Welcome

We are excited to welcome your student to the University of Denver. Parents and families are essential partners in fostering student success, and we strive to provide you with the information and resources that you need to support your students, as they make the transition to life on the DU campus.

Each year, university students across the nation are profoundly affected by problems related to the use of alcohol and other drugs. While most DU students drink responsibly or not at all, substance use has the potential to cause interpersonal, academic, legal, and health concerns that can impact our entire campus community.

Research shows that parents and other family members can play a powerful role in influencing the behaviors of their college students. For instance,

- The children of parents who speak with them about binge drinking prior to their arrival on campus display lower drinking tendencies and are less likely to experience negative alcohol-related consequences.
- Students who perceive that their parents would approve of them drinking are more likely to experience drinking-related problems.
- On days when students communicate with their parents, they consume fewer drinks and are less likely to engage in heavy drinking.
- As students transition to college, continued parental involvement may moderate and temper peer influence with regards to substance use behaviors and serve as a protective factor in impeding the adoption of increased use of alcohol and other drugs.

You may be concerned that your student’s alcohol and other drug-related habits are already firmly established and that it’s too late to have this talk. We urge you to speak with them, anyway. While these behaviors may not be new, they will now be occurring within the context of new people, places, and situations.
First year students typically experience more negative consequences as a result of their substance use during the first month of college than in the months prior to matriculation – regardless of whether or not they actually use more or more often.

This handbook will provide you with a variety of strategies for speaking with your student about alcohol and other drugs and give you tools to help you recognize if your student is having a problem with substance use. By reading this handbook and initiating these conversations with your student, you will lay the foundation for their safe and successful DU experience.
Tips for Communicating with your College Student

Find a good time to talk, when neither of you are distracted or rushed. Express that this is an important issue. Let your student know that you care about them, want to help, and genuinely respect and support their desire to be independent. Start the conversation with a statement that expresses open-mindedness, and ask your student about their opinions and experiences. Some thought provoking questions might be:

- What role do you want alcohol and/or other drugs to play in your college experience?
- How will you know – for yourself – if alcohol or drugs are negatively impacting your ability to reach your goals?
- Do you know anyone who drinks a lot? How has it affected them?
- Do you have any concerns?

Do...  
☐ Ask questions, listen, and take what they say seriously.
☐ Offer reassurance that you trust them.
☐ Communicate respect.
☐ Appeal to common goals (i.e. you and your student both want them to be healthy, safe, and successful.)
☐ Be prepared to answer questions about your own experiences related to alcohol and other drugs in a manner that does not convey permissiveness.
☐ Discuss any family history of alcoholism or drug abuse. Having a family member who has experienced addiction significantly increases one’s own risk for experiencing similar issues.

Do Not...  
☐ Lecture.
☐ Threaten punishment.
☐ Debate or require that your student “defend” their position.
Having the Conversation

1. Talk About the Physiological Effects

If your student chooses to drink or use other drugs, it is important that they are aware of the wide range of effects that these substances have on their judgment, behavior, and health. Frequent substance use can result in physical and/or psychological dependence, as well as severe health problems. Emotional and social development can also be seriously impaired.

Effects of Alcohol

- While small amounts of alcohol can make you feel “buzzed,” it is a depressant that will cause you to feel more sluggish, tired, and uncoordinated with each additional drink; more alcohol does not equal a better buzz.
- As a depressant, alcohol inhibits your central nervous system, impairing judgment and coordination; your respiratory system, impairing breathing; and your gag reflex, making it possible for you to choke on your own vomit. As you drink, your ability to form memories is affected, as well, causing “blackouts” or alcohol-induced memory loss. Loss of consciousness, or “passing out,” and death may also occur.
- Your level of intoxication is related to the amount of alcohol that you consume, but it is also influenced by a variety of other factors. These include whether or not you have also taken medications or other drugs, how quickly you drink, how much you ate prior to drinking, your body size, your hormone levels, and your stress or fatigue levels.
- “Sobering up” takes time – nothing you do can speed up this process and make your liver work faster.

Effects of Marijuana

- The main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana is Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). THC acts on specific sites within the body, called cannabinoid receptors. The brain areas that
have many receptors include the parts of the brain that influence pleasure, memory, thinking, concentrating, sensory and time perception, and coordinated movement.

- Dosage can be difficult to control when consuming edible marijuana products. Unlike smoking marijuana, effects from edibles can take from 30 minutes to 2 hours to kick in and may last longer than expected. The amount of THC can also vary.

**Effects of Illicit Drugs and Prescription Medications**

- Stimulants, depressants, hallucinogens, and narcotics impact breathing, blood pressure, and heart rate and can cause confusion, altered reaction times, loss of coordination, and/or irrational or violent behavior.
- Illegal substances are unregulated and can therefore have unpredictable effects that may vary with each use; there is no way of knowing exactly what you are putting in your body.
- Prescription medications are not a safer alternative to “street” drugs. When used without medical oversight, the potential for harm is significant.
- While prescription stimulants are often believed to increase focus and productivity, there is no research to support that these drugs improve academic performance in individuals who do not have a diagnosed need.

**Effects of Mixing Alcohol with Other Drugs**

- Illicit drugs, prescription drugs, and over-the-counter medications can interact with alcohol and with each other in harmful and unpredictable ways.
- These drugs may intensify or mask the effects of alcohol, thereby greatly increasing the risk for accidental overdose and death.
- If you have been prescribed a medication by your doctor, pay attention to the warning labels on the bottle. Many prescription medications should never be used with alcohol; these combinations are potentially lethal.
Tips to Share – “Safer” Drinking Strategies

- Understand and set limits before you drink. Need some help? Check out an online “BAC Calculator” – and remember that serving size matters!
- Stretch drinks out over longer periods of time, possibly alternating between nonalcoholic drinks and alcoholic drinks.
- Avoid consuming large amounts of alcohol over short periods of time (i.e. taking multiple shots, playing drinking games, using beer bongs, etc.
- Stay away from mixed drinks or punches – if you didn’t mix it yourself, you can’t know what and how much you are being served.
- Eat a substantial and balanced meal before drinking.
- Plan ahead to get home safely.
- Never mix alcohol with other drugs, including prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- Avoid the use of alcohol as a way to “cope with” or avoid issues in your life that may be causing you worry or distress.
- Look out for your fellow students at all times. Know how to recognize an emergency situation and be aware of when and how to seek medical help.
2. Share Your Own Beliefs and Expectations

Your beliefs and practices related to alcohol and other drugs are connected to your personal values. In talking with your student, reiterate and emphasize your family’s value and belief systems.

Be clear about what behaviors you will and will not accept. If you are going to permit your student to drink alcohol in certain contexts, it is important to identify how you define “responsible use.” It may also be helpful to discuss specific strategies that you expect them to employ to keep themselves and their friends safe, such as sticking to three or fewer drinks in one night, using a designated driver, and staying with a group of trusted friends.

It is also important to set clear and realistic expectations regarding academic performance. Alcohol is often a major factor when students are struggling to reach their academic goals.

Substance Use and Academics

In recent campus health surveys, a percentage of DU students reported that their alcohol and/or drug use had negatively affected their individual academic performance in the past year. National research indicates that:

- GPA is negatively correlated with alcohol use. One study showed that “A” students drank an average of 3.3 drinks per week, while “D” or “F” students drank an average of 9.0 drinks per week.

- Students who engaged in binge drinking (consuming 5 or more drinks in a 2 hour period) at least one time within the past 2 weeks had lower GPAs than those who did not engage in high risk drinking over this time period.

- Students who had used marijuana at least once in the past 30 days had lower GPAs than students who had not used during this time period.

- Students who reported using illegal drugs in the past 30 days had lower GPAs than students who had not used during this time period.
3. Address Motivations

Many students believe that there are positive benefits associated with alcohol or other drug use. When speaking with your student, it is important to recognize, understand, and address these motivations. Here are some ways to talk about commonly-sited motivations for using alcohol or other drugs.

To have fun or enhance an experience

Talk with your student about the activities they enjoy doing without alcohol and how they will find opportunities to engage with these activities on campus. Encourage them to consider what alcohol or other drugs add to their experiences, and remind them that more alcohol does not always lead to more fun. If they are having fun after 3 drinks, what will an additional drink add to the experience? At what point does alcohol begin to detract from the experience?

To meet people or to fit in

Students often believe that alcohol makes it easier to talk to new people or that it is important to drink or use other drugs in order to fit in. Help your student identify strategies for meeting other students who share common interests. Remind them that many DU students choose not to drink – and that most students who choose to consume alcohol will do so in safe and moderate ways. Work with your student to understand the dynamics of peer pressure and stress the importance of being their own person. Brainstorm ways to respond to situations where they might feel pressured to drink or use other drugs.

To unwind or de-stress

Remind your student that alcohol and other drugs are not effective ways of coping with issues in their life that may be causing them worry or distress. Some students may use marijuana in an attempt to “self-medicate” for issues such as depression, anxiety, or ADHD. “Self-medicating” with alcohol or other drugs may help them momentarily feel better or forget the cause of their distress, but this behavior will not help them effectively address the issue at hand. Additionally, large doses of alcohol can trigger a stress
response in most individuals. Research shows that college students who use alcohol and other drugs as a means of coping with stress are more likely to encounter negative health, legal, and/or social consequences as a result of their use. Work with your student to identify positive coping techniques that they can turn to when they are feeling stressed or overwhelmed.”

4. Discuss Negative Consequences

While strong “scare tactics” are not recommended, it is important to discuss the potential disadvantages of drinking and using other drugs in a straight-forward and honest fashion.

• Impaired judgment may lead to regrettable or dangerous situations. DU students have suffered illness, legal trouble, academic problems, regretted actions, high-risk sexual activity, and violence as a result of substance use.

• The University of Denver’s Honor Code prohibits underage or excessive alcohol use and the possession, use, or distribution of illegal drugs – including marijuana. The Honor Code also prohibits any act that directly or indirectly creates a substantial risk to anyone’s health or safety. This includes, but is not limited to, the use or abuse of any substance that results in medical evaluation or assistance. DU maintains the right to notify the parents or guardians of any dependent student under the age of 21 who has been found responsible for violating any drug or alcohol policies. This notification is intended to encourage communication between students and their parents or guardians. More information about the University of Denver Honor Code is available at www.du.edu/honorcode.

• Underage drinking and drug use are illegal. The State of Colorado upholds laws regarding underage drinking, drug use, and the use of false identification (of note, the use and/or possession of a “Fake ID” is considered a felony in Colorado). For some violations, students may face legal consequences beyond an Honor Code violation. Such citations can be costly and have long-term implications for one’s career goals. Students should understand that their ability to obtain
professional licensures, field placements, and certain jobs may be impacted by having a citation on their record.

- **Medical emergencies can occur.** If a student is found intoxicated on campus, a Campus Safety Officer may ask them to submit to a Preliminary Breathalyzer Test (PBT). Trained medical personnel will be called upon to initiate a medical evaluation whenever an individual presents with a blood alcohol concentration above the state’s legal limit or otherwise exhibits behaviors or symptoms indicating that they are medically compromised. Trained medical personnel will determine if the student needs to be transported to a local medical facility for additional monitoring or care. Students are responsible for all costs related to their transport and care.
Did You Know?

Most college students generally make healthy decisions regarding alcohol and other drugs. However, the media often portrays frequent and heavy substance use among college students, and students tend to overestimate the degree to which their peers engage in these behaviors. These misperceptions can sometimes play a role in the adoption of high-risk behaviors.

When talking with your student regarding their decisions related to alcohol and other drug use, it is important to promote a healthy and realistic understanding of their peers’ behaviors. You may wish to remind them that:

• In the last 30 days, 20% of DU students abstained from alcohol.
  Point: Not all college students drink alcohol.

• DU students believed that only 3% of their peers abstained from alcohol in the last 30 days.
  Point: Students overestimate the percentage of their peers who drink.

• Among students who used alcohol the last time that they socialized, 63% had 4 or fewer drinks.
  Point: Most students drink moderately when they choose to drink.

• Sixty-five percent (65%) of DU students had not consumed 5 or more alcoholic beverages in one sitting during the past two weeks.
  Point: Most students do not engage in “binge drinking” behaviors.

• Ninety-eight percent (98%) of DU students who drink typically employ at least one “safer” drinking practice (such as those featured on Page 7.)
  Point: Most students regularly utilize harm reduction strategies to keep themselves and their friends safe.

• In the last 30 days, 79% of DU students abstained from marijuana.
  Point: Not all college students use marijuana.
DU students believed that only 9% of their peers abstained from marijuana in the last 30 days. 
*Point: Students overestimate the percentage of their peers who use marijuana.*

In the last year, 93% of DU students did not use prescription stimulants without a prescription. 
*Point: Not all college students misuse prescription medications.*

**What should I do if I Suspect that my student has a Problem?**

Some students may display behaviors that cause you to become concerned about their substance use. These behaviors may include:

- Changes in class attendance and/or academic performance
- Drinking before class or other important obligations
- Use of substances to cope with problems
- Social withdrawal and/or tendency to avoid events where substances will not be readily available
- Increased tolerance and difficulty cutting down or controlling level of use
- Feelings of guilt, shame, or sadness regarding one’s use of substances; feeling annoyed or attacked when asked about their drinking or drug use
- Continued use despite repeatedly experiencing problems as a result, such as fights or arguments with family or friends; interference with school, work, and other important responsibilities; or taking risks or getting seriously injured while under the influence.

If you are worried about a student’s substance use,

- Find the right time and setting, so that you both have time to talk and are able to do so privately and without distractions.
What DU is Doing

DU is deeply committed to supporting your student’s health and well-being so that they can focus on their academic success. As an institution, we have invested significant time and resources to enhance the University’s capacity to prevent and respond to high-risk drinking on campus. We aim to provide our students with the information and skills necessary to make healthy decisions with regards to substance use. To this end, DU offers a comprehensive array of:

- Counseling and intervention services for individuals who are identified as being at-risk for issues related to their substance use.
- Educational campaigns and initiatives.
- Strategies that seek to impact the campus and community environments in which student alcohol and drug use typically occurs.
DU is serious about students’ safety, and the University abides by all state and federal laws related to alcohol and other drugs. If a student is found intoxicated on campus, a Campus Safety Officer may ask them to submit to a Preliminary Breathalyzer Test (PBT). Trained medical personnel will be called upon to initiate a medical evaluation whenever an individual presents with a blood alcohol concentration above the state’s legal limit or otherwise exhibits behaviors or symptoms indicating that they are medically compromised. Trained medical personnel will determine if the student needs to be transported to a local medical facility for additional monitoring or care (note that the student will be responsible for all costs related to their transport and care).

The University also maintains the right to notify parents or guardians of any dependent student under the age of 21 who has been found responsible for violating campus drug or alcohol policies. If you have questions about these processes, please contact the Health and Counseling Center or the Office of Student Conduct.

**Thank You**

Thank you for taking the time to review this handbook and for initiating these important conversations with your student. While we urge you to speak with your student about these issues prior to their arrival on campus, please continue to check in with them throughout the year in order to ensure that alcohol or other drugs are not negatively impacting their college experience. We very much value your partnership in supporting your student’s success and know that you will make a difference.
Campus Resources

Various resources are available to help support your student. The Health and Counseling Center offers affordable assessment, counseling, and referral for students with alcohol and other drug concerns as well as general mental health and adjustment issues.

Health and Counseling Center
303.871.2205
info@hcc.du.edu
www.du.edu/duhealth

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

Student Conduct
303.871.3111
www.du.edu/studentconduct

Student Outreach and Support
303.871.4724
care@du.edu
www.du.edu/studentsupport