parties, and in most cases, your sons and daughters know that alcohol will be at the party. They need to have a plan for how they're going to deal with the situation so they'll stay safe.

Leave the Scene

Suggest your sons and daughters have a plan for how to get home if there's *no one* at the party that has *not* been drinking or if they're in a situation they feel is unsafe.

Turning the Pressure Around

This strategy involves questioning the other person about pressure. Effective phrases include:

"Why are you trying so hard to make me do something I don't want to do?"

"But I told you no, I'm not going to do that. Don't you listen?"

Another way to say this is: *"Stop pressuring me. You're going to drive me crazy!"*

"What kind of friend are you to keep pressuring me? Back off."

Use Deception

Students often report holding a drink but not actually drinking it. This deception helps others to leave them alone and not pressure them to drink something.

Use Humor

If your sons and daughters typically converse with a lot of humor, advise them to use it to think of things to say that can get them out of a bad situation. Encourage them to make the humorous statement their own, so it's something they feel confident in.

Share Responsibility

Have your sons and daughters talk with a friend before the party, and share a plan to stay safe. Ask that friend to help make sure they both stick to the plan.

COMMON CHALLENGES to GOOD COMMUNICATION

Below are some typical responses parents get from their sons or daughters when talking about difficult subjects. If you notice your sons and daughters (or even yourself) reverting to any of these, collect yourself and stay on topic.

The Outburst

The person feeling anger responds with short, highly charged, emotional explosions, usually blaming the other person. Afterwards, there is calmness, and the person who displayed the outburst hopes all is forgiven. He or she would have you believe the outburst is simply a way of letting off steam and that it's nothing personal.

Bringing Up the Past

The angry person brings up past events that were hurtful and directs attention away from the current issues to that of rehashing the past. The issue causing the anger is lost as attention turns to past injustices.

Using Minor Irritations

The angry person repeatedly starts fights and arguments over minor irritations (e.g. forgetting to turn the lights off, forgetting to close doors). The minor problems are cause for constant criticism. The real issue causing the anger is masked.

Social Aggression

This angry person does not state why he or she is angry but rather turns the anger into aggressive actions, making hurtful or cynical remarks, often times in social settings. When asked what is wrong, the response is usually, *"Nothing."* The other person has no idea why he or she is under attack.

The Silent Treatment

The angry person turns cold and punishes the "transgressor" through silence and obvious rejection.

Collecting Social Allies

The angry person mobilizes support for his or her side. He or she talks about how victimized he/she is to other people. This person is very good at getting other people involved and putting them in the middle of the conflict. This can also be evidenced through a quick sentence during a conversation such as, *"Well, Jason doesn't think so. His parents don't seem to care."*

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES to REDIRECT CONVERSATION

Use these strategies to redirect the conversation more constructively.

Listen

Permit your sons and daughters to speak without interruption. Listen to what they say, and don't go into the conversation with an agenda. Be open and receptive to what's said and respond to the things that you're hearing – not the things you think need to be talked about.

Stay Focused

Limit discussion to only the issue at hand. Make good eye contact and show that you are listening.

Avoid Vulnerabilities

Judiciously avoid talking about vulnerabilities or emotional sensitivities. If conflict arises, it's sometimes tempting to point out past behavior. However, this is not the time, ruins communication, and ultimately hurts your relationship with your sons and daughters.

Admit your Errors

Be willing to admit you are wrong and apologize. No one is perfect. If you're willing to acknowledge a mistake or be self-critical, students see that as a sign of strength and approachability. Saying you're sorry is a way of showing that you care. Don't blame others and accept responsibility for your actions.

Use Open-Ended Questions

College-aged students are notorious for one-word responses. Using closed-ended questions encourages those. Instead, use questions that begin with words like, "What do you think . . .?" or "How . . .?"

Appeal to Common Goals

Your sons and daughters need to be reminded that you're on their side. Because they're adults and moving on to college, family rules are more difficult to enforce. Setting one-sided rules and punishments is counter-productive. Engaging in a dialogue about common goals and how each of you can help attain these goals will be more effective to your sons and daughters' transitions into adulthood than rules and punishments would be.

Agree to Disengage

Agree to temporarily disengage from interacting if either person becomes emotional or punitive. Wait until both of you can talk in a calm, direct fashion. When the discussion turns into an argument or becomes emotional, explain that it's best to calm down and start the discussion later.

Choose a Good Time

Choose an optimal time to bring up and discuss issues. Don't do it when either of you is rushed or has another commitment at the moment.

Make the Other Feel Better

When opportunities arise, don't hesitate to complement your sons and daughters. This is also a good time to verbalize respect. When your sons and daughters feel good about themselves, they're more likely to open up and confide in you. This also shows them that you believe in and trust them.

Avoid Debate

Sometimes conversations become structured so that people must defend their positions. The entire conversation degenerates into a mini-debate in which each person is looking for weaknesses in the other person's argument. Try to keep the conversation productive and goal-directed. Don't get side-tracked by the details of each other's statements.

Verbalize Respect

Whenever you can and whenever it's appropriate, convey respect to your sons and daughters. Phrases like "I'm proud of you the way you..." or "I've always admired that about you." are great ways to confer respect. By conferring respect, you are acknowledging that your sons and daughters are becoming adults while you are developing an adult relationship with them.

Only Winners

When conflict arises, the healthy outcome is two winners. A person's natural tendency is to fight to *win*. Remember, talking about alcohol with your sons and daughters should not be a fight or a battle of wills or a conflict with opposing sides. It should be a discussion about values, safety, love, and respect. When this happens, there are only winners – regardless of what is said. When a parent goes into a conversation with this in mind, it creates the kind of environment where there will be only winners.