A Guide for Supporting and Referring Students with Substance Abuse Problems

Alcohol & Drug Awareness Project

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If you would like more information about a specific issue or would like a consultation on a particular situation you may contact:

Alcohol & Drug Awareness Project

Signs that indicate it might be time to intervene:

It's Never Too Early!

• The student appears to be under the influence while in class
• Daily functioning is impaired
• Increased tardiness and absences, especially on Mondays or Fridays
• Decreased attention
• Deterioration in academic performance
• Excessive requests for extensions and special favors
• Deterioration of personal hygiene
• Significant weight loss or gain
• Frequent illness or injury
• Increased forgetfulness
• Poor judgment
• Difficulty with decision-making
• Changes in behavior
• Decreased motivation or energy
• Episodes of irritability, defensiveness, agitation, or unexplained hostility
• Excessive references to alcohol or other drug use; frequent conversations about drinking
• The student or someone else has expressed concerns about their use of alcohol or other drugs

A student does not have to be dependent on alcohol or other drugs to contact ADAP

Adapted from Hampshire College
“Faculty Guide for Supporting and Referring Students”
Students who misuse alcohol or other drugs may experience negative consequences such as poor or lowered academic performance, accidents, legal problems, health problems, risky sexual behaviors, and violence. Faculty and staff have substantial influence on students and are natural role models. Often, faculty and staff are among the first to notice that a student is having personal problems. If you are worried a student may be misusing alcohol or other drugs, you are well positioned to communicate your concerns and to refer the student to the Alcohol and Drug Awareness Project (ADAP). We need your help to reach out to students who may be having difficulty with alcohol or other drugs. You can also contact ADAP confidentially if you have questions about the behavior of someone who you think might have a problem.

A Brief Conversation Goes A LONG WAY

Approaching a Student with a Concern

The following information includes elements that support an effective approach

How to Begin?

• Ensure privacy and choose a time to talk when neither of you is rushed
• Express your care and concern
• Don’t promise absolute confidentiality in all circumstances
• Provide students with precise, verifiable information on their conduct with examples of behavior
• Describe in specific terms the behaviors you have observed that concern you
• Use “I statements” to decrease student defensiveness

Some Suggestions

• Avoid enabling the drinking or drug related behavior (e.g., accepting excuses, pushing back deadlines, or ignoring problems caused by alcohol or other drugs). Shielding a person from drinking or drug related consequences indirectly allows them to continue misusing substances.
• Mention more than one source of help so the student knows there are numerous options both on and off campus, including Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, SMART Recovery, and Al-Anon. Information can be found on the ADAP website.

Additional Thoughts

• Students must take responsibility for changing their own behavior. It is not within your power to “fix” them. However, your care and concern can go a long way to helping them make a decision to change. Reassure the student that you believe in their ability to make needed changes and that there is support for them in this process.
• Even if the student doesn’t respond well or make immediate changes, your concern may motivate them to think more about seeking help and making behavioral changes later on. At some point in the future, the student may approach you or someone else for help, or they may utilize the advice and resources you offered. Change is a process, not an event.
• These can be difficult conversations to have, consider debriefing with someone else after an interaction with a student.

It is not always obvious when a student has an alcohol or drug problem but your actions can make a difference