

Parent Based Interventions

For Incoming College Freshmen

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Alcohol Specific Communication

by David Closson, M.S.

Research has shown alcohol specific communication is the foundation of parent based interventions. Rather than you take tons of time to study and research, we have listed a few of the common hurdles parents will face when talking to their children about alcohol. We have also listed some suggestions for overcoming those hurdles.

Let's get started!

Communication Hurdles

Lecture & Talking At

Many students fear the never ending, one-way lecture where the main theme is "right vs. wrong." In looking at the research, students that come from homes where the parents lecture in this one-way fashion tend to drink more.

Trust

"Son, we need to have a talk about alcohol." Cue the thought "What's the matter? Do you not trust me anymore?" Students often feel a request to talk about drinking as an indication of lower trust.

The studies show that when teens feel they can both trust and are trusted by their parents, they will drink less.

Punishment

"Right, you want me to talk about drinking. Then you probably won't even let me go out!" When the teen fears they may be punished they are less likely to communicate. This also leads to a higher likelihood of them experiencing alcohol-related negative consequences.

Own Drinking Behavior

"But mom, did you drink when you were a student? Did you ever get drunk?"

Do you think these questions are a worry in parents' minds? Potentially keeping them from talking to their students? Very much so. If the parent lies and says no then they are being dishonest and if they say yes then they are being "hypocritical."

How to Leap the Hurdles

Timing/Distractions

"Don't talk to me until I've had my morning coffee." Have you ever said this before? Use that same concept for parents trying to talk to their students about alcohol. Pick a good time when they aren't busy, heading to an activity or rushed. A few options are to schedule a time, a lunch, or even an ice cream run!

90%

Over 90% of students try alcohol outside the home before graduating from high school.

(Turrissi, 2014)

Listening

Listening is the best way to avoid the dreaded one-way lecture. Second, who likes to be interrupted? Parents can step it up a notch and show they are really listening by paraphrasing and summarizing. "Let me see if I understand you. It sounds like...."

Respect

It goes right along with the golden rule to treat others the way you want to be treated. Parents want their teens to respect them, so it is important for the parents to show respect to their teens. This can be done by telling them you are proud of them or admire them for what they are doing.

Common Goals

Whose side are the parents on? It is always good to remind the teen that the parents are on their side. Reminding them that the parents share a common goal with the teen. It is pretty safe to say a common goal would be for the teen to stay safe and healthy.

Open Ended Questions

“Fine.” “Okay, mom.” “Whatever.” All of these are typical responses parents get that shut down their conversations with teens. The use of good open ended questions will help keep the conversation going and avoid those conversational shutdowns.

Avoid the Debate

It takes two to argue, so don't be one of the two. Teens are quick to feel the need to defend their position and the conversation turns into a debate. Parents must fight the urge to place blame (“You did this___” etc.) or falling into an argument.

Break Time

If things just aren't going smooth, it is perfectly okay to disengage. Take a break and revisit the conversation at a later time when both parties have calmed down. There is no need to force the conversation as that will likely cause the student to dig their heels in even deeper and defend their position.

FAST FACT

Myth: “My son or daughter won't listen at this point.”

Fact: “The results of the American College Health Survey revealed that parents were the number one source that students turned to for important information.”

(Turrisi, 2014)

What to Talk About

For parents that are going to be talking to their teens about drinking it is best to keep their focus on the goals. What would they like to communicate and what do the end results look like? The research shows that the following topics address transitioning to drinking and high risk drinking behavior.

Assertiveness

Drinking is social and peer influence is a leading reason college student's drink. Through talking to their teens, parents can develop assertiveness in the teen and the skills needed to resist the peer influence to drink.

Facts About Alcohol

Although college students may think they know everything there is to know about drinking, they are all too often incorrect. Parents are wise to address the myths about alcohol and share the facts.



Talking about how alcohol affects the body is a good place for parents to start. Students need to know how occasionally drinking alcohol can affect their bodies.

For those that saw our first three videos on parent based interventions you heard me talk about parental approval. This is where parents will want to clearly and directly share their beliefs on alcohol. No hinting or assuming the teen gets it. Make it clear what is okay and what isn't okay.



Why Students Drink or Don't Drink

For those that are familiar with motivational interviewing, think about the good vs. not so good questions. When a parent asks about some good things it will serve a few purposes. It will help lower the teen's resistance to talking about drinking. It will also help engage them in the conversation and keep it going.

What are some of the not so good things about drinking? Sound familiar? This is a good approach to discussing the negative consequences that could result from drinking.

Secondly, discussing why students drink or don't drink will help them think through choices when faced with peer influences and positive reasons to drink.

Alternatives

“There's nothing else to do.” Covering this topic will help the student see that there is more to do socially than drinking. It will also support that the non-drinking alternatives are fun and viable options. It will also show that the parent is willing to help the student find alternatives. Reinforcing the concept covered earlier, the parents are on the same side as the student.

Social Norms

Perceived norms, injunctive norms, social norms. All about the norms. When given the correct data, parents can not only clear up their own (mis)perceived norms, but they can cover these with the teen as well.

PERCEIVED PARENTAL KNOWLEDGE

“When perceived parental approval is low, greater perceived parental knowledge of the child's activities, whereabouts, and associations, is associated with even less approving student attitudes.”

(Hummer, et. Al., 2013)

Parental Monitoring

by David Closson, M.S.

The question was raised "how to monitor the students without becoming a helicopter parent?" There is no consensus as to what behaviors constitute parental "monitoring." Typically it refers to the parent's knowledge of their child's activities, friends, and behaviors.

Research found that the parental knowledge just before college predicted the student's first semester's alcohol use. The second semester's drinking was indirectly influenced through peer selection (Abar et al. 2008).

How does a parent go about getting this knowledge? This is one area that will vary greatly as every parent/child relation is different.

A second aspect is that once the student transitions to college it is even harder for parents to monitor their student's activities. As a part of normal development, the students will move to be more autonomous and independent. Thus, gaining the knowledge becomes harder.

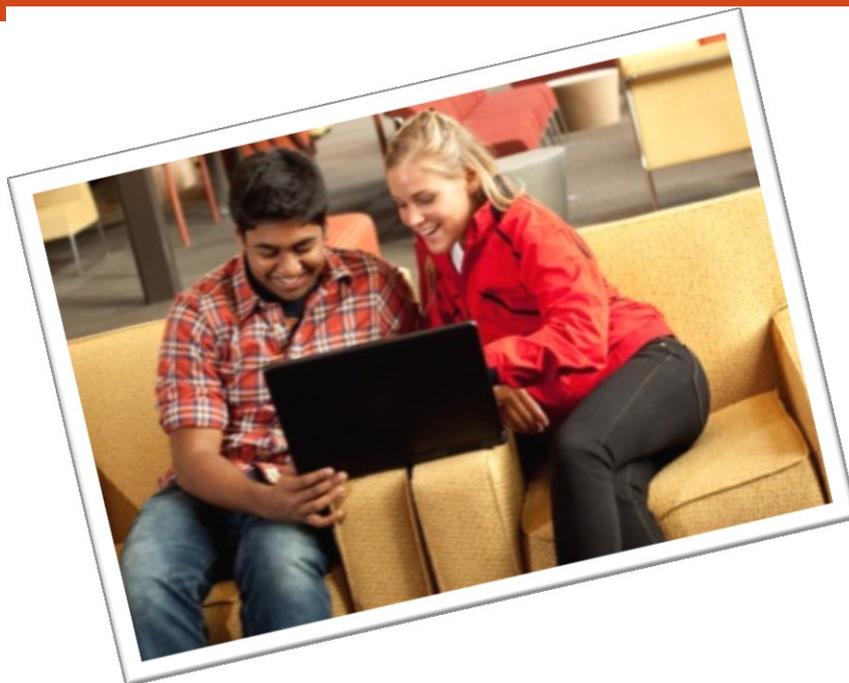
FAST FACT

32%

"Compared to days when students did not communicate with their parents, on days when students communicated for more than 30 minutes, they were 32% less likely to engage in heavy drinking"

There has been some research done that looked into the frequency of communication between the parent and student during their first semester. They found the more a parent would talk to their student both throughout the week and on the weekends had a direct effect on the students drinking behavior.

"Compared to days when students did not communicate with their parents, on days when students communicated for more than 30 minutes, they consumed 20% fewer drinks. On days when students communicated for more than 30 minutes, they were 32% less likely to engage in heavy drinking" (Small et al. 2011).



These conversations were not alcohol specific or serving any purpose other than just talking.

Overall, the students whose parents would communicate consistent expectations, monitor friends and activities would begin drinking later. The same effect was found when parents communicated warmth and affection along with supporting the student as they develop socially. Another result from these actions were that those students have less problematic drinking behavior when they do begin drinking (Small et. al. 2011).

Here is a list of a few ideas for parents:

- Dinner – the parents take the student out to dinner.
- Talking
 - Week days
 - Weekends
- Activities – plan fun activities together such as shopping, weekend trips, and other fun happenings.
- Campus visits
 - Sporting events
 - Other campus activities
- Parents Day – visit the students on the universities parent day and take part in the campus activities.

**This is only a list of suggestions and not meant to be a complete list.*



Examples and Research of Parent Based Interventions

by David Closson, M.S.

Handbook PBI

The most common parent based intervention is sending the parents a handbook in the summer leading up to their child transitioning to college. These can be sent with move in information, orientation information, or as a separate mailing.

These handbooks were designed to do the following:

- 1) Increase the parent's knowledge on college student's alcohol abuse, risk, and possible negative consequences.
- 2) Reinforce parent's confidence that their efforts will make a difference.
- 3) Give strategies to improve alcohol-specific communication.
- 4) Provide strategies on teaching skills to deal with peer pressure.
- 5) Explain parental behaviors that reduce teen drinking i.e. monitoring and disapproval.

Study 1

89% of parents reported being "mostly" or "very" satisfied, and 90% reporting reading "most" or "all" of the handbook.

The handbook was significantly associated with an increase in students' perceptions of parent disapproval for alcohol use at 10 months.

Higher perceived parent disapproval at 10 months was associated with a lower likelihood of transitioning to heavy episodic drinking and consequences.



Study 2

Participants in the PBI group who initiated drinking at ages 14, 16 and 17 reported consuming significantly less alcohol during peak drinking occasions than participants in the control group.

The PBI group who initiated drinking at ages 16 and 17 drank significantly fewer drinks per week.

The PBI group who initiated at age 17 showed a significant reduction in consequences.

Study 3

Participants in the PBI were significantly less likely to transition into drinking status during their freshman year.

The PBI showed less growth over the freshman year in number of drinks per week.



Web-based PBI

Study 4

Examined the effects of a web-based social norms PBI on the parent's intentions to talk to their students about alcohol and their perceived norms.

85% of parents underestimated their own student's alcohol use.

70% of parents underestimated how acceptable their own student believed it is to engage in various drinking behaviors.

Parents were less approving than they were perceived to be.

43% were motivated to have a conversation about the statistics with their student.

22.5% planned to ask their child about his/her use of alcohol.

18.3% planned to find out more about their child's alcohol attitudes.

16.9% planned to initiate more frequent conversations about alcohol.

Study 5

Web-based PBI providing parents with personalized normative feedback.

Parents reported a greater motivation to discuss alcohol with their student.

Male students report discussing more alcohol topics with parents.

Post PNF, the parents estimates of how much their student drank on a typical week and on how many days were closer to the actual norms.

Study 6

Web-based PBI to increase communication and reduce the risk associated with alcohol use among students.

Parents reported a greater increase in discussing protective behaviors and strategies.

The students reported an increase in their use of the protective behaviors as well.

In person presentations

Study 7

In person social norms and alcohol communication tips PBI (1hr session during orientation).

Increased amount of students that abstained from drinking.

Lower percentage of students reported binge drinking.

Increased motivation to have alcohol specific communications with their student.

Evidence of short term effects (6 months).

FAST FACT

85%

"85% of parents underestimated their own student's alcohol use"

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.eiu.edu/ihec

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