

• “Mind your own business!” Calmly and caringly share how the problem is affecting your life as well.

Relief: Some people feel relieved—they can stop pretending everything is all right. However...expressed relief may come hours, days, or years later.

Admission of Problem: The person may be able to admit something is really wrong, but don't count on it or view your attempt at talking as a failure if admission of the problem is not achieved. Every drop in the bucket adds up over time.

REMEMBER ...

If you're worried about a friend's drinking/drug use, don't be afraid to bring it up. Although friends often want to protect friends from harm, not saying anything simply enables the behavior and makes it worse by removing consequences.

This discussion is likely to be difficult and may take several conversations. It is not necessary that everything be said at once.

Your friend may refuse help even after repeated attempts. Don't travel this path alone! It is important to consult with a professional about what to do next.

Make no promises of confidentiality during the conversation, since you will likely need to talk with others for your own support or the support of your friend.

Your efforts are valuable. You may be one of several people talking with your friend and it makes a difference, even if it doesn't appear so right away!

Change takes time. Continue to be supportive of your friend. Avoid taking on the role of counselor or alcohol/drug monitor. Instead, ask your friend how involved s/he would like you to be and how you can be helpful to him/her.

Take care of yourself. You may have feelings of anger, sadness, loss or fear that would be helpful to share with someone. Consider seeking additional support through family, friends, clergy or mental health professionals about your situation.

RESOURCES

On-Grounds Support

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/caps.html
434-243-5150

Mary D. Ainsworth Psychological Clinic

www.virginia.edu/~psych/ainsworth
434-982-4737

Maxine Platzer Lynn Women's Center

<http://womenscenter.virginia.edu/>
434-982-2361

Hoos in Recovery (student group)

www.virginia.edu/hoosinrecovery

Off-Grounds Support

Alcoholics Anonymous

<http://jeffersonfob.wordpress.com/>
434-293-6565

Narcotics Anonymous

<http://piedmontvana.org/>
434-979-8298.

TALKING TO A FRIEND WITH AN ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG USE PROBLEM

The Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How to Help



Adapted from: How to Help A Friend with an Eating Disorder; UVa Coalition on Eating Disorders and Exercise Concerns

WHO

The individual closest to the person of concern is the best person to initiate the conversation. Even small groups can be intimidating.

It may be helpful to talk with your friends or even consult with a professional before speaking with the person.

WHERE/WHEN

Choose a private space and allow plenty of time for discussion.

Approach your friend after you have considered what you want to say. Practicing or writing down your thoughts in advance may help reduce your anxiety.

Don't try to talk to your friend when s/he is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

WHY

Reflect upon your reasons for wanting to talk with your friend, and clearly plan out your goals.

- Concern for your friend's health?
- A desire to improve the relationship?
- A desire to have your friend know that you care?
- Frustration for the way your friend's behavior affects others or your physical space?

WHAT TO SAY

Don't assume you know what your friend is experiencing. Emphasize his/her autonomy and freedom to make choices, but balance this with feedback on how his/her behavior is impacting others.

Share your feelings using "I" statements.

- "I'm concerned about your health and worried that you are having difficulty taking care of yourself."

Describe why you are concerned by sharing specific moments when you noticed worrisome behavior. Be direct, but not accusatory and avoid hearsay.

- "Friday night you got drunk, trashed our room and didn't remember it the next day."

Ask your friend

- "I wonder...what do you think about your drinking/drug use?"
- Follow up with, "What do you like about drinking/using?"
- "What are your concerns?"
- "What steps could you take to change this pattern?"

Encourage your friend to seek help and remind him/her that you will assist in finding resources.

- "I will support you in...(whatever step s/he identifies)"
- "I am here and willing to help you when you're ready to make a change."

WHAT NOT TO SAY

Avoid battling about drinking/drug use. The person will likely make excuses or become defensive. Work to remain supportive and concerned.

Don't make excuses for the person, cover up problems or provide your class notes if s/he was too hung over or high to go to class. Enabling keeps the person from feeling the effects of his/her behavior.

HOW YOUR FRIEND MAY REACT

Denial or defensiveness: Your friend may feel that s/he does not have a problem or feel ashamed of being discovered.

- "Thanks for your concern, but I'm really fine." Remind him/her what you have noticed and why you remain concerned.
- "What are you talking about? You drink too." You're right, I do. I'm just offering information and my observations. You have the right to decide what to do.
- "All of my friends drink/use. I would be sitting alone in my room every weekend if I didn't drink/use." So you're concerned about the risks of changing. What might be some of the benefits of changing? What are some options other than not drinking/using at all?
- "It's okay. I've been under a lot of stress lately. I won't drink/use like this when I graduate." "You're trying to manage your stress with alcohol/drugs. Would you be willing to talk to someone or look at some other ways you can manage stress that would have better results?"