

## **Worried About A Friend's Drinking Or Drug Use?**

It's difficult to know when to say something when you're worried about a friend's drug or alcohol use. Ask yourself:

### **How does it affect you?**

- Have you lost time from classes, studying, or a job in order to help your friend cope with problems caused by their drinking or drug use?
- Is your friend's drinking or drug use making you unhappy in any aspect of your life?
- Is your friend's behavior affecting your reputation in a way you don't like?
- Have you ever felt embarrassed or hurt by something they said or did while intoxicated?
- Have there been outbursts of anger or irritability?
- Have you ever had to take care of your friend because of their alcohol or drug use?

### **How does it affect your friend?**

- Does your friend drink in order to get drunk?
- Does your friend drink or use drugs in an environment that you would rather avoid?
- Has there been a change in your friend's peer group?
- Is your friend doing dangerous things because of drugs or alcohol?
- Has your friend ever wanted to cut down on drinking or drug use?
- Does your friend slam drinks?
- Does your friend ever drink to steady their nerves or to get rid of a hangover?
- Has your friend ever been in trouble because of drinking or drug use?
- Does your friend find it necessary to drink or get high in order to enjoy a party?
- Are drugs or alcohol affecting your friend's academic performance?
- Does your friend drink to escape from or to cope with problems or stress?
- Do they use drugs or alcohol to avoid painful feelings?
- Has your friend ever been unable to remember things they said or did while drinking?
- Has your friend ever had a frightening experience with drugs but continued to use?
- Is your friend annoyed when people criticize their drinking?
- Has your friend ever received medical care for something related to drinking or drug use?
- Have you noticed a decline in personal health or appearance?
- Does anyone in your friend's family drink to excess regularly? Do any close relatives have a drinking or drug problem?

The more times you answer yes, and the more frequently each factor is true, the more likely it is that your friend has a problem. A caring conversation can help your friend learn about how his or her behavior affects others and can help your friend get the help they need.

Remember, needing help is not the same as being an alcoholic or an addict. Uncontrolled alcohol or drug use is not the only sign that someone needs help. Many people can stop whenever they choose, even for long periods of time. The important question is what happens to them when they drink or use drugs. Do they do think they regret later such as get in fights, destroy property, drive under the influence, or have unplanned or unwanted sex?

There are many ways to help someone who's having trouble with alcohol or drugs. Some people just need the wakeup call of your honest opinion; others can benefit from professional help to make changes in their behavior. Still others need professional help to maintain complete abstinence through rehabilitation programs and/or recovery programs.

#### **Before you talk to your friend:**

- Learn about drug and alcohol abuse.
- Prepare a list of specific problems that have occurred because of your friend's drinking or drug use. Keep these as concrete as possible. "You're so antisocial when you drink" will not mean as much as "When you were drunk, you made fun of me and were mean to me. You hurt me." Bring the list with you and keep the conversation focused.
- Choose a private location where you can talk without embarrassment or interruption. Talking in your room or other quiet space without distractions like TV or other electronic devices may help you both to communicate more effectively.

#### **How to talk to your friend:**

- Talk to your friend when they are sober. The sooner you can arrange this after a bad episode, the better. Your message will have more impact while your friend is hung over than it will be three days later.
- Restrict your comments to what you feel and what you have experienced of your friend's behavior. Express statements that cannot be disputed. Remarks like, "Everyone's disgusted with you," or "Lily thinks you have a real problem," will probably lead to arguments about Lily's problems or who 'everyone' is. Avoid such generalizations.
- Convey your concern for your friend's well-being with specific statements, "I want to talk to you because I am worried about you," or "Our friendship means a lot to me. I don't like to see what's been happening."
- It is important to openly discuss the negative consequences of your friend's drinking or drug use. Use concrete examples from your list. "At the party I was left standing there while you threw up. The next day you were too hung over to write your paper. It makes me sad that these things are happening in your life."

- Emphasize the difference between sober behavior that you like and drinking behavior that you dislike. “You have the most wonderful sense of humor, but when you drink it turns into cruel sarcasm and you’re not funny anymore. You’re mean.”
- Be sure to distinguish between the person and the behavior. “I think you’re a great person, but the more marijuana you smoke, the less you seem to care about anything.”
- Encourage your friend to consult with a professional to talk about their alcohol problem. Show them the list of alcohol and drug resources on Salem State’s counseling and health services website. You can offer to find out more about those resources or go with them to schedule an appointment with a counselor in the Ellison Campus Center, Room 107.
- Talk to people you trust (other friends or relatives) about your concerns. Their involvement may help.

**What NOT to do:**

- Don’t accuse or argue. If your friend gets angry or provokes you, remind yourself to remain calm and to stay focused on your goal – to be helpful by honestly expressing your concerns. “I understand that you don’t like some things I do, either; we can talk about them later. My point now is that when you drink, I feel hurt by the things you do.”
- Don’t lecture or moralize. Remain factual, listen and be nonjudgmental. Remarks like, “You’ve been acting like a slut”, will only elicit defensive anger. Instead say, “You’ve been going out with people you don’t like and doing things you regret the next day.”
- Don’t give up. If your friend seems resistant, you can bring it up later or let them know you’re there for them if they ever want to talk.