

# Alcohol Discussion Guide: Age-Based



## College

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Alcohol is the number one most abused substance by college aged students. The majority of college freshman drink alcohol but, this number decreases every year thereafter. Unfortunately, about 40% of youth age 21-25 binge drink and about 14% consistently engage in heavy drinking. In college, parents lose a lot of leverage and supervisory capacity. However, alcohol use in college does not have to be part of the 'mythical college experience'. Use this age-based alcohol discussion guide when talking with your college-aged young adult.

### COLLEGE AGE YOUTH:

- Remind teens and young adults that their Frontal Lobe still has about 20% of its growth left to accomplish by the age of 25. This gives parents the scientific justification to request an alcohol-free college lifestyle.
- Set expectations for being a good steward of parents' tuition investment by studying with an alcohol-free brain. Remember that many college students choose not to drink during college.

**ALCOHOL-FREE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE SCRIPT:** *'You have earned the privilege of attending college (or trade school). Remember what our Family Code says about alcohol. We trust that you will follow the code, say no to alcohol until age 21, and find ways to have fun naturally, without alcohol. When you are of age to drink, we would be delighted if you chose to let your brain fully develop without alcohol's interference until age 25!'*

**ALCOHOL USE IN COLLEGE SCRIPT:** *'If you chose to drink, we expect you to drink responsibly when you are age 21. If you find yourself in trouble because of alcohol, call us immediately. We will help.'*

- Investigate college alcohol policies and the college's state's laws regarding underage drinking, drunk driving, and underage alcohol possession.

**ACTIVITY:** For each college they are applying to, ask your teen to look up the college's policy about underage drinking and discuss with you before choosing a college.

- Match student's developmental needs and maturity level to campus size and support services available.
- Require a gap year experience for those in need of Improved Executive Function or who have a history of high-risk behavior.
- Treat alcohol use problems prior to college and continue to alcohol test during the first two years.

**ALCOHOL TESTING IN COLLEGE SCRIPT:** *'We believe you will make better choices about alcohol in college than you did during high school. However, you have earned alcohol testing while in college due to those previous choices. We found a lab near the college. We need you to go there and sign up for random testing. Sign a HIPAA release so the results will come to us. For the first two years, you can earn your tuition with negative tests.'*

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- Prepare and help young people negotiate the transition by touring schools, attending orientations, and connecting health resources prior to admission.

**ACTIVITY:** Review the list of college or trade school admission stressors, how they might affect your child, and how they might cope with them.

- Separation from family (Don't show your hurt if they say they cannot wait to be rid you!)
- Losses and gains of peer networks
- Increases in academic choices and demands
- Increases in independence
- Loss of parental guidance and support
- Loss of positive coping routines
- Pressure to engage in risky behavior
- Increase in stress caused by transition and role changes
- Changes in living arrangements and roommates

**ACTIVITY:** During a campus tour or the first week of classes, ask your college student to locate the student health office. If they see a doctor or counselor regularly for medication maintenance or counseling, ask them to make their first appointment with a healthcare or mental healthcare provider.

- Require part-time work, internships, or apprenticeships as prosocial activities or summer projects.
- Encourage campus volunteering, student government work, sports, or clubs. Beware of Greek organizations, especially if they have a history of alcohol abuse in high school. Set firm limits and expectations for how to earn their Greek dues. HINT: Alcohol & drug testing.
- Require maintenance of a minimum GPA to earn tuition and other financial support.
- Inform youth that reports of the following behavior will earn a return home, possible gap year, or attendance at a community or local college until behavior is rectified:
  - Missed classes
  - GPA below required minimum
  - Chronic sleep or mental health problems
  - Sexual or physical assaults
  - Property damage