



MARCH 2014 NEWSLETTER

Worried about Drinking and Spring Break? Parents can use their strong influence even for college students!

By Lise Gervais

Parents sometimes feel like their words fall on deaf ears, but a recent study found that talking to kids about alcohol can lead to lower drinking rates even among college students.

Robert Turrisi, PhD, a psychologist at Penn State University, and colleagues gave parents booster brochures to help them talk to their recent high school graduates about drinking before they left for college. Four months after this intervention, students were drinking less than their peers. In another study, Kim Fromme, PhD, and colleagues at the University of Texas at Austin asked college students to take a survey that assessed family and peer attitudes and level of caring. They found that students who felt that their parents were aware and cared were likely to drink less.

Binge drinking is a serious problem on college campuses and parents are right to be concerned. According to studies quoted by the National Institutes of Health, "About one-quarter of college students report having academic consequences because of their drinking, including missing class, falling behind, doing poorly on exams or papers, and receiving lower grades overall."

Contributing to this is the fact that some colleges don't schedule Friday classes. While this gives students time to work part-time or study, some students start partying after Thursday classes, leading to long weekends where homework gets lost in the haze.

Many colleges have taken steps to curb binge drinking such as greater enforcement, community partnerships, counseling and methods to identify problems early on. For example, the University of Idaho requires freshmen to have a GPA of at least 1.0 to attend a second semester. A GPA that low can be a sign of binge drinking, drug use or untreated illness that keeps students from attending classes and can result in behavioral problems that can be disruptive to other students.

The transition from high school to the reality of college can be jarring.

As students are adjusting to campus life, peers become a stronger influence. In schools where there is an emphasis on athletics and where sororities and fraternities are prevalent, drinking rates tend to be higher. Still students

tend to overestimate how much their classmates are actually drinking and may drink more to try to fit in. Parents can help with a reality check, reminding students of their goals, and just letting them know they care.



It would probably surprise most parents that, according to the

Roper Youth Report, parents are by far the strongest influence on kids aged 13-17 regarding their decisions about drinking. Now we know that influence extends beyond the teen years. Parents who regularly communicate with their college-age children and continue the discussion about alcohol and drugs can help with good decision-making. They may be far away, but still accessible by phone, text, email or social media

Having these kinds of discussions with kids of any age can be difficult for both parent and child, but there is help. The Partnership for A Drug-Free America has a very informative site about the development of the teen brain and how to start a discussion on drinking. Substances Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA.gov) has an interactive video that is worth the time and very helpful. The American Academy of Pediatrics website www.healthychildren.org also has helpful information on talking with kids about alcohol.

For college students, you will want to know about their Spring Break plans and communicate your desire for their safety and well being. Remember... you have more influence than you think!

Turrisi:

<http://www.journalofsubstanceabusetreatment.com/article/S0740-5472%2812%2900469-2/abstract>

Fromme:

<http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=2007-08148-003>

Roper:

<http://www.alcoholstats.com/uploads/InfluencesOnYouthsDecisionsAboutDrinking.pdf>

For more information, see www.healthyalcoholmarket.com Contact Pam Erickson at pam@pamaction.com

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