

How to Help a Friend with an Alcohol or Other Drug Problem

It is important to understand that changing a behavior, whether it is beginning an exercise program or quitting an addiction, is not about will power or how much the person cares about you. Even if a person acknowledges that there is a problem, she/he may not be able or willing to change as quickly as you'd like. Keep in mind that substance-related habits, including alcohol, may be hard to end or control. Below are some important tips to help you begin a conversation:

- Wait until the person is sober and no longer under the influence to begin a conversation.
- Express your concern about their use. Be tactful, but not too polite.
- Address how their substance use is affecting your relationship with them.
- Avoid lectures, blaming, bribes or verbal attacks.
- Let them know that you dislike their behavior, not them as a person.
- Insist that they take responsibility for their actions.
- Do not protect them by covering up for their behaviors. This will only enable your friend to continue the behavior.
- Understand that there may be defensiveness and that it is rooted in fear of facing their problem, not you.
- Set clear guidelines of what you expect. For example, you no longer are comfortable with alcohol being present in your room or apartment.
- Have some campus or community resources available and ready such as a local support group or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS).
- Plan activities together that do not involve alcohol or other substances and limit your own drinking when you are around your friend.
- Remain supportive and acknowledge even the small steps your friend has taken to change their behavior.
- Understand that relapse, or steps backward, are often part of the process.



www.montclair.edu/hp

healthpro@mail.montclair.edu