



SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

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Teaching Safe Drinking Habits

What is the goal when drinking alcohol? Many students who choose to drink say, "To get drunk!" This is a bad answer, but why?

Becoming intoxicated (obtaining a blood alcohol level of over .08) increases one's risk of experiencing the negative effects of drinking. Students who drink with the goal of getting drunk end up having stronger hangovers, since alcohol is a toxin and the body needs time to clear it from the system.

When students drink to get drunk, they are at greater risk for doing things they will later regret: having unwanted sex, causing damage through vandalism and missing class. Drinking to get drunk also increases the risk of alcohol poisoning, blackouts and being arrested.

Share these simple concepts with students around their drinking habits. If they choose to drink, have them follow these steps and they will be safer and healthier for it.

Don't drink to get drunk, drink to get buzzed. A state of being buzzed is when blood alcohol level hovers around .02-.04 and a feeling of well-being is achieved. In order to maintain a buzz, one must understand how quickly an individual's body processes alcohol and how much it takes to feel intoxicated. The only way to determine this is through practice.

Know how much and its impact. Without knowing how much alcohol is being consumed, one cannot measure the speed of alcohol's effects. Women typically take longer to process alcohol. Also, the less a person weighs, the quicker their blood alcohol level rises.

All drinks are not created equal. We've all seen slide shows and public service announcements where we learn that one shot = one glass of wine = one beer. Understand that a big red party cup full of shots and fruit punch is probably closer to 5-6 drinks all at once. Giant margaritas at the restaurant served in giant glasses are really 3-4 drinks in one. Also, realize it is not just how much one is drinking, but what percentage of alcohol is in the drink being consumed.

Eat something and mix in non-alcoholic drinks. Our bodies process alcohol more efficiently when we have some food in our stomach. Our liver can process about one drink an hour. Eat prior to drinking and take it slow. Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks. It will help with hydration and keep one from getting too drunk, too fast. Remember, simply having more non-alcoholic drinks or drinking caffeine won't counter the effects of alcohol already consumed.

Get some help. If someone is drinking to try to escape an emotion like sadness or anger, that person likely needs to talk to a counselor or therapist about drinking and/or the sadness or anger. If more and more alcohol is needed to reach the same level of intoxication (building tolerance), or if friends and family have brought up drinking causing problems, alcohol dependence or abuse might be an issue. If a student starts miss classes or falling behind in assignments due to drinking, it is probably time to talk to a counselor or a therapist. If a student has tried to cut back and failed or is thinking about drinking/getting drunk most of the day, see a specialist.

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