

## Substance Use

Students arriving at Yale University come with widely different experiences with alcohol and other drugs. Some students may never have used alcohol and/or other drugs while others may already have experienced problems related to a substance use disorder that required treatment. A number of incoming students have already experimented with alcohol and/or other drugs without negative outcomes thus far. The following information is to help first-year counselors to work with their students about alcohol and drug use.

### Risks Associated with Excessive Alcohol Use

Excessive alcohol use and the accompanying intoxication affects decision-making by leading people to focus on immediate cues rather than more abstract or distant factors. This can lead intoxicated people to give in to impulses that they would otherwise be able to control – for some people, this leads to risk-taking behavior.

Even more serious, acute intoxication may also lead to death, including by brain stem suppression or by the inhalation of vomitus into the lungs, both impairing one's ability to breathe.

The students should be aware that certain practices greatly increase the likelihood of reaching one's lethal limit. These include "doing shots" because in taking one shot after another, the student typically does not experience the initial impact of the alcohol and can easily become very intoxicated. Similarly, mixed drinks and punch can mask the quantity of alcohol. Encourage your students who drink to always be aware of how much alcohol is in each drinks and to keep close track of their total consumption.

The students should also be aware that while their tolerance to alcohol increases over time, the lethal limit does not. That is, the more drinking one does, the more alcohol it takes to become intoxicated, but there is very little change in the amount of alcohol needed to trigger a medical emergency.

Rates of alcohol metabolism are affected by a wide range of individual factors (body size, weight, gender, alcohol tolerance, hormonal levels, and genetic factors) as well as situational factors (rate of consumption, food and water consumption, interactions with other prescription or recreational drugs, etc.)

Students taking prescription medication need to exercise particular care. Anti-depressant and anti-anxiety agents for example, may enhance the effects of alcohol, leading to greater central nervous system depression. Oral contraceptives may increase the duration of intoxication. Any students taking medication should consult with their health care clinician about possible interaction before drinking.

### Risks Associated with Other Drug Use

- **Marijuana** use impairs reaction time, motor coordination, decision making, alertness and one's perception of time. Combining alcohol and marijuana can be especially dangerous when driving. Research suggests that heavy long-term use of marijuana can affect learning and memory, and can lead to respiratory problems. Smoking marijuana can also expose one to carcinogens with evidence of an association between smoking marijuana and the development of lung cancer. It is now believed that heavy marijuana users may experience a withdrawal syndrome upon cessation of the drug.

- **Opioids**, include the illegal drug **heroin** as well synthetic opioids such as **fentanyl**, and **pain relievers** available legally by prescription, such as **oxycodone (OxyContin®)**, **hydrocodone (Vicodin®)**, **codeine**, **morphine**, and many others. Prescription opioids, while they can be effective in treating certain types of painful conditions when prescribed by a physician and taken as prescribed, can also be mis-used and lead to serious problems. An overdose of heroin or prescription opioids can lead to respiratory depression and death. Combining any opioids and alcohol, opioids and anxiety medications and opioids and other medications that cause sedation, increases the possibility of death. Frequent users can develop psychological and physical dependence (an addictive disorder) with any of the opioids.
- **Ritalin and Adderall** are stimulants that are prescribed to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). If used incorrectly or in excess, they can become drugs of abuse. They can also be misused for the purposes of experiencing euphoria or extensive wakefulness or to cause weight loss. Unwanted effects include irritability, depression and fatigue. Chronic use can lead to an “amphetamine psychosis.”
- **Cocaine** is a stimulant used to induce euphoria and increase energy. Like methamphetamine it is very addictive. Death can result from seizures or cardiac arrest even with infrequent use. Combining alcohol and cocaine is particularly dangerous as it forms a third compound called cocaethylene that is more potent than cocaine alone and increases the risk of sudden death.
- **Ecstasy** is a drug that has both hallucinogenic and stimulant properties. Users think that the drug helps them connect to others. Users may engage in behavior they later regret. Dehydration and overheating may occur and the user may require medical attention. Heavy users may also experience depression and impairments of learning ability and memory. Less frequent users may feel depressed for days after use.
- **Methamphetamine** or “crystal meth” is a stimulant that individuals use to increase alertness and energy, and to induce euphoria. Negative effects include confusion, paranoia, and aggressive, and psychotic behavior. The drug is highly addictive and its use has been linked to high risk sexual behaviors. Ongoing use can result in mood disturbances, “amphetamine psychosis,” and nerve damage.
- **LSD** or “Acid” is a powerful hallucinogenic agent which has unpredictable and widely varying effects on users. Often the internal experience of the drug is more dramatic than exhibited externally and can include distortions in one’s perceptions of time, space and self; seeing, hearing or feeling things that are not real; and rapid mood swings. These effects can induce fear and panic in the individual which could lead to dangerous behavior. Increases in pulse rate, blood pressure and body temperature are other unwanted effects.

### **Responding to Students Concerned about their Alcohol and Drug Use:**

Students who are concerned about their use of alcohol, or other drugs can contact Yale Health for a Substance Consultation. This is a private meeting with a counselor who can provide assessment, education, and treatment, and help students connect with ongoing support as needed..

### **References:**

1. Brief Alcohol Screening and Interventions for College Students by Dimeff, Baer, Kivlahan, Marlatt
2. National Institute of Drug Abuse: <http://www.drugabuse.gov/infofacts>

### **Identifying and Responding to New or On-going Problems with Alcohol and Other Drugs:**

First-year counselors may become aware of students who are experiencing repeated difficulties with alcohol and other drugs. These difficulties include: repeatedly passing out, blacking out (memory loss), increasing

tolerance, and relying on substances to aid in performing daily activities. Other concerns include exhibiting aggressive behavior, or behavior offensive to others while intoxicated. Academic performance may deteriorate as students may miss classes due to hangovers or other alcohol- or drug-related reasons. Students may also make significant changes in their lifestyle to accommodate increased alcohol and/or drug use. For example, they may schedule classes later in the day so as not to interfere with nighttime drinking, or they may change peer groups after friends express concern about their use of substances.

The above signs may suggest an alcohol or drug use disorder. First year counselors are invaluable in identifying these warning signs. While they are not expected to diagnose the extent of a student's difficulties with substances, first year counselors who are concerned about a student's use of substances, should contact their Dean to discuss how best to proceed with their concerns. In most cases this will mean a referral to Yale Health for a substance use consultation.

## Responding to Alcohol or Other Drug Emergencies

First-year counselors are in a unique position to facilitate students' receiving proper care in any emergency. You may observe the need for medical care yourself or be called for help by a roommate or friend.

- Remember, a first-year counselor's role is to make an initial assessment of danger and summon help accordingly.
- It is an emergency if a student has any of the following signs:
  - is unresponsive or unconscious,
  - cannot walk unassisted,
  - is vomiting uncontrollably,
  - is unable to respond to simple commands, OR
  - is exhibiting any other behaviors or symptoms that alarm you (i.e. skin discoloring, bizarre temperatures too hot or too cold, acting bizarrely)
- In an emergency, call the YPD at 203-432-4400 (or 911 from a campus phone).
  - Identify yourself as a FroCo, and state that you are calling about an alcohol or other drug emergency.
  - Stay with the student until help arrives.
    - Do not give the intoxicated student water, as this may increase the chances of dangerous vomiting.
    - Do not induce vomiting.
    - Do not put the student in the shower.
  - Once the YPD is there, let them manage the situation. You can sometimes help by clearing away other students to give them space.
  - When the EMTs arrive, they will evaluate the student, and usually take them to the emergency room.
    - If the EMTs say a student does not need to go to the ER, you can still take them to Yale Health. See below.
  - In the ambulance and at the ER, the clinical staff will monitor the student and manage whatever medical issues arise.
  - The student will remain in the ER until their blood alcohol levels drop to a safe level.
  - The YPD will check in on them during the night, and can give them a ride back to campus.

- In the meantime, you should email your dean, or call in the morning. (Unless there is something particularly difficult, for which you need help, in which case call your dean right away.)

What if there isn't an emergency, but you are still concerned? For example, if a student has been vomiting or has consumed a large amount of alcohol in a short period of time.

- Do not try to treat this situation yourself!
- You can take the student to the Yale Infirmary for basic treatment and observation.
  - If you are unsure what to do, call (203) 432-0123 to speak to a Yale Health nurse.
- First, find another FroCo to go with you. If the student's condition worsens, you will need help. (If you are on a duty night, you also need to find someone to take over for you.)
- To get a student to Yale Health, you have several options:
  - The Minibus at (203) 432-6330. When you call, identify yourself as a FroCo and explain that a student is ill.
  - Take a taxi, Lyft, or Uber (both there and back). Save your receipts. Do not take your own car.
  - If you are very close (eg. Lake Place, the new colleges) you can walk.
- If a student becomes belligerent, you should call the Yale Police.
- Regarding visitors: only Yale students can use Yale Health. If you are concerned about a visitor, you must call the YPD; they cannot use the infirmary.

Under no circumstances should you or any other student watch a drunk student overnight. This is a task for medical professionals. Take the intoxicated student to Yale Health.

### **Follow-up Appointments with Students seen at Yale Health or the YNHH ER for intoxication:**

All students seen for alcohol intoxication at Yale Health or the YNHH ER are to have a follow-up appointment with a Yale Health clinician. These visits are essential to assess for the possibility of ongoing difficulties with alcohol, to discuss risk taking behavior, and to provide information on low-risk drinking choices.

Students who are seen at Yale Health will make an appointment for a substance consultation before they leave Yale Health. Students who are seen in the YNHH ER will be contacted by AODHRI staff and asked to set up an appointment time at Yale Health.

Students often discuss their care at Yale Health or the YNHH ER with their first-year counselors. First-year counselors can help with follow-up care by asking students if they have a substance consultation