

RA Alcohol Information Guide

What's the Need?

While not all college students drink (and many of those who do choose to drink, do so in moderation), consequences of high-risk drinking can be devastating for college students, their families and friends, and college communities at large. It is important to consider all students and their choices around alcohol when it comes to alcohol-related messaging and programming – providing risk reduction information for those who choose to drink and supporting those who choose not to drink for whatever reason, by not inadvertently normalizing alcohol use in programming and messaging and providing plenty of alternative, sober events.

How You Can Help with Alcohol Messaging:

Unhelpful Messages/Approaches	Why?	Helpful Messages/Approaches
"Its college – everyone drinks!"	Reinforcing the misperception that "everyone drinks in college" is very unhelpful. Social norms have a significant influence on individual behavior, so it is important to present data on actual trends. Additionally, statements that normalize substance use can be isolating for students on our campus who are in recovery.	Not all college students drink. At NAU, 28% of students say they don't drink and never have. Most of the students who do drink, typically do so in a lower-risk way, meaning following healthy drinking guidelines and using risk reduction strategies like pacing drinks to one or fewer per hour.
"Work hard, play hard!"	Messages like this can promote dangerous drinking behaviors. Research has indicated that excessive drinking is correlated with short- and long-term academic, health, and social impacts.	Encourage your residence to strive for balance. Students should prioritize their mental and physical health and work towards balance in their lives.
Programs that inadvertently normalize high-risk alcohol use (e.g. "Cupcake Wasted" program – drinking games played with cupcakes instead of alcohol).	While programs like this probably seem harmless, they contribute to the normalization of drinking games and more generally, drinking by college students.	Evidence-based approaches should be used to create programming (see below for some ideas!).

The Basics:

- One standard drink is equal to any of the following:
 - 12 ounces of regular beer
 - 5 ounces of wine
 - 1.5 ounces of hard alcohol (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [NIAAA], 2015).
- Binge drinking is defined as:
 - Males: 5 or more drinks per day
 - Females: 4 or more drinks per day (NIAAA, 2015)
- Low-risk drinking is defined as:
 - Males: No more than 4 drinks per *and* no more than 14 per week
 - Females: No more than 3 drinks per day *and* no more than 7 per week (NIAAA, 2015)

- In addition to staying within the low-risk drinking guidelines outlined above, people who choose to drink can use the following risk reduction strategies to help them stay safe :
 - Use a designated sober driver
 - Pace drinks to one or fewer per hour
 - Eat before and during drinking
 - Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages
 - Keep track of how much you consume by counting “standard drinks”
 - Don’t mix alcohol with other substances
 - Never leave your drink unattended
 - High-risk drinking by college students is a significant public health problem. Each year there are estimated to be thousands of incidents of alcohol-related physical and sexual assaults and deaths among college students (NIAAA, 2015).
 - Students who binge drink frequently are more likely than non-binge drinkers to: miss class, fall behind in school, receive lower grades, engage in unplanned sexual activity and fail to use protection against pregnancy or STIs, get in trouble with campus police, and drive after drinking (NIAAA, 2015).
 - In the long-term, binge drinking can lead to: liver damage, heart disease, cancer, pancreatitis, structural and functional brain changes resulting in changes in mood and behavior, impaired cognition and coordination (NIAAA, 2015).
 - Binge drinking can also have “secondhand effects” on others, including:
 - Interruptions to study or sleep
 - Being insulted or humiliated
 - Having a serious argument
 - Being physically or sexually assaulted
 - Receiving unwanted sexual advances
 - Experiencing personal property damage
 - Alcohol poisoning is a potential medical emergency and should be treated as such. It is important to be able to recognize the signs of alcohol poisoning and know what steps to take to help. Signs of alcohol poisoning can be remembered using the CUPS acronym:
 - **C**old skin
 - **U**nresponsive
 - **P**uking
 - **S**low breathing
- If you notice any of these symptoms, don’t hesitate to take action and get help:
- Turn the person on their side
 - Do not leave them alone
 - Call 911

Putting it Into Practice:

- Create your own version of our “20 Fun Things to do Without Alcohol or Drugs” handout on a bulletin board. Put together a list of fun, free, and substance-free things to do on campus and around town. You could even plan to do some (or all!) of the activities on your list with the residents in your hall.
- Set up laptops and have people complete ScreenU Alcohol (find it here: nau.edu/screenu), a free, confidential, online screening tool that assesses risk and provides resources for students thinking about making a change around their drinking.
- Invite the Collegiate Recovery Program to host a Recovery 101 workshop. In this workshop you and your residents can learn more about how to help a friend who is struggling with their substance use and how best to support those in recovery. The workshop also includes stories from NAU students in recovery.

Reliable Sources:

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism – College Drinking Factsheet: <https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/media/collegedrinkingFactSheet.pdf>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens – Alcohol: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/drug-facts/alcohol>
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism – Alcohol and You: An Interactive Body: <https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/SpecialFeatures/interactiveBody.aspx>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Binge Drinking Factsheet: <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/binge-drinking.htm>