

Alcohol SMARTS

A Back-to-School Guide for College Students and their Parents

Fall 2001

SPECIAL ISSUE

THE SOBERING CONSEQUENCES
OF HIGH-RISK ALCOHOL USE

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RUTLAND-AREA
RESOURCES
FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS
AND THEIR PARENTS

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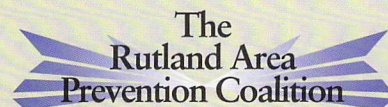


Rutland Regional Medical Center

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COMMUNITY CARE
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Promoting Substance Abuse Prevention throughout Rutland County

IRREPARABLE HARM: High-risk alcohol use and the college career

"Most college students drink in moderation—or choose not to drink at all."

—Christine Dawson, coordinator for the Rutland Area Prevention (RAP) Coalition

Parents of college students are concerned. A recent American Medical Association (AMA) study found that more than 95% of parents polled believe that excessive alcohol consumption is a serious threat to their children. And 85 percent feel that the easy availability of alcohol in college communities contributes to too much drinking.

Their worries are justified: High-risk alcohol use, defined for men as five or more drinks in one session and for women as four or more drinks in one session, can damage or prematurely end a promising college career.

"Most college students drink in moderation—or choose not to drink at all," says Christine Dawson, coordinator for the Rutland Area Prevention (RAP) Coalition. "But those who do engage in high-risk alcohol consumption unwittingly expose themselves to all kinds of dangers."

SOBERING CONSEQUENCES

What are the sobering consequences of problem drinking while at college?

Academic failure. New research shows that even small amounts of alcohol affect college students' ability to learn and remember new information. This can result in a low grade point average or, even worse, an inability to graduate—both of which can affect future opportunities for employment and graduate study.

Sexual health problems. "Alcohol does not cause rape, but it can put people in risky situations," Dawson says. Alcohol can impair communication skills and judgment—and this combination can set up situations in which college students might engage in sexual activity without protection. Such encounters can result in sexually transmitted disease, pregnancy or even date rape. "One in four college women are victims of rape or attempted rape," Dawson says. "Over 75 percent of acquaintance rapes on campus are alcohol related."

Property destruction and violent behavior. People who've had too much to drink can act in unruly or violent ways. Damage to dorms, personal property and the surrounding community have multiple costs—including punishment by the school, possible criminal or legal action, and a strained relationship between the college and its neighbors.

Motor vehicle crashes. A student who drives while intoxicated, or who is a passenger in a vehicle driven by an intoxicated person, risks his or her own life as well as the lives of others on the road. Injury, license suspension, fines, lawsuits and even jail time could result.



A lifelong struggle with chemical dependency.

Alcohol is a legal drug that, when used excessively, can cause addiction: a life-threatening disease characterized by physical dependency on the abused substance. It can also lead to the use of other, illicit drugs. If not diagnosed and treated in a timely manner, it can cause a lifetime of hardship and physical problems ... even death.

A POPULATION AT RISK

Deb Houghton, a RAP coalition community educator, agrees that the risk of alcohol-related problems among college students is great.

"Experts concur that alcohol is the number one health risk for college students," Houghton says. "Studies such as Monitoring the Future and the Core Alcohol and Drug Survey have found that about 70 percent of students report drinking alcohol within the past 30 days."

In fact, college students have a significantly higher risk for alcohol-related problems than almost any population, according to recent research.

For first-year students, that risk is even greater. Why? "I think it's the combination of being away from home for the first time, the need to fit in and the perception that alcohol is an important part of college life," Dawson says. "College students are also some of the primary targets for advertising and promotions from the alcohol industry."

PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Colleges and universities are working with parents, students, community groups and area law enforcement to implement programs aimed at preventing alcohol use problems and heavy drinking among college students. Here in Rutland, the RAP Coalition and Rutland Mental Health Services offer assistance and support to college students and their families. For more information on preventing high-risk alcohol use among college students, or to seek help for a college student who has a drinking problem, contact any of the resources listed on the back page.

Three MUST-DOs for parents of college-age children

Whether your child is just beginning to visit colleges or finishing up those final few courses, you can reduce his or her risk of alcohol and other drug-related problems by staying informed and keeping the lines of communication open. Deb Houghton, a RAP Coalition community educator, offers these three recommendations for parents of college-age children:

1 UNDERSTAND THE REPERCUSSIONS. Know the on-campus alcohol and drug use policies at the school your son or daughter attends, as well as current state and federal laws governing drug and alcohol offenses.

2 USE YOUR RESOURCES. All colleges employ key personnel that can serve as resources regarding campus drug and alcohol issues. "Campus safety and security officers, the Dean of Students, Health Services and Counseling, Resident Assistants, Resident Directors and Peer Counselors can provide information, direction, additional resources and support," Houghton says. She also suggests inquiring about the working relationship between on-campus security and local law enforcement.

3 KNOW THE ACTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES. Research the strategies that college and community personnel are using to counter alcohol- and other drug-related health risks. Get the facts on alcohol-free leisure activities, substance-free housing options and efforts to limit on-campus alcohol and tobacco advertising. Familiarize yourself with current drug trends, as well as attitudes about drug use.

What's the best way to prevent your college-age son or daughter from becoming a high-risk alcohol user? "Parents can continue to stay connected to their children by being good listeners and role models," says Houghton. Praise your son or daughter whenever he or she makes positive, healthy choices, and encourage him or her to have honest conversations about life as a college student, where alcohol is the number one health risk. Students who feel their alcohol use might upset their parents are much more likely to abstain or use infrequently than those whose parents avoid the discussion altogether.

Alcohol + Sex = A lethal combination

For many, the newfound independence experienced while away at college presents new opportunities and freedoms. On their own for the very first time, students may make a new group of friends, participate in new activities or hobbies, try drugs or alcohol, or experiment with sexual activity.

Combine alcohol with any of those—especially sex—and the situation can turn dangerous, even deadly.

"Our society is finally starting to become aware that the combination of alcohol and getting behind the wheel of a car is a lethal combination," says Dianna Bassett, RN, a public health nurse for the Vermont Department of Health. "What we need to realize is that alcohol and unprotected sex can be just as life-changing."

According to Bassett, recent research reported on thebody.com cites that 2 people in the 13- to 24-year-old age group contract HIV, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus, every hour. (HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.) "Half of all new infections of HIV are occurring in folks under 25, including teenagers and people of college age," she says. "Studies show

that when people drink alcohol, they are less likely to use birth control. That can lead to greater risk of unplanned pregnancy and STDs [sexually transmitted diseases]." Often, people infected with STDs, including HIV, don't see symptoms until years after their exposure ... so they may risk infecting others, as well.

What should you do if your college-age child tells you he or she has been involved in an unplanned, or even violent, sexual encounter—whether or not it involved alcohol use? "Stay calm, and don't be judgmental," advises Bassett. If STDs or pregnancy are a concern, encourage your child to visit a family doctor, gynecologist or family planning clinic for testing and any necessary treatment.

If a rape has occurred, your child needs immediate medical and legal attention. Rape victims should report to the nearest hospital emergency room or police department and should not shower, Bassett explains.

In either case, don't underestimate how much your help may be needed, and the courage it may have taken for your child to contact you. "You could offer to go along, be a support person," Bassett adds.

Life-saving rules for college partiers

If you're going to a party or event where alcohol may play a role in the evening's entertainment, keep these rules for responsible drinking in mind.

IF YOU'RE UNDER 21 ...

Don't drink. Period. Underage drinking is against the law and carries with it severe penalties.

IF YOU'RE 21 OR OLDER ...

Pace yourself and limit the amount you drink. It's okay to refuse a drink if you don't really want one. Know your limits, and don't overdo it. Set the pace for moderate drinking with one drink per hour, and no more than three drinks per day. Never drink daily.

Avoid drinking games, "doing shots," or "chugging" drinks. Though these common party activities may seem like they're all in good fun, they can quickly lead to your losing track of your alcohol intake and drinking more than your body can handle.

Alternate between nonalcoholic and alcoholic drinks to slow and limit your alcohol intake.

If you don't know what's in it, don't drink it. Punches and mixed drinks can contain unknown amounts of alcohol. Mix your own drinks to control their alcohol content.

Don't leave your drink unattended. An unwatched drink can lead to trouble. Both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages can be "spiked" with alcohol or even worse, drugs. Rohophyl, a tasteless and colorless drug sometimes called "The Date Rape Drug," can be slipped into a drink undetected ... and can render its victim severely impaired and unable to move.

Never drink and drive. Appoint a designated driver, someone who commits to drinking no alcohol during the course of the evening, before you go out. And for your own safety, never get into a car with a driver who's been drinking.

Colleges take aim at problem drinking

It's in a college's best interest to keep its students alcohol-free. So it's no surprise that schools nationwide are educating students and their parents about the dangers of high-risk alcohol use.

The myth of college alcohol use

"There's a whole mythology involved with college," explains Neil Carlson, Director of Student Activities for Rutland's College of St. Joseph. "The myth is that everyone's doing it. 'Party 'til you drop.' But in reality, between a quarter and a third of college students don't drink at all, and the majority of them are not problem drinkers."

"People tend to think there's a lot more [alcohol] use than there really is," says John D'Esposito, an investigator and educator with the Vermont Department of Liquor Control who trains college personnel, students and alcohol retailers on alcohol-related laws. "But when you're new to the college environment, you're thrown in the cauldron with everyone else—and you want to do what people suggest is appropriate behavior. If you're trying to fit in, and the word is that 'everyone's doing it,' then drinking seems like the 'normal' thing to do."

Redefining 'normal' behavior

A practice called "Norms Marketing," in which colleges spread the word about *actual* college drinking trends, aims to normalize alcohol-free behavior and activities ... and redefine college life.

"Colleges are trying to change the culture of drinking," says D'Esposito. "It used to be that Thursday was the start of the

weekend—you'd party Thursday night and skip your Friday classes. Now colleges are trying to program their most popular classes for Friday mornings. And they're offering alcohol-free 'fun clubs,' alternative activities, and substance-free housing. People need to know that those options are available."

Convincing students that drinking isn't the status quo is a continual challenge, Carlson explains. Orientation sessions, dorm discussions, alcohol-free activities and more are just some of the ways the College of St. Joseph educates students about alternatives. "We emphasize that drinking when you're under 21 is illegal, and that if we catch you, we bag you. But we do preventive work as well."

What types of preventive messages do colleges send?

"For one, that it's okay to abstain," Carlson says. "And to pay attention. Is everyone else really getting drunk all the time? You never hear about a party unless it's wild and crazy. It's perfectly okay to just have quiet time or an interesting conversation. In fact, that's more normal, in reality, than 'insane' partying."

"You can also use curriculum infusion to tie the subject of alcohol use and abuse into the academic environment," adds D'Esposito. "History, math, biology, community health ... messages in class reinforce the costs of alcohol to community and society."

Many colleges choose to supplement existing alcohol education programs with public service announcements in student newspapers, on college radio and television, and via e-mail.

Rutland-area resources for college students and their parents

Substance abuse prevention, consultation, education and training

The Rutland Area Prevention Coalition

802-775-4199
rapco@together.net

The Rutland Area Prevention (RAP) Coalition collaborates with schools, civic and community organizations, business, clergy, parents, youth and all interested individuals to provide education, support and resources for the prevention of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse. Through education and promotion of healthy lifestyle choices, the RAP Coalition mobilizes the community in the prevention of substance abuse.

Alcohol Smarts is published as a community service by the Rutland Area Prevention Coalition, Rutland Mental Health Services, Rutland Community Programs and Rutland Regional Medical Center. The information presented is intended for guidance only and does not replace professional medical, legal or other advice.

Assessment • school-based clinicians and student assistance programs • intensive outpatient therapy with family education • prevention and case management services

Rutland Mental Health Services

802-747-7696
Toll-free 1-877-430-2273
CRISIS LINE 802-775-1000
78 South Main St.
P.O. Box 222
Rutland, VT 05702-0222

Rutland Mental Health Services partners with Rutland Regional Medical Center to deliver substance abuse and mental health services. Together, they provide personalized care and treatment plans for adolescents and others struggling to overcome chemical dependency.

Resources, reading materials and Internet access

The Education and Wellness Center

802-775-4314
78 South Main St.
Rutland, VT 05702-0222

Fall and Winter Hours:
Mon. and Wed. 11 am–2 pm
Thurs. 8:30 am–11 am
and 3:30 pm–5:30 pm
or by appointment

The Education and Wellness Center, conveniently located adjacent to the RAP Coalition offices, provides public access to the combined resources of the RAP Coalition and the Healthy Youth Resource Network. Visitors to the Center will find materials on all aspects of healthy living, including stress management, meditation, yoga, parenting, teaching materials, and curricula on substance abuse prevention, Resiliency and Asset Development™ and other health topics. The Center also offers a video viewing room and Internet access for electronic research into other subject matter, as well as a knowledgeable staff for in-person assistance.

Emergency and Inpatient Care

Rutland Regional Medical Center

160 Allen Street
Rutland, VT 05701
802-775-7111

As Vermont's second-largest health care facility, Rutland Regional Medical Center provides 24-hour-a-day emergency services and medical treatment.

**In an emergency,
call 24 hours a day:
775-1000
CRISIS AND
EMERGENCY HOTLINE**