

WHAT PEER EDUCATORS AND RESIDENT ADVISORS (RAs) NEED TO KNOW ABOUT COLLEGE DRINKING



www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
National Institutes of Health
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

About This Brochure:



PEER EDUCATORS

This brochure for college peer educators and resident advisors contains **highlights** from the report, *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*. The report was developed by the National Institutes of Health National Advisory Council on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Task Force on College Drinking.

The Task Force was composed of college presidents, alcohol researchers, and students. It conducted an extensive analysis of the research literature in order to provide the most up-to-date and credible science-based information on college drinking, including:

- The scope of the college drinking problem
- The effectiveness of intervention programs currently used by schools and communities
- Recommendations for college presidents and researchers on how to improve these interventions and prevention efforts

The Task Force hopes that you will use this brochure (and our other materials) to help you understand the extent of this problem, speak knowledgeably about it, and be proactive in taking steps to address it at your school. The full report of the Task Force and additional supporting documents are available at www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov.

Highlights from:

A CALL TO ACTION: CHANGING THE CULTURE OF DRINKING AT U.S. COLLEGES

A SNAPSHOT OF ANNUAL HIGH-RISK COLLEGE DRINKING CONSEQUENCES

The Task Force integrated several national databases and compiled a list of statistics that present a **new** and **more complete** picture of college drinking consequences. The first step in addressing this problem is to recognize it for what it is—a public health issue for the Nation, which particularly impacts young adults.

- **Death:** Over 1,400 students ages 18 to 24 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries including motor vehicle crashes.
- **Injury:** 500,000 students ages 18 to 24 are unintentionally injured under the influence of alcohol.
- **Assault:** More than 600,000 students ages 18 to 24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking.
- **Sexual Abuse:** More than 70,000 students ages 18 to 24 are victims of a sexual assault or date rape in which alcohol is involved.
- **Unsafe Sex:** 400,000 students ages 18 to 24 have unprotected sex and more than 100,000 report having been too intoxicated to know if they consented to having sex.
- **Academic Problems:** About 25 percent of college students report academic consequences of their

HIGH-RISK COLLEGE STUDENT DRINKING

High-risk college student drinking includes the following:

- Underage drinking
- Drinking and driving or other activities where the use of alcohol is dangerous
- Drinking when health conditions or medications make use dangerous
- Binge drinking; that is, 5 drinks in a row per occasion for males and 4 for females*

**Moderate drinking by persons of legal age is defined as no more than 2 standard drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women.*

drinking including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams and papers, and receiving lower grades overall. More than 1 million or slightly more than 25 percent of college students report academic problems linked to alcohol use.

- **Health Problems and Suicide Attempts:** More than 150,000 students develop an alcohol-related health problem and between 1.2 and 1.5 percent of students indicate that they tried to commit suicide within the past year due to drinking or drug use.
- **Drunk Driving:** 2.1 million students between the ages of 18 and 24 drove under the influence of alcohol last year.
- **Vandalism:** About 11 percent of college students report that they have damaged property while under the influence of alcohol.
- **Property Damage:** More than 25 percent of administrators from schools with relatively low drinking levels and over 50 percent from schools with high drinking levels say their campuses have a “moderate” to “major” problem with alcohol-related property damage.
- **Police Involvement:** About 5 percent of 4-year college students are involved with the police or campus security as a result of their drinking and an estimated 110,000 students between the ages of 18 and 24 are arrested for an alcohol-related violation such as public drunkenness or driving under the influence.
- **Alcohol Abuse and Dependence:** 31 percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6 percent for a diagnosis of alcohol dependence in the past 12 months, according to questionnaire-based self-reports about their drinking.

What are potential signs of a problem?

- Failure to fulfill major work, school, or home responsibilities
- Specific school problems such as poor attendance, low grades, and/or recent disciplinary action
- Drinking in situations that are physically dangerous, such as driving a car
- Having recurring alcohol-related legal problems, such as being arrested for driving under the influence of alcohol or for physically hurting someone while drunk
- Continued drinking despite having ongoing relationship problems that are caused or worsened by drinking
- Mood changes such as temper flare-ups, irritability, and defensiveness
- Physical or mental problems such as memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, or slurred speech

PEER EDUCATORS SHOULD KNOW:

- How can you identify problem, at-risk, or dependent drinkers?
- How is the body affected by alcohol consumption?
- What are the drinking laws in your State and community?
- What are your school's alcohol policies and procedures?
- What are the possible consequences if a student breaks the law or policy?

Why is the Task Force reaching out to peer educators?

- You are trusted by classmates to provide reliable answers and accurate information, regardless of the health topic.
- You have hands-on knowledge that enables you to interpret the report from a different perspective.
- You are a very important link between the administration and student body.
- You can assist college presidents in reducing underage/excessive drinking.
- Your input can make college alcohol prevention programs more successful.

A Call to Action for Peer Educators/Resident Advisors

You can help reduce underage and excessive drinking in a variety of ways. The following commonsense suggestions, along with your creativity and rapport with peers, can be strong tools for you to make a difference on your campus.

- Become involved in the review and assessment of current alcohol programs on campus.
- Understand and become active in implementing strategies that target the entire study body, the campus and surrounding community environment, and the individual at-risk, problem, or alcohol-dependent student drinker.

- Work with the administration (through your health center) to help plan and implement interventions. For example, Alcohol Screening Day occurs every April—does it happen on your campus? An online screening tool always available to you is www.alcoholscreening.org.
- Openly support policy changes aimed at altering the culture of drinking on campus. Many university alcohol policies are listed on NIAAA's College Drinking Prevention Web site, www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov.
- Understand and advocate for the implementation of the research-based strategies identified in the Task Force's report, as well as programs that include an evaluation component.
- Work to improve joint campus–community efforts to limit student high-risk drinking.
- Read the Task Force's report (see the Resources list at the end of this brochure for the Web Site and mailing address). You will learn the scientific reasoning behind its recommendations, and consequently be able to discuss those recommendations with others.



The Task Force recommends a comprehensive **3-in-1 Framework** that addresses multiple audiences simultaneously. This is explained in more detail in the full Task Force report, which is available free of charge from NIAAA or online at www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Task Force report, *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*, contains information that can help you better respond to high-risk drinking at your school. Highlights include:

Living Arrangements

The proportion of college students who drink varies depending on where they live. Drinking rates are highest in fraternities and sororities, followed by on-campus housing (e.g., dormitories, residence halls). Students who live independently off-site (e.g., in apartments) drink less, while commuting students who live with their families drink the least.

College Characteristics

A number of environmental influences working in concert with other factors may affect students' alcohol consumption. Schools where excessive alcohol use is more likely to occur include:

- Schools where Greek systems dominate (i.e., fraternities, sororities)
- Schools where athletic teams are prominent
- Schools located in the Northeast

First-Year Students

The first 6 weeks of enrollment are critical to first-year student success. Because many students initiate heavy drinking during these early days of college, the potential exists for excessive alcohol consumption to interfere with successful adaptation to campus life. The transition to college is often

so difficult to negotiate that about one-third of first-year students fail to enroll for their second year.

Established Drinking Patterns

Although some drinking problems begin during the college years, many students entering college bring established drinking practices with them. Thirty percent of 12th-graders, for example, report binge drinking in high school, slightly more report having “been drunk,” and almost three-quarters report drinking in the past year. Colleges and universities “inherit” a substantial number of drinking problems that developed earlier in adolescence.

Secondhand Consequences of Drinking

Students who do not drink or do not abuse alcohol experience secondhand consequences from others’ excessive use. In addition to physical and sexual assault and damaged property, these consequences include unwanted sexual advances and disrupted sleep and study. The problems produced by high-risk drinking are neither victimless nor cost-free. All students—whether they misuse alcohol or not—and their parents, faculty, and members of the surrounding community experience the negative consequences of the drinking culture on U.S. campuses.

Other Factors Affecting Drinking

- Biological and genetic predisposition to use
- Belief system and personality
- Expectations about the effects of alcohol
- Availability of alcohol in the area surrounding a campus

RESOURCES

The following materials are available from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) by mail or through the NIAAA Web site (www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov):

Task Force Report

- *A Call to Action: Changing the Culture of Drinking at U.S. Colleges*
Final Report of the Task Force on College Drinking

Panel Reports

- *High-Risk Drinking in College: What We Know and What We Need To Learn*
Final Report of the Task Force on College Drinking's Panel on Contexts and Consequences
- *How To Reduce High-Risk College Drinking: Use Proven Strategies, Fill Research Gaps*
Final Report of the Task Force on College Drinking's Panel on Prevention and Treatment

Brochures

- *What College Presidents Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Parents Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Peer Educators and Resident Advisors (RAs) Need to Know About College Drinking*

Future Brochures

- *What High School Guidance Counselors Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Community Leaders Need to Know About College Drinking*
- *What Students Need to Know About College Drinking*

Planning and Evaluation Handbook

- *Reducing Alcohol Problems on Campus: A Guide to Planning and Evaluation*

Online Resources

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
www.niaaa.nih.gov
- NIAAA Leadership to Keep Children Alcohol Free
www.alcoholfreechildren.org
- NIAAA Kids Web Site
www.thecoolspot.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
www.nhtsa.dot.gov



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- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov
 - U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov
 - U.S. Department of Justice
www.usdoj.gov

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