

Alcohol and drugs- what you can say when your student tells you the truth about college parties

The other day when Dr. Lai asked a dad in her office how his college freshman son was doing, the dad replied that he was in a state of shock. The reason? His son recently confessed that he drank alcohol and smoked pot at college.

What would you do if your child told you he or she was drinking or using other drugs? Standing with one's mouth gaping open is probably not the best response. When your child returns home after her first semester away, take the opportunity to discuss alcohol and drugs. Today, licensed psychologist John Gannon who has over 25 years experience as a marriage and family therapist in the Philadelphia area, blogs about what a parent can say. A father of a young adult and a teen, John Gannon has spoken both locally, and nationally on family matters. He has addressed numerous teacher and parent groups, given advice on a radio call in program and has appeared on The Montel Williams Show.

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Okay, it happened. Your child went off to college and now he tells you his college experience is just as bad as yours was. Yes, he is doing well academically. But he is smoking pot and drinking alcohol- it is just about enough to push you over the edge. OMG!

I won't tell you to relax about this, but remember for the most part, this is a transitional time and not necessarily a life changing scenario. After all, people have gone off to college for 100's of years and survived. The likelihood that

your child will be the exception is not overly high. If this scenario occurs and you comment about drug and alcohol use, you will act responsibly for your child and not necessarily condone the behavior. Most likely, the actions are unlikely to be life changing and isolated to college.

So what is fair to talk about and what is probably too much to talk about? First, if there is any family history for either drug or alcohol abuse this should be discussed. The family secret needs to be revealed so that your child has a chance to minimize the impact of biology/genetics. Painful as it may be, your child deserves the chance to understand why his situation is somewhat unique and that he is at greater risk for drug and alcohol abuse issues than other students.

Secondly, if there is any family history of depression, anxiety, mood disorder, or other significant mental health issues this also needs to be revealed. These disorders run in families. The presence of these disorders increases the likelihood a person self medicates with drugs or alcohol in order to combat mental illness.

Next, isolated events do occur. We always hear about them from our friends. We are grateful that the events do not happen to us. Although these events do appear random, your child has the potential to experience one of them. For instance, episodic binge drinking can be epidemic at some colleges. Chances are your child will participate at some point or another.

Did you ever have that talk about alcohol and drugs that you promised yourself you would have with your child before he went to school? Did you explain about mixing substances? Did you explain about how the body metabolizes alcohol? Did you talk about how alcohol and marijuana lower impulsivity and reduce judgment? Did you tell him how proud of him you are and yet you also feel scared? Did you set the stage to have a dialogue versus a lecture from parent to child?

So go on! Have the talk even if your child already started college. Sure you might be met with some eye rolling. Don't forget, you rolled your eyes at your parents. What goes around comes around. Listen, if your child hears one thing from you that he remembers, that's a win! With luck, your child's events are not the ones others are talking about.

John Gannon

Psychologist, Marriage and Family Therapist

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For more information Partnership for a Drug-Free America
www.drugfreeamerica.org

National YouthAnti-Drug Media Campaign www.TheAntiDrug.com

If you are concerned your child is addicted : to find treatment- U.S .Department of Health and Human Services- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration – Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov 1-800-788-2800

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