On behalf of the University of Denver, I would like to extend a sincere welcome to our community. We realize this is a transition not only for your student, but also for you as parents and families. Transitions can be hard and lead to increased stressors. While not all students turn to alcohol and other drugs to alleviate stress, we know the realities of substance use on college campuses and its potential to impact interpersonal, academic, and health behaviors for students and our academic community.

As the Executive Director of the Health and Counseling Center, I have the honor and privilege of being a part in aiding a successful transition to the university and champion of your student’s health and wellness. Our goal is to provide comprehensive services and initiatives to empower students and families to make the healthiest decisions for them, especially as it relates to alcohol and other drug use. Currently, we have robust staff and initiatives that span the spectrum of alcohol and other drug use including prevention and education efforts, clinical counseling, case management, and recovery-based supports.

At the University of Denver, our approach encourages individual decision making and empowerment through education. We use this philosophy to reduce the adverse effects and consequences associated with substance use, while understanding that the decision to use may persist for a variety of reasons. The main aim of this approach is to inform our community so that each individual can make educated choices and emphasize attainable health and wellness goals.

It is critical, however, to be informed and educated on the University of Denver campus policies, as well as local, state, and national laws. For more information on these policies and legal obligations to campus and Denver community, please reference below:

University of Denver Honor Code: https://www.du.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/index.html
Our goal, again, is to inform you and your students about the inherent risks and legality of substance use to make informed decisions that optimize your health and success at the university.

As parents and families of students at the University of Denver, we consider you key partners in your student’s successful transition, health, and wellness. We encourage you to speak with your student should you be concerned about their alcohol or other drug use. This handbook will provide you with a variety of strategies for speaking with your student about their substance use, as well as give you tools and resources to help recognize if your student may need help. By reading this handbook and initiating these conversations with your student, you will lay the foundation for their safe and successful DU experience.

Sincerely,

Michael LaFarr
Executive Director
Health & Counseling Center
Campus Life & Inclusive Excellence
University of Denver
It is critical to be informed about the substances most commonly used on college campuses. For more information, refer to the Resources section.

**Alcohol**

- In small amounts can have stimulant effects (ex. feeling “buzzed”)
- In larger amounts has depressant effects (ex. impaired coordination, judgement, and reaction time)
- At dangerous amounts can lead to blackouts, passing out, and death
- Many college alcohol problems are related to high-risk (binge) drinking:
  
  Drinking 4 or more standard drinks in a 2 hour period for biological females and 5 or more standard drinks in a 2 hour period for biological males

- Examples of one standard drink include:
  - 12 oz. beer
  - 5 oz. wine
  - 1.5 oz. liquor (80-proof)

- In Colorado, people must be 21 or older to buy, possess, or use alcohol
- In University of Denver residence halls, students under 21 cannot be in the presence of alcohol or have empty alcohol containers
Cannabis

- A plant that produces a chemical called THC *(Tetrahydrocannabinol)* which makes the person using it feel high. *(Also known as marijuana, weed, or pot)*
- Use can lead to negative effects on the lungs, memory, and mental health
- In Colorado, people must be 21 or older to buy, possess, or use recreational cannabis
- University of Denver is a smoke-free campus and any form of cannabis use *(recreational and medical)* is prohibited

Cannabis can be used in different ways *(ex. smoking, vaping, topicals, edibles, dabbing)*

- Edibles – food, snacks, beverages, or candies that contain THC
  - Can take up to four hours to feel the full effects
  - Effects can last up to ten hours
  - Using too much can cause anxiety, hallucinations, and paranoia
  - In commercially-available edibles, standard serving size is 10 mg of THC; don’t take more than that to start
  - Difficult to know how much THC is in homemade edibles
- Dabbing – heating and inhaling THC extract, also called hash oil, shatter, or concentrates
  - Can contain up to 60-80% THC and may take effect very quickly
  - Extremely potent and shouldn’t be used by anyone who hasn’t used cannabis before
Prescription Drug Misuse

- Taking a medication in a dose or manner other than prescribed, using someone else’s medication, or taking a medication to get high
- Misuse can lead to overdose, addiction, other health and medical problems, and death
- Only use prescription drugs under the supervision of your health care provider
- Illegal to possess prescription drugs without a prescription or sell/give your prescription drugs to someone else
- While most University of Denver students do not misuse prescription drugs, the most commonly misused are stimulants (ex. Adderall, Ritalin). If your student is prescribed stimulants, it is essential for them to store their medication securely and dispose of expired or unused medication safely. The Health & Counseling Center is not able to store or dispose medication for students

Mixing Substances

- When taken together, substances, including alcohol, can interact with each other in harmful and unpredictable ways
- Mixing substances can increase risk for overdose and death
- If you are using a prescription drug, read the warning labels on the bottle. Many prescription drugs should never be used with alcohol
It can be difficult to distinguish between many of the challenges that students may face during their college experience. Still, there are indicators that substance use may be becoming a barrier in your student’s life and warrant a conversation.

**Signs may include:**

- **Academic concerns:**
  - A sudden lack of interest in class and extracurricular activities
  - Frequently missing classes
  - Performing poorly on tests or projects
  - Grades dropping

- **Behavioral concerns:**
  - Driving under the influence
  - Craving or compulsion
  - Getting into arguments or physical altercations
  - Getting hurt or injured
  - Damaging property
  - Involvement with law enforcement or Student Rights & Responsibilities
  - Desire to change patterns of use, but difficulty with following through

- **Interpersonal concerns:**
  - Drastic changes in behaviors and in relationships your student values
  - Sudden and frequent requests for money without a reasonable explanation
  - Exaggerated efforts to keep family members from entering their room
  - Criticism by family, peers and others believing student might have a substance use problem
Health related concerns:

- Changes in hygiene
- Hangovers
- Significant changes in diet and sleep
- Contracting communicable diseases
- Overdoses
- Symptoms of withdrawal

Many of the items on this list are not unique indicators of problems with substance use and may be signs of other stressors in your student’s life. We know that substance use often serves as a response to pressures experienced by students. Approaching each possible indicator with care may open up a conversation to identify the motivation for their use - allowing you to engage with your student in a more meaningful way.

Relapse

- Relapse warning signs for students pursuing recovery:
  - Progressive loss of daily structure and responsibilities
  - Hopelessness or indifference
  - Tendency toward loneliness
  - Easily irritated, annoyed, or dissatisfied
  - Intentional lying
Research shows that talking with your college student about substance use can serve as a protective factor against later risky use. We encourage you to be engaged with your student around this topic, but we know it can sometimes be hard to know what to say. Here are some suggestions for how to have these conversations:

• **Be patient and understanding**
  It’s normal for your student to not be open to change at first. Substance use by students typically is connected to a need or desire in their life. Help your student identify what needs they might be meeting with substances and help them find alternatives.

• **Approach in the spirit of warmth and support**
  Approaching students as the experts of their own experience may disarm defensiveness and encourage open dialogue. Low conflict in the parent-child relationship is correlated with better outcomes.

• **Get informed**
  Be aware of the gaps in your knowledge about substances, and try to become familiar before talking with your student - showing investment in learning about your student’s world.

• **Stay in touch**
  Regular communication and knowledge of students’ activity is correlated with better outcomes. The first six weeks of a student’s first year are a particularly vulnerable time.

• **Set and communicate your expectations**
  Set clear expectations and be open to conversation about them. Your student will benefit from consistent and well articulated expectations.

• **Celebrate progress**
  The change process can be slow, so reinforce positive changes, no matter how small.
• **Employ a curious lens**
  Asking questions rather than giving ultimatums may prevent defensiveness that will likely shut down open and honest communications. Intrusive or overprotective parenting styles are correlated with poorer outcomes.

• **Know when to take a break**
  If emotions are running high, let your student know you might need to make a plan to revisit the conversation within the next 24 hours.

• **Be on your student’s team**
  Identify the shared goals or values that you both have such as your student having a safe and enjoyable college experience. Learn what your student likes and what they care about, and who they are becoming.

For more information, visit:

https://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup

Source for informational interviewing:

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64964/
The University of Denver offers various resources to help to support your students thrive. While these resources are intended to help your students, it is important for you to know what resources are at your student’s disposal and where to direct them. These departments are also happy to help answer any further questions you may have.

**Campus Resources**

**Health and Counseling Center**
303.871.2205
www.du.edu/duhealth

**Center for Advocacy, Prevention, & Empowerment**
303.871.3853
www.du.edu/cape

**Collegiate Recovery Community**
303.871.3699
www.du.edu/crc

**Health Promotion**
303.871.3763
www.du.edu/thrive

**Campus Safety**
303.871.3000 (emergencies) | 303.871.2334 (inquiries)
https://www.du.edu/campussafety/

**Parent & Family Engagement**
303.871.3708
www.du.edu/studentlife/parents

**Student Engagement**
303.871.3111
www.du.edu/studentlife/engagement

**Student Outreach & Support**
303.871.4724
www.du.edu/studentsupport

**Student Rights & Responsibilities**
303.871.2455
www.du.edu/studentconduct
Other Resources

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

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment
www.ResponsibilityGrowsHere.com

Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention
www.TakeMeds Seriously.org