

A Message to Parents about Students and Alcohol Use

UCSC is committed to providing a safe, healthy environment in which your student can thrive while getting the best education possible. One of the most widely publicized health and safety issues on U.S. campuses is the practice of “binge” or “high risk” drinking, which is drinking to intoxication. This issue is also becoming more common at the high school level nationally. There are numerous harms and tragedies associated with binge drinking such as injury, violence, alcohol poisoning, and instances of unwanted and/or unprotected sex. These are realities that campuses deal with on a daily basis.

Student Health Outreach and Promotion (SHOP) works closely with campus and community partners to develop highly visible programs that encourage students to make safer, smarter choices about alcohol use. We also support those students who choose not to drink.

Last year we implemented an on-line Alcohol Education Course that all incoming first year students are asked to complete before they arrive on campus. It provides students with information about high-risk drinking behaviors and associated harms, including tools for planning and hosting safer social gatherings. We ask your support in encouraging your student to complete this program this summer. You will receive more information about this course in August.

Participation by parents in campus community efforts to educate students around alcohol use is key. You are the primary influence in your student’s life. Please talk with your student this summer about your expectations regarding drug and alcohol use and continue the dialogue throughout their time at UCSC. Although students are not likely to bring up the topic, they will listen if you do. You may not even get a response, but research shows that students pay attention when their parents talk about alcohol and drugs. It is surprising how often we hear “My parents think...” or “My parents say...” when students are talking with each other or with University staff about these issues.

In this handout, you will find suggestions for how to start that conversation, facts that may help guide your discussion, and resources for more information.

Initiate a Dialogue about Alcohol and other Drugs

Talk to your student directly and explicitly about your expectations and experiences with:

- Drinking and drug use,
- Drinking and driving and/or riding in a car with someone who has been drinking,
- Drinking and sexual decision making, including having sex with someone who has been drinking, and
- Balancing studies and social life.

In having these conversations:

- Take care not to romanticize any over-indulgences from your own youth. Using phrases like “I drank more than my share when I was your age” or “just know your limits” may lead your student to assume that you are okay with them drinking to dangerous levels.
- Be aware that high achieving students and others who previously may not have used alcohol do sometimes elect to drink. These students may be less likely to know their limits.
- Be careful not to reinforce assumptions such as “everyone parties in college.” It is not true.
- Acknowledge that students who do not drink are affected by those who do. For example, let them know that they can confront offensive behavior by a drunken peer either by talking directly to the student or indirectly by notifying residential staff.
- Let them know that UCSC takes these issues seriously. Enforcement operations, including DUI checkpoints, alcohol sales compliance checks and party patrols are scheduled during the first six weeks of fall quarter when there is a nationwide spike in student alcohol use known as the “college effect”.

The first six weeks of college is a very high-risk time for drinking for first year students. We encourage parents to call, write, or e-mail frequently. Some questions you may want to ask are:

- How are you doing? What do you do to relieve the stress?
- What is the party scene like? (If your student indicates that “everyone drinks,” or if you think that he/she is drinking, pursue the issue. Reinforce your academic and social expectations)
- Do you know the signs of alcohol poisoning? (On the **CUSP**:
Cold, clammy, or pale skin;
Unconscious or unable to be awakened;
Slowed or irregular breathing;
Puking/vomiting while passed out).
- What is your “safe limit” for drinking? How do you know when you’ve had enough to drink?
- What kind of activities other than drinking are available on- or off-campus?

Educate yourself about Alcohol Issues on Campus

In California, the legal age for purchasing and consuming alcohol is 21 years old.

Underage alcohol consumption and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol is against the law. Providing alcohol to minors is against the law.

UCSC policy prohibits underage drinking as well as use of illegal drugs.

Many students tell us that the environment at UCSC is stricter than what they experienced before college with regard to alcohol use. Know the policies on campus and the laws in the surrounding community and the consequences of violating them.

Students under the age of 21 may not consume alcohol anywhere on campus or remain in the presence of others who are violating alcohol policy. Any residential student found responsible for

(over)



violating alcohol policy can face sanctions, probation, loss of housing, and forfeiture of all future University housing (including being banned from visiting residential areas for up to five years).

All students, including those who may live off-campus, found responsible for alcohol and drug violations may be subject to university warning, probation, suspension or dismissal. A student who is found under the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs may be arrested by UCSC and Santa Cruz police and spend the night in jail. They will be responsible for paying the booking fee. Under state law, they may also lose their driver's license for up to six months.

It is not true that “everyone drinks in college.”

In a recent survey of UCSC students, approximately 30% reported not drinking at all in the previous 30 days. Most students (65% percent) reported drinking three or fewer drinks in an average week. Students grossly exaggerate their peers' use of alcohol. They tend to drink up to what they perceive to be the norm.

Resources

For more information about alcohol use and college students:

Higher Education Center
www.edc.org/hec

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov

On-Campus Resources at UCSC

Student Health Outreach and Promotion (SHOP)

Kresge College on the Piazzetta
shop@ucsc.edu
www2.usce.edu/healthcenter/shop 831.459.3772

SHOP offers confidential, non-judgmental comprehensive, culturally sensitive, non-judgmental information, education, resources and support around issues related to alcohol and other drug use, sexually transmitted infections, sexuality and sexual health, stress management and other concerns. Our prevention mission is to empower students to make responsible and healthy lifestyle choices by communicating the realities, misperceptions and secondary effects of their choices.

SHOP also provides resources for students who are in recovery and helps connect these students to one another.

For more information about UCSC's Alcohol Prevention Initiatives:
www2.ucsc.edu/healthcenter/shop

The effects of alcohol linger long after the party.

About 25 percent of college students report academic consequences of their drinking including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall. Moreover, alcohol can impair abstract thinking skills for up to 30 days following consumption.

More than 70,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are victims of alcohol-related sexual assault or date rape.

500,000 students ages 18 to 24 are unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol.

Alcohol kills.

1,400 college students between the ages of 18 and 24 die each year from alcohol-related unintentional injuries. These deaths include students who fall out of bedroom windows while intoxicated or trip down a flight of stairs. In other instances, students pass out from excessive alcohol consumption and die. In many of these cases, other students were aware that the student was unconscious, but they either did not recognize the seriousness of the situation, or they did not want to get their friend in trouble. Intervention is critical when a friend or neighbor is unconscious.

“Party Small” or not at all

There are differences between abstaining from drinking, low-risk drinking and high-risk drinking. Abstaining from drinking is the safest choice.

Low-risk drinking involves:

- Thinking about whether or not you will drink and what you will drink before a party or other event.
- Eating a meal before drinking
- Drinking no more than one drink* per hour
- Always knowing what you are drinking and knowing your limits
- Alternating alcohol-free drinks throughout the evening
- Knowing how you will get home safely before you go out

High-risk drinking is:

- Chugging, drinking games, shots (drinking anything out of a punch bowl, trough, hose, or funnel)
- Drinking to get drunk (intoxicated)
- Driving after drinking or riding with someone who is under the influence
- Not knowing what is in your glass or leaving it unattended
- Mixing alcohol with medications or illegal drugs
- Drinking to blackout

*1 drink = one 12 oz. beer = 4 oz. wine = 1 oz. liquor

Psychiatry Services

Student Health Center
www2.ucsc.edu/healthcenter

To make an appointment call: 831.459.2214

All students currently enrolled at UCSC may make use of the services. There is no charge for a visit.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS)

www2.ucsc.edu/counsel

NOTE: CPS will be relocating over the summer; for the new location, check their website. To make an appointment call at 831.459.2628

All currently enrolled undergraduate and graduate students at the University of California at Santa Cruz are eligible to utilize on-campus counseling services free of charge. Offices are also located at each of the residential colleges.

Some information in this publication has been adapted from the Century Council, the University of Oregon, the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, and the University of Minnesota.