How to Help a Friend

Tips for talking to a friend about their drinking or drug use

California State University Chico
WellCat Prevention

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

Signs your Friend needs help

- Do you worry about the amount a friend or loved one uses alcohol or drugs?
- Have you ever felt embarrassed or hurt by something they said or did while intoxicated?
- Are drugs or alcohol affecting your friend's relationships, work, or academic performance?
- Are they irritated or annoyed with you if you try to discuss their substance use?

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 their behavior affects others and can help your friend get the help they need.

Before you talk

- Learn about alcohol and drug use
- Speak to a professional staff and/or peer educators at WellCat Prevention for advice or help
- Prepare a list of specific problems that have occurred because of your friend's drinking or drug use
- Keep in mind that change can be a long process and can take many different forms

How to help

- Choose a time when you are both sober
- Find a private place to talk
- Emphasize the difference between sober behavior and drinking behavior. "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."
- Openly discuss the negative consequences of your friend's drinking or drug use
- Be sure to distinguish between the person and the behavior. "I think you're a great person, but the more cannabis you smoke, the less you seem to care about anything."
- Be sure to listen and be patient
- Encourage your friend to consult with a professional.
- 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.
- Don't lecture or moralize. Remain factual, listen, and be nonjudgmental.
- Avoid coercion, persuasion, ultimatums, and the use of external contingencies (e.g., the threatened loss of job or family).
- 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.

RESOURCES

WellCat Prevention

- Confidential support from peer educators or professional staff
- Individual assessment and assistance finding treatment
- Information on drugs, alcohol, health, wellness, and recovery

SMART Recovery

- Self Management and Recovery Training is a mutual support group for CSU Chico students
- Check our website for time/location this semester

WellCat Counseling Center

- Offers group counseling, short-term individual counseling, short-term couples counseling, or referral to counseling services in the community.
- Student Services Center 430, (530) 898-6345
  www.csuchico.edu/counseling