

Risky Choices

Candid Conversations With Your College Student

Congratulations! If your son or daughter has made it to college, you have already done a great job of giving them a solid foundation on which to build their lives. Now you have an opportunity to keep that positive momentum going. While your student may appear independent and well-equipped for his college experience, he will still need your guidance as he faces choices that may be risky to his health and wellness.

According to Susquehanna University students, the No. 1 factor impacting a student's choice to drink or use other drugs is their parents. Your child actually cares what you think! Therefore, keeping the dialog going with your student after you've launched him into his college career can make a positive difference. Following are some suggestions for keeping the lines of communication open as your child is adjusting to college life:

- 1) Be clear about what your stance is on alcohol and other drug use. Holding tuition out as an incentive to not consume alcohol or other drugs is not necessarily helpful. However, you can talk about the natural consequences that occur when people make poor choices.
- 2) Be realistic. Alcohol is available and consumed in college. However, 72 percent of Susquehanna students acknowledge that, while they do consume alcohol, most of them are safe and responsible with their use.* Discuss what it means to be safe and responsible (other than not drinking if they are under 21 years old).
- 3) Discuss some of the misperceptions of college drinking and drug use. For example, the rate of alcohol consumption at Susquehanna has gradually been declining since 2001 and more students are drinking less.* In other words, not all college students drink. In fact, most students are more interested in the opportunity for socializing than the actual drinking.
- 4) Scare tactics may seem effective in the short term, but you will get further by treating your child like an adult. Challenge her to think about what her goals are and how alcohol and other drug use would impact those goals.
- 5) Listening is always a good thing and highly encouraged. There will be things your child tells you that may be difficult to hear but reacting emotionally is not helpful. Encourage him to tell you more about what he thought, felt or experienced and how this has made a difference in his life.
- 6) Brief, but frequent conversations about risk-taking behavior will make the most impact. Engaging your child in what feels like a lengthy lecture will likely discourage her from entering into an adult conversation with you.

As these conversations advance, you may find them to be educational and meaningful for both you and your child. However, don't expect the conversations to go smoothly all the time. There will be rough spots, but hang in there and know that these are only growing pains. You and your student can get through them.

*Susquehanna University Core Survey, 2008