

## Welcome!

College is an exciting milestone for both you and your student. It is a time of new experiences, a time of transition, and a time to stay connected. If you have already spoken with your Wake Forest student about alcohol, great; however, it is a good idea to revisit the conversation. You may need to adjust your communication style as your student develops greater independence. If you have not spoken with your college student about drinking, it's never too late to have the conversation. While we are committed to making a difference with our students, we also understand that you are the first line of defense against alcohol misuse and abuse.

Before coming to campus, all first-years will complete the AlcoholEdu for College curriculum. The content on <http://www.everfi.com/alcoholeduforparents> is designed to support your conversations about alcohol to help shape the decisions your student must make in college surrounding alcohol use. It includes helpful resources such as tips on parents' roles in the transition to college, talking to your college student about alcohol, warning signs of an alcohol problem, and links to additional resources.

## Improving Communication

Nationally, 9 in 10 students experiment with alcohol, 7 in 10 drink regularly, and 3 in 10 will be problem drinkers. According to a survey, 75% of Wake Forest students reported consuming alcohol. While alcohol misuse may just seem like part of the college experience, binge-drinking is associated with many negative consequences including academic consequences, unplanned sexual activity, date rape, injuries, and legal trouble. Fortunately, research shows that students whose parents who share firm stances about alcohol use with them are much more likely to practice safer drinking behaviors. Below are some tips to help you have a positive discussion about alcohol with your child.

- Listen – Listen without interrupting or lecturing. Try paraphrasing: “If I’m understanding you correctly, you feel like...” This can help you make sure you understand, while showing your child that you are interested in what they have to say.
- Verbalize Respect – Convey respect to your student by saying things like “I’m proud of you for how you are handling things.” People are more likely to open up when they feel the other person respects them.
- Choose a Good Time – Try to have the conversation when neither of you are rushed or distracted. Make sure you both have time to sit down and talk calmly.
- Appeal to Common Goals – Remind your student that you are on their side. Make sure they know you are only looking out for their health and safety.
- Avoid Communication Stoppers – Single statements such as “Anyone who drives drunk is crazy,” or “No one in this family would ever do that,” can shut down conversation.
- Control Your Emotions – Try to speak in a calm, relaxed voice so you don’t push your student away. Stay focused and keep to the facts.

- Avoid Debate Mode – Try to avoid “You did this” statements. They can make people feel attacked and become defensive. If you feel the conversation is turning into a debate, suggest that you both approach things from a different angle and be willing to stop and try again when both of you can talk calmly and openly.
- Focus on Your Message – Try not to let the conversation drift beyond your central message. Your child will likely be more receptive to you if you aren’t reminding them to clean their room or write thank-you notes at the same time. You don’t want your message to get lost in a long list of demands.
- Prepare - Be ready to receive questions about your own behavior and answer them in constructive ways. This may require some preparation before starting the conversation.

It may be helpful to revisit this conversation periodically throughout the school year. Remember, you know your student better than anyone. Find a communication method and time that works for both of you and make it a regular activity.

Another great resource with tips about how to have these conversations is “College Parents Matter . . . Have the Conversation” produced by the Maryland Collaborative to Reduce College Drinking and Other Problems. The website is: <http://www.collegeparentsmatter.org/index.html>.

### **Talking about Alcohol**

During these conversations, remind your student that nothing, not even coffee, food, a shower, or a nap can make you sober up faster, and that mixing alcohol with any medication from Tylenol to prescribed pain-killers can have serious and dangerous side effects. Additionally, research suggests tolerance to alcohol is 90% hereditary. Talk with your child about any alcoholism in your family as it could put them at increased risk for addiction. More information about how alcohol affects the body can be found at [choices.thrive.wfu.edu/resources](http://choices.thrive.wfu.edu/resources).

Once they move to campus, encourage your student to connect with other students who have common interests. A list of student organizations at Wake Forest can be found at <https://wfu.campuslabs.com/engage/organizations>. Also, brainstorm simple one-liners that can help them get “out” of a peer pressure situation such as “It’s just not for me,” or “I don’t drink.”

### **Warning Signs**

Finally, be aware of some of the warning signs of an alcohol problem. Information can be found on the AlcoholEdu website mentioned above under “warning signs of an alcohol problem.”

If you believe your student may have developed an alcohol problem, share your concern and encourage them to seek help. Do not blame them, but find appropriate treatment. You can call, email, and/or visit the Assistant Director of Wellbeing – Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention for support and resources. If possible, a visit may be warranted. Ask to meet their friends, or attend Family Weekend and other campus events open to parents. We want you to continue to stay actively involved in the life of your student even though they may be away at college.