

Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse: Can Parents Make a Difference After College Begins?

-Nancy Reynolds, MSPH

A simple, yet profound message to parents: *You're not done yet!* Research consistently shows that parents remain one of the strongest influences in the lives of their college-aged children. Contrary to the pervasive stereotypes portrayed in films such as *Animal House* and *Road Trip* as well as other media, the majority of college students *drink moderately or not at all*. Ithaca College students are no exception! That being said, problems such as alcohol poisoning, accidents, sexual risk-taking, and poor academic performance do arise among a subset of our students.

Even though you may have already had a conversation with your son or daughter about this issue in the past, it's important to maintain an ongoing dialogue. This is especially critical during the first few weeks and months of college life when first-year students are at greatest risk of making unhealthy decisions. Recent studies have shown that the more frequently a college student talks with a parent, the more likely it is that the student will make low-risk choices about alcohol and other drugs.

Consider these suggestions: Rather than (or in addition to) the traditional Sunday evening phone call, how about a Friday early-evening call? This timing can set the stage for your child to have a safe and productive weekend. He or she will begin the weekend with a reminder of your values and your loving and supportive voice in his or her head. By being gently curious, you can learn about activities, homework, and other plans that your child has made. Remember to ask open-ended questions so that the conversation doesn't sound like an interrogation.

"What's going on for you socially this weekend?"

"How do you feel about the campus social scene so far?"

"What have you noticed about student drinking?" "How are you handling it?"

"What all do you have on your plate this weekend?"

Truly listen to the responses, and reflect on what you've heard. Whenever you can, convey support and respect to your child. Tell your son or daughter that you are proud of him or her for going to college. Reinforce your love and care through affirmations such as:

"You have a good head on your shoulders!"

"You're going to have a wonderful college experience."

"You know how to use your time wisely."

Staff in the [Office of Counseling and Wellness](#) offer services related to substance use, abuse, and support for abstinence. In addition, there are services available in the local Ithaca community. For a complete listing, visit our webpage, [Alcohol and Other Drug Services](#). For more information on this topic, contact Nancy Reynolds, Program Director, Center for Health Promotion, at nreynolds@ithaca.edu or 607-274-7933.