The start of the fall semester is fast approaching, but there is still time for parents to talk with their student(s) about alcohol and drug use. According to the 2016 National College Health Assessment, 62.3% of UC students drank alcohol in the last month and 21.8% of UC students engaged in binge drinking (having 5 or more alcoholic drinks in one setting) 1-2 times in the last two weeks.

Conversations about alcohol can often be difficult, but research has shown that parents are a primary influence in students’ lives. Parents should have a discussion with their student about the effects of alcohol on the body, the reasons students may choose to drink, reasons for not drinking, and their willingness to help in unsafe situations that involve alcohol. Parents should also encourage their student to complete UC’s online alcohol education program, AlcoholEdu, and could use the program as an opportunity to discuss alcohol and other drugs.

The following are example questions that can be used to discuss the topic of alcohol with your student:

1) How will you decide whether or not to drink?
2) What will you do if you find yourself at a party where there is only alcohol to drink?
3) What will you do if your roommate drinks and/or if your room becomes a center for this type of activity?
4) What will you do if you find a student passed out in the bathroom and/or how would you handle caring for someone who is very drunk?
5) How will you balance the need to study and the opportunities to drink?

College can potentially provide an environment where the pressure to drink is high. When parents discuss alcohol use with their students, the students are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors involving alcohol. Here are some tips to make the discussion easier and more successful:

1) Listen—do not interrupt; just listen and summarize what you hear after they are finished speaking.
2) Verbalize respect—tell them what you respect about them and what they tell you.
3) Choose a good time—choose a good space and have enough time to have a calm, relaxed discussion.
4) Communicate directly—don’t be involved in another activity during the conversation. Stick to the topic.
5) Try to appeal to common goals—remind your student that you are on their side and establish common goals.
6) Avoid communication “stoppers”—don’t use statements that would shut down the conversation.
7) Conflict is natural—realize that conflict happens and use it as an opportunity to grow and learn from each other.
8) Agree to disengage—if things get heated, agree to stop and wait until a better time.
9) Use appropriate body language—position yourself to be open to communicate and to convey a positive attitude.
10) Avoid Debate Mode—if the conversation turns into a mini-debate, try approaching it from a different angle.

Learn more about UC’s Alcohol Policy. The University of Cincinnati also has a Medical Amnesty Policy. The Student Wellness Center offers free resources to students about safe drinking strategies, the effects of alcohol, and many programs throughout the semester! To see what events are planned, visit the Student Wellness Center Calendar.

Student Wellness Center | 675 Steger Student Life Center | 513.556.6124 | @UC_Wellness | uc.edu/wellness