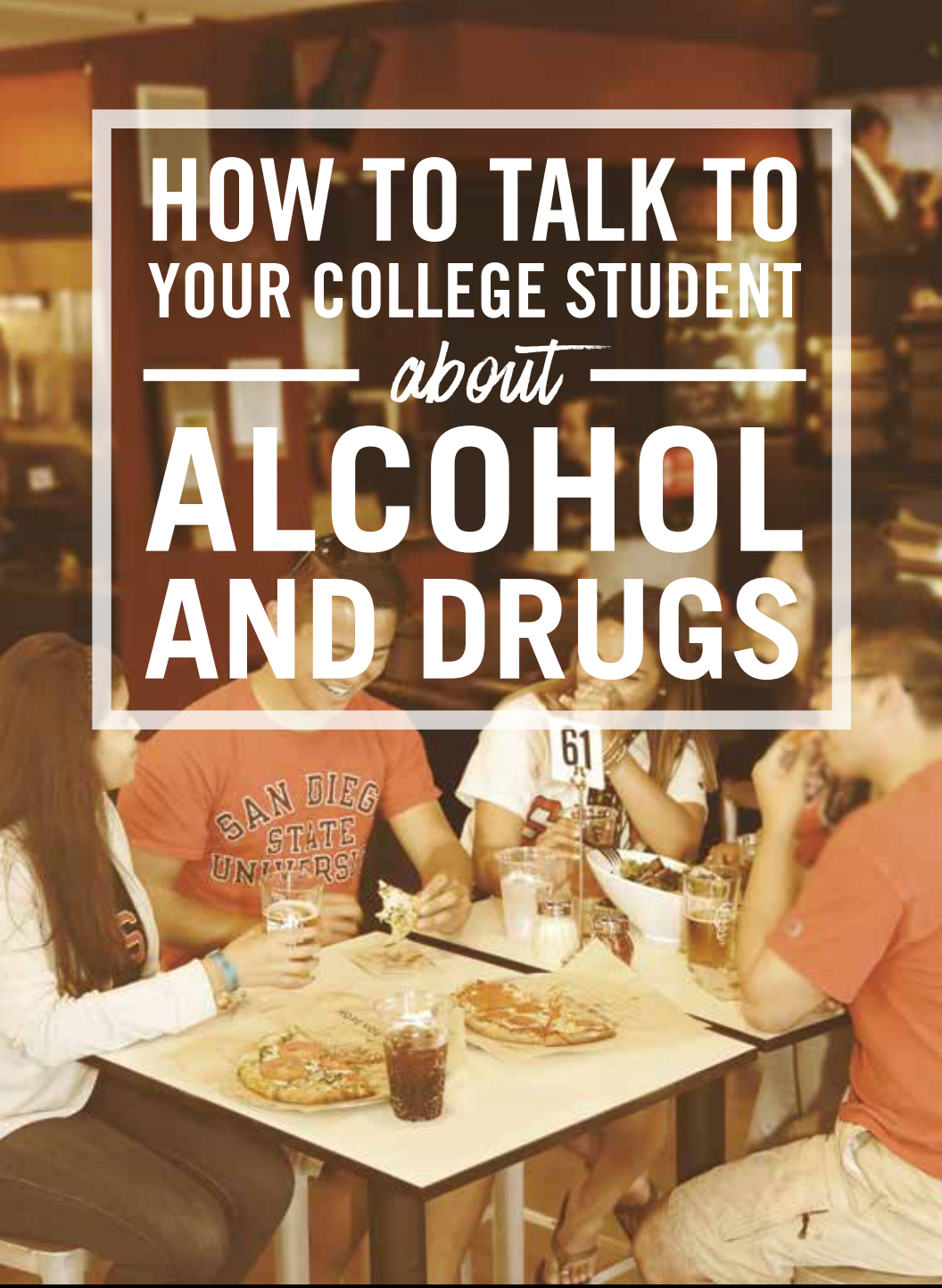

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR COLLEGE STUDENT *about* ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY
Division of Student Affairs

HOW
WHY
WHEN
WHAT
WHO

HOW to talk to your college student about alcohol and other drugs

Have you heard that drinking in college is a rite of passage with its most serious consequence being a nasty hangover?

Or that parents lose all power or influence once their child enters college?

Or that "everyone" drinks heavily in college?

Students, parents, faculty, staff, and community members tend to overestimate alcohol use in college in general, as well as at SDSU. You may be surprised to know that SDSU's rates of alcohol use are below the national average! It is important that you, as a parent, do not accept heavy drinking as "normal" and something that you cannot impact. You are a vital source of influence and an important partner in our comprehensive approach to alcohol and other drug use on campus. Every experience at SDSU is educational, whether that experience happens inside or outside of the classroom.

Research has shown that open, two-way communication between parents and their students can greatly reduce students' heavy drinking.

The first weeks of the first semester of college are critical to the academic success of a new student. Because heavy alcohol use and drug use can complicate and negatively affect a student's transition, it is an important time to begin talking with your student about the consequences of alcohol and other drug use. We also recommend continuing to have conversations periodically throughout the year.

The information in this pamphlet is provided to assist you in talking with your student as he or she begins this critical new phase of life as a student at San Diego State University. This booklet should also familiarize you with some of the innovative and internationally recognized ways in which we address these concerns.

In an effort to assist students in understanding the impact of alcohol use and to support healthy choices, all incoming freshmen and new transfer students are required to complete the Alcohol eCHECKUP TO GO (*www.sdsu.edu/e-chug*), an online alcohol program, which provides students with personalized feedback about their own

use of alcohol and correct misconceptions about typical alcohol use by students at SDSU and other universities across the country. Students will need to complete the eCHECKUP TO GO during their first semester at SDSU. They will be able to do this confidentially.

WHY should I talk to my student about alcohol and other drugs?

Your lifelong relationship with your student means that you have tremendous influence over the decisions he or she makes. This influence will continue even after your student has started college. Even though he or she is on the brink of adulthood, your college-bound student still looks to you for guidance and support. You are a primary influence in your student's life and can create healthy and realistic expectations about behaviors around the use of alcohol and other drugs. We encourage you to talk with your student about your expectations regarding drug and alcohol use and to continue the dialogue throughout their time at SDSU. Although students may not bring up the topic, we encourage you to address it, as research shows that parents influence students' alcohol-related beliefs.

WHEN should I talk to my student about alcohol and other drugs?

The conversations should start now! Transitioning to college can be stressful. Your student will be adjusting to a new environment, new social situations, and will have new opportunities to make healthy decisions. Be proactive and talk to them about the difficult decisions they will have to make when it comes to alcohol and other drugs. New college students are often homesick and, while wrestling with a desire to fit in, can be easily influenced by others. Having conversations about alcohol and drugs before they leave home helps prepare students to make positive decisions.

Continue these conversations throughout your student's time at SDSU. Pay attention to your student's experiences and activities during the crucial first six weeks on campus, as making poor choices regarding alcohol and drug use can negatively impact your student's success at college. Continue to talk about the challenging situations that are

bound to come up from time-to-time. Ask about the decisions they have made and support healthy choices. Each time your student comes home, continue these conversations and ask questions. Be ready for a new, somewhat more mature, version of your child to walk through your door – bearing dirty laundry, of course.

HOW do I start a conversation about alcohol and other drugs?

SETTING THE TONE

- Be prepared to establish an ongoing conversation, not a one-time speech.
- Evaluate and be willing to articulate your own views about alcohol and other drug use.
- Avoid contradictions between your words and your actions.
- Exchange information face-to-face if possible, but also call, email or text message your student.
- Make it your family's goal to talk openly and honestly about these topics.
- Listen to your student in a non-judgmental manner. Keep an open mind and remain calm even if your student asks you questions or tells you about a situation that shocks you. Be careful not to judge or express anger about small "behavior lapses" – if your student feels you disapprove, he or she may not feel comfortable sharing with you in the future.
- Allow your student to express fears and concerns without your interruption. By putting your emotions aside and listening, you may learn a lot that will help you guide your student.

WHAT TO ASK

- Ask often about academics, roommates, your student's social/leisure time activities, and drinking and social behavior of roommates and friends. While your student might hesitate to talk about their own behaviors, talking about their friends will open the door for you to have conversations about healthy behavior.
- Ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer. If there is something that you want to know, ask.

WHAT should I say (or not say) to my student about alcohol and other drugs?

WHAT TO SAY

- Prior to leaving for college and during the first six weeks, create hypothetical situations: How would you handle it if your roommate drinks too much? What would you do if you found someone passed out? What if someone offers you a drink and you do not know what is in it? How will you ensure that you are safe?
- Clearly state your expectations with regard to alcohol.
- Expand the conversation to include academic success, personal safety, sexual activity, and drugs other than alcohol.
- Stress to your student the importance of looking out for others and knowing when to get help.
- Know the signs of overintoxication and that it can be fatal.
- Know that mixing alcohol with other drugs may intensify these effects.
- Let him or her know that at SDSU there are thousands of students who choose not to drink or use drugs at all.
- Inappropriate use of alcohol and other drugs is often a sign of deeper issues; don't be afraid to ask your student what is going on.
- If they are having a problem with alcohol or other drugs, be prepared to refer them to resources on campus. Be familiar with the help that is available at SDSU (see "For More Information" in this brochure).
- Tell your student to stand up for his or her right to a safe campus environment. Students who do not drink can be affected by the behavior of those who do. Encourage your student to discuss the problem with the appropriate staff member and/or resource available on campus (see "For More Information").
- Look for and create "teachable moments" such as television shows or clips, news, or newspapers/magazines that deal with substance use.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

- Avoid telling tales of drinking exploits from your own college years. Entertaining your student with stories of drinking back in the "good old days" just makes it sound like "everyone does it." In fact, a lot of students choose not to drink excessively or use illegal drugs. Let your student choose that path if they wish to do so.
- The "I'm your parent and I have the right to know" questions can be frustrating for your student. It is a good idea to talk about communication guidelines ahead of time to establish expectations on which you can all agree.
- Do not be overly alarmed about emotional phone calls or letters. After unloading problems, students usually feel better. Serve as a sounding board for your student and do not overreact to all problems. If problems are serious or out of character, resources for students and parents are available on campus.

WHO can help me talk to my student about alcohol and other drugs?

Refer to the resource section on the back cover of this pamphlet for guidance when needing assistance for your student with alcohol or other drugs. Resources are also available to assist parents whose student might have a problem with alcohol or other drugs.

COLLEGE DRINKING

There are many stereotypes of the college student; sadly, one stereotype is the heavy drinker. Though most students do not engage in the type of frequent, heavy drinking characterized in popular media, research does tell us that a substantial minority does. In fact, nationally about 40 percent of college students report a recent episode of drinking five or more drinks in one sitting.

Such drinking causes consequences; more than 1,800 college students die each year in alcohol-related incidents. **Most of those deaths stem from vehicle crashes.** Another 500,000 are injured from alcohol-related incidents. We also know that alcohol is often present when

instances of sexual assault and fights occur, and is also associated with academic problems some students experience.

There are legal consequences to consider as well. Since most college students in the U.S. are under the age of 21, possession and consumption of alcohol may place the student at risk for arrest or citation. Driving drunk also can be a costly mistake, with fines and driving restrictions common penalties for DUIs across the nation.

At SDSU, we are fortunate to have a lower rate of heavy drinking than the national average. About 70 percent of our students report no recent episodes of heavy drinking. However, that is not to say that alcohol is not a serious problem for some of our students. Sadly, we have experienced some tragic consequences of alcohol abuse. Heavy drinking at parties, especially in the neighborhood around campus, has also led to conflict between our students and campus neighbors. Noise violations, vandalism and disruptive behavior are serious concerns tied to alcohol use among our students.

OTHER DRUGS

While alcohol is the most commonly abused substance on college campuses, other drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and ecstasy/molly are present at colleges across the nation. Each drug has its own particular effect on the body and poses its own unique risks, in addition to the possibility of developing dependence. **Marijuana has been shown to cause impairments that make driving hazardous.** Both cocaine and ecstasy can cause organ damage and pose overdose or reaction risks that can be fatal.

CANNABIS/MARIJUANA

The State of California has made cannabis (AKA marijuana) legal for adults 21 and over, and for medical use. There remain restrictions on use in public, impaired driving and unlicensed sales. San Diego State University, like all universities that accept Federal funds, continues to prohibit the possession and use of cannabis on University property (including residence halls), and in connection with any University-sponsored or sanctioned activity. This applies to any use of cannabis (adult use and medical use).

Even with the change in legal status, the majority of SDSU students do

not use cannabis. And those that do tend to report very infrequent use. This is important, because recent research tells us that college students who use cannabis are more likely to have gaps in their enrollment and, at times, not complete their degrees.

Speaking to your student about the laws and SDSU policies around cannabis can help assure they aren't confused by the state's legal status. Set out your expectations about cannabis use, and let them know that there can be negative effects. Help them understand the actual rates of use at SDSU. Most students have never used other drugs.

In the past year:

- 55 percent have not used any marijuana
- 89 percent have not used any cocaine
- 87 percent have not used any ecstasy
- 97 percent have not used any methamphetamine

It's important that students know that while they may feel pressured to use illegal drugs, most students resist and avoid any use. And over 4 out of 5 SDSU students have not used any marijuana in the last 30 days.

PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE ABUSE

There is no question that our nation is experiencing a growing problem with prescription medicine abuse. This problem extends well beyond college campuses and includes high school age youth as well as adults. Pain medications, muscle relaxants, and stimulants are among those being abused. Whether they are used to get high, to recover from a bad night, or as a study aid, use of these medicines can lead to serious medical consequences. Medicines are placed under prescription controls because the medical community has identified significant, possibly life-threatening effects if care is not taken in how they are administered.

Students who take prescription medicines without a valid prescription are at heightened risk for developing dependency. Also, these medications can be very dangerous when mixed with other drugs or alcohol; fatal consequences can occur. Overdose is also a serious risk and can lead to deaths. Again, though about 90 percent of SDSU students have not used a drug like Oxycontin, Ritalin, Adderall or

Vicodin without a prescription, the consequences of such use can be so harmful that it is important students are told that just because something is a medicine doesn't mean it is safe.

TIPS FOR PARENTS regarding fraternity and sorority activities

San Diego State University has a vibrant fraternity/sorority ("Greek") community with nearly 50 chapters, including both general and culturally based chapters. These organizations provide opportunities for friendship, leadership, campus involvement, community service and recreation. Although there is much more to the fraternity and sorority community than partying, members of social organizations sometimes engage in high risk activities. Students considering joining a Greek-lettered organization should ask appropriate questions and join an organization that reflects their own interests and values. Check the SDSU Fraternity & Sorority Life website (*greeklife.sdsu.edu*) to make sure the organization your student joins is recognized and is in good standing with the university. If your student joins a fraternity or sorority, request contact information for the faculty/staff and/or volunteer alumni advisors for the chapter and feel free to contact the advisor if you have concerns.

HOUSING

Most SDSU fraternities and sororities and a couple of culturally based fraternities occupy chapter houses. Fraternity and sorority housing is private and not considered to be on-campus housing. The national policies of the sororities require that their houses be alcohol-free, and they also require a live-in house director. Most fraternity houses are not required to be alcohol-free, and fraternities do not have live-in advisors or staff, although there are volunteer alumni advisors who oversee the chapters.

ALCOHOL

Many fraternity and sorority events, such as formal dances, are held at licensed establishments such as hotels. Buses are provided and all members and guests are required to ride on the bus in order to prevent students driving after drinking. For students under the age

of 21, drinking is against the law and against campus policy, even at fraternity parties.

Research at SDSU and other institutions demonstrates that binge drinking and recreational drug use is higher for fraternity and sorority members. We encourage you to have frank discussions with your student about peer pressure and moderation. All prospective fraternity and sorority members are required to complete a brief online course and quiz to educate them on alcohol, drugs, hazing and campus policies pertaining to fraternity and sorority life in order to be eligible to join.

Although hard alcohol (liquor) is not permitted at fraternity parties held at chapter houses, the policy is difficult to enforce and several chapters have been sanctioned for violations of the policy. Virtually all instances of alcohol poisoning stemming from off-campus parties are the result of students drinking hard alcohol (especially when they are drinking straight shots and playing drinking games). Discuss this danger with your student.

For safety, students who attend fraternity or other parties should be encouraged to arrive, stay and leave in a group so they can watch out for one another. Drinks should never be left unattended.

Recruitment and new member activities such as initiation and big brother/sister events are required to be dry. Information about other fraternity and sorority alcohol and hazing policies can be found on the Parents Resources section of the SDSU Fraternity & Sorority Life website (*greeklife.sdsu.edu*). If you have questions or become aware that a chapter is not in compliance, you are encouraged to discuss the matter with the Assistant Director of Student Life & Leadership for Fraternity & Sorority Life at (619) 594-5221 or *greeklife@sdsu.edu*. If you discover evidence of hazing, you can also make an anonymous call to the national hazing hotline, 1-888-NOT-HAZE, where the call will be referred to the appropriate national headquarters.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

If you would like more information about student alcohol and drug use, you may contact the following SDSU offices:

Counseling & Psychological Services
(619) 594-5220

Information about alcohol and other drug prevention and intervention programs available to SDSU students, as well as consultation services for students, parents, staff and faculty who are concerned about an SDSU student.
www.go.sdsu/student_affairs/cps

Well-being & Health Promotion
(619) 594-4133

Information on prevention programs, campus policies and services related to alcohol and other drugs.
healthpromotion.sdsu.edu

SDSU Fraternity and Sorority Life
(619) 594-5221

Information about fraternity and sorority alcohol and hazing policies.
www.greeklife.sdsu.edu

Residential Education Office
(619) 594-5742

Information about alcohol policies or alcohol-related concerns in the residence halls.
www.sdsu.edu/housing

USEFUL WEB LINKS:

"What Parents Need To Know About College Drinking"

- tips to help parents learn more about the consequences of harmful and underage college drinking, factors that may affect it, and ways they can help.
www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/ParentsandStudents/Parents/Default.aspx

The Alcohol eCHECKUP TO GO

- an interactive web program that provides feedback about students' use of alcohol and drinking patterns.
www.sdsu.edu/e-chug

The Marijuana eCHECKUP TO GO

- a marijuana-specific tool that provides feedback about students' use of marijuana.
www.sdsu.edu/e-toke

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.drugabuse.gov

County of San Diego Health & Human Services Alcohol and Drug Services (ADS)

- provides an integrated system of community-based alcohol and other drug prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery services throughout San Diego County.
www.sdcounty.ca.gov/hhsa/programs/bhs/alcohol_drug_services

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