



## HOW TO HELP A STUDENT WITH AN ALCOHOL OR DRUG PROBLEM

Alcohol, Drugs and College Alcohol and drug use continue to be one of the most significant problems on college campuses nationwide. Some students who use alcohol and/or drugs experience consequences, such as poor or lowered academic performance, violence, health problems, high-risk sexual behavior, and addiction. Reducing alcohol and drug use is one of the keys to creating a safer and healthier community that promotes academic, personal, and social growth.

Effective strategies to prevent alcohol and drug abuse and their associated problems must involve the entire College community. Faculty and staff have substantial influence on students and are natural role models; you have the opportunity to positively impact students and the greater campus culture surrounding alcohol and drug abuse. Although we are not asking faculty and staff to become diagnosticians or counselors, we do want to enable you to recognize, speak up, and reach out to students who may be having difficulty with alcohol or drugs. The Human Resources Department offers in-services on Drugs of Abuse and Reasonable Belief.

### **How can I tell if a student may have a problem with alcohol and/or drugs?**

It's not always obvious when a student has alcohol or drug problem. In your regular interactions with students, you may observe patterns of attendance, performance and/or behaviors that, in combination, could be warning signs of a substance abuse problem. Although the list below is neither a diagnostic test nor a comprehensive list of all possible warning signs, these are some things to look out for:

#### **Warning Signs:**

- Coming to class, work, practice, meetings, etc. drunk or high
- Excessive or unexplained sleepiness
- Poor attendance or tardiness, especially on Mondays and/or Fridays
- Excessive or unexplained energy or hyper-focus
- Agitation or unexplained hostility
- Decline in amount or quality of work completed
- Changes in physical appearance (e.g. bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils, significant weight loss or gain)
- Frequent extension requests or excuses for late or missing work
- Noticeable new health problems or frequent illness
- Decreased attention or increased forgetfulness
- Poor judgment and decision-making
- Excessive references to alcohol or drug use in conversation, papers, projects

#### **Problematic Patterns:**

- Hiding or sneaking use, or lying about frequency or amount of use
- Using first thing in the morning, before class or work, before driving, before anxiety-provoking

events (e.g. speech, exam), to help fall asleep or when alone

- Use 'helps' to manage stress, anxiety, depression, or undesirable/uncomfortable feelings
- Changing friends or interests to those centered around alcohol or drugs
- Isolation from others
- Development of tolerance (when the body requires more of a substance to achieve same effects over time)
- Blackouts (memory loss due to alcohol or drug use)
- Withdrawal symptoms after stopping use (varies by substance, but can include shaking hands, fever and/or chills, nausea, sleepiness and/or insomnia, etc.)

### **Should I say something?**

If you suspect a student is having difficulties with alcohol or drugs, you are in a unique position to offer resources, guidance, and support. Though not a complete manual for dealing with students' alcohol or drug problems, this guide may make an awkward conversation more comfortable and productive. If you do decide to 'say something', research shows that a non-judgmental, supportive, and caring approach is most effective for reaching students. The talking points below are from the FRAMES model, which has been shown to be effective with college students.

#### **Feedback:**

Provide students with precise, verifiable data on their conduct; avoid 'shock value' or 'scare tactics' with examples of behavior. Avoid "never" and "always", use 'I statements', stressing that the opinions and feelings that go along with them are your own. I've been concerned about your attendance; you've missed four of my last six lectures. And your grade on the first exam was much higher than on the second.

#### **Responsibility:**

Students must take responsibility for changing their own behavior. Those who approach them cannot 'fix' things, however supportive they may be. Combine an offer to help that also empowers the student to improve the situation. I really want to help you turn things around and will do what I can to help. But any real change will have to come from you.

#### **Advice:**

Just pointing out a problem is not enough; propose a specific plan of action, like talking with someone to learn ways to improve the situation, such as reducing frequency or amount of use. Ask the student for an update after, showing your continued interest and concern. I'd advise you to talk with someone more knowledgeable about these things than I am. And send me an email after; I'd like to know how you're doing.

#### **Menu:**

Mention more than one source of help so the student knows there are numerous options both on and off campus. There are a lot of people you can talk to about these things. Why not try OPEN or UHCS or maybe Spiritual Life.

#### **Empathy:**

Encourage students to talk, while you listen very carefully. Try to identify with the feelings the student may experience during the exchange or might have had during the worrisome events you discuss. It's probably uncomfortable for you to be talking with me about this...I bet this situation is tough or



disappointing.

**Self-efficacy:**

Stress that the student does have the ability to change his/her situation, including getting help. Mention that other students in similar situations have made changes and even complete turnarounds. You can change things and make a lot out of this experience.

Lastly don't expect appreciation from the student; you may have to wait some time for your concern to be fully valued. Even if the student doesn't make immediate changes, you have still offered your support and concern, and at some point in the future, the student may approach you for help or utilize the advice and resources you offered.

**Resources**

In addition to the resources contained on this site, the college also offers literature in the Human Resources Office, Reading Room at CCC, student lounge at CSC and OTC. HR offers In-services and Professional Development on Drug Testing, Abuse, and Reasonable Belief Training.

***References: U.S. Department of Education, American College Health Association, CORE Survey, NUCohort Survey***