



College is a time of self-exploration, an enlightening phase of life when students have the chance to grow in understanding, and determine their place in the world. It's a time when young people learn to navigate life independent of their parents.

Unfortunately, strenuous class schedules, part-time jobs, homework, and everything else force the student into a sort of juggling act. Some students will succeed despite the stresses; others will falter.

The College Experience: Social Distractions

New distractions and diversions, coupled with the adjustment to a new environment, weigh heavily on students. Social scenes are a major part of the college experience. Fraternities, sororities, athletic departments, and other clubs and organizations encourage an active social life. These groups are also notorious for promoting *party culture*.

It's important to form bonds and lifelong friendships, but dangerous cases of substance abuse (while attending college functions) prove that some groups are healthier than others. Binge drinking has resulted in many students' deaths, including that of Philip Dhanens who died after remaining locked in a room, binge-drinking, for a period of 15 hours.

The struggle to define one's identity is a challenge many students find insurmountable. Students turn to substance abuse, in an effort to connect with peers and feel supported. Unfortunately, this behavior sometimes has very serious consequences.

The Health Risks Students Face

Binge drink is incredibly dangerous. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism lists the following types of "collateral damage:"

- Injuries – Nearly 600,000 college students injure themselves while intoxicated
- Fatalities – There's nearly 2,000 students who die an alcohol-related death each year
- Sexual Misconduct – More than 97,000 students "have been victims of an alcohol-related date rape or other sexual assault."
- Academic impairment – One-fourth of students report falling behind in school, such as missing classes and receiving low grades.
- Poor health – Alcohol causes serious health issues, and more 150,000 students have reported alcohol-related health problems.

According to a report published in May 2007, the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reveals that "half of all full-time college students binge-drink, abuse prescription drugs, and/or abuse illegal drugs." Further complicating matters, students have abused their own prescriptions, such as Adderall and Ritalin, in order maintain heavy workloads. These *study drugs* have created black markets on-campus.

How to Help Substance Abusing College Students

While many higher education institutions have policies in place to curb substance abuse, students still find themselves surrounded by an abundance of drugs and alcohol. Peer pressure is very real, and prevalent on campuses nationwide. If you feel yourself fighting the pressure to drink and use drugs, then employ these tips:

- Stay organized – Learn how to prioritize your assignments and arrange your time to fit in coursework and healthy socializing.
- Build a health support network – While frats and sororities may seem like a *rite of passage*, if it costs you your life it simply isn't worth it. Avoid campus groups that have a reputation for binge drinking and hazing.
- Create healthy habits – Hitting the books is important, but there should also be time for eating right and exercising. A regular workout stimulates blood flow, and releases endorphins into the brain, which improves outlook and boosts happiness.

If someone you care about is suffering from drug or alcohol abuse, there are steps you can take to help them. First contact your school administration, and ask them what programs are available. If necessary, contact your friend's parents for help.

Substance abuse is a problem that's on the rise, and it endangers students across the world. Education is the best way to fight the disease, so students are asked to educate themselves about the causes and effects of substance abuse.

<http://rehab-international.org/drug-addiction/help-for-college-students>

Drugs and Alcohol Plague College Campuses

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<http://www.projectknow.com/7-crazy-binge-drinking-deaths/>

<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arcr352/201-218.htm>

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<http://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/studydrugs.html>