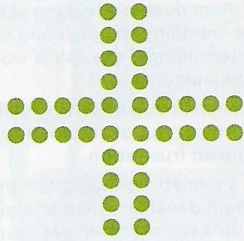


MASK

MOTHERS AWARENESS ON SCHOOL-AGE KIDS

educate + college life skills



COLLEGE LIFE SKILLS

PREPARING FOR PEER PRESSURE

By // Dr. Lisa Strohman, J.D., Ph.D.

When kids go away to college, it's difficult for parents to know if they're using drugs or alcohol. The American Council for Drug Education (ACDE) states the signs to determining drug abuse are changes in appearance, attitude, personality and behavior.

However, when your child isn't living at home, it can be especially challenging to know if these changes are happening. And by the time you do realize it, your student may be seriously struggling.

College is a time when children evolve from childhood to adulthood, and they are trying to find their own way in the world. It's also the first time they are free from watchful parents. As your child is tasked with figuring out what they are going to major in and a career path to pursue, they are also trying to connect with new people and build new friendships. These new challenges and responsibilities can cause stress and anxiety.

When parents don't see their kids often, they may be afraid or hesitant to ask them direct questions like, "Have you been offered drugs yet?" or "Have you tried any drugs or have you been drinking a lot?" But it's important to have these open conversations without judgment to encourage them to share what is really happening, and to help your college kids understand that you are asking because you care.

If your child denies any substance abuse, but you still feel like something is off, trust your gut. It could be mental health-related, which is important to address. College students are under such incredible stress from the demands of classes, social life and trying to meet expectations. Fortunately, there are resources available. Most campuses have counselors onsite that are willing and ready to help students get through difficulties.

One of the best things a parent can do is begin to have these tough discussions before their children leave for college. A big part of college life outside of class are the social activities and parties, which come with peer pressure to participate. Talking about expectations and providing guidance on how to handle various situations will not guarantee your college student won't try things or struggle at times, but sharing tools for navigating potential challenges will help them make good decisions and keep lines of communication open. ☐

SEE THE SIGNS

If you suspect your child is using or abusing substances, make note of these signs and symptoms:

BEHAVIORAL

- Borrowing, stealing money.
- Skipping class, declining grades.
- Missing money, valuables, prescription drugs.
- Acting isolated, withdrawn, secretive or exhibiting suspicious behaviors.
- Clashes with family values and beliefs.
- Preoccupation with alcohol or drug-related lifestyle in music, clothing, and posters.
- Using incense, perfume, or air fresheners to cover the smell of smoke or drugs.
- Using eye drops to mask bloodshot eyes and dilated pupils

PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Unexplained, confusing change in personality and/or attitude.
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing.
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation.
- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appears lethargic or "spaced out."
- Appears fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, for no apparent reason.