



FORT HAYS STATE
UNIVERSITY

FAMILY SUPPORT GUIDE

Information and Helpful Strategies
for Communicating with
Your Student Regarding:

Alcohol

Gender-Based Violence

Alcohol and Sexual Violence

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

WELCOME!

The transition to college is an important time for students and their loved ones. Fort Hays State University (FHSU) takes the health and safety of your student seriously. Our relationship with you is a critical partnership in supporting your student’s academic success and in fostering a rich and rewarding undergraduate experience.

With your student entering college, your role and relationship will change. This is a great time to begin, or continue, conversations about alcohol choices, consent, sexual assault, healthy and unhealthy relationships, and your student’s mental health and well-being. We understand these are difficult topics and that everyone has unique and personal values that reflect what is important to them. In this guide, we discuss ways to help your student prepare for new challenges they may encounter during their college career.

FHSU is committed to creating a safe space for learning and working and engages student support systems as part of that process. Our community is committed to a safe and welcoming environment for everyone. All students deserve a place to learn, grow, and succeed. Join us in making FHSU a place where students can thrive.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide focuses on key areas that can impact your student’s health and wellness at FHSU. We offer prompts and opportunities to engage your student about issues that affect academic and personal success. The aim is to equip you with strategies to start and continue conversations with your student.

ALCOHOL

It's important for parents and families to discuss expectations for behaviors associated with alcohol and to understand the potential risks and consequences of alcohol use. As students navigate their new surroundings, they may face decisions about alcohol. We look to you as partners in FHSU's efforts to create an environment where all students can succeed, both in and out of the classroom.

Start the Conversation

Engage in an open dialog with your student about alcohol use prior to coming to FHSU, and continue the conversations throughout their college career. Family discussions before college can lead to lower alcohol consumption during the first year and reduce the risk of students experiencing serious alcohol-related consequences.

When the time and setting are appropriate, suggest to your student that you would like to talk about decisions they may make about alcohol. Talk about how alcohol might affect other parts of their college experience. Be mindful to avoid glamorizing any past personal use of alcohol or other drugs. These conversations may feel awkward. What matters most is having them at least once and, ideally, multiples times throughout the semester.

During the conversation, convey that you care about your student, you want to understand them, and you respect their privacy and independence.

Possible Conversation Starters:

- *"How will you decide whether or not to drink?"*
- *"What will you do if you find yourself at a party where there is only alcohol to drink?"*
- *"Have you thought about what you might do if you feel pressure to drink, or are offered a drink, and you don't want one?"*
- *"What will you do if your roommate drinks in your room?"*
- *"How would you handle helping a friend who has had too much to drink?"*

Prevention

Before the start of the semester, your student will complete an online learning module called AlcoholEdu. This interactive course provides your student with base level knowledge of alcohol and can also serve as a conversation starter about decisions they may face around alcohol. All first-year students are required to complete AlcoholEdu or a hold is placed on their student account. When students complete the learning module, they can indicate their desire to become involved with nondrinkers, and they will receive information on how to connect with those students.

According to a survey of 502 FHSU students conducted by the Docking Institute of Public Affairs during the 2019 academic year:

- 62% usually have 0-4 drinks when they party.
- 97% keep their drink with them at all times.
- 85% always or usually have a designated driver when they will be drinking.
- 44% always or usually use the Safe Ride service.
- 75% reported they didn't experience pressure to drink.

Also, FHSU students look out for their fellow Tigers:

- 62% reported helping someone who was intoxicated.
- 43% reported that they didn't drink so they could serve as a designated driver.
- 33% reported taking someone's keys because that person was intoxicated.

Talking Points

In visiting with your student, try these talking points about drinking behaviors:

- *"FHSU has a party school reputation but, in reality, most students don't drink excessively."*
- *"You don't need to drink to find your place on campus."*
- *"I know you're going to experience temptations to drink, so just be safe if you choose to drink."*

Addressing an Alcohol Abuse Problem

Parents and family members may underestimate their college student's alcohol consumption. If you're concerned that your student has a drinking problem, the following behavioral indicators may occur suddenly or present as extreme in character:

- Decline in grades or academic performance
- Increase in the intensity and frequency of alcohol use
- Defiance of rules and regulations
- Changes in demeanor
- Increased reliance on alcohol
- Trouble with law enforcement or university policy
- Problems with relationships
- Unsuccessful attempts to stop drinking
- Physical health problems
- Incidents resulting from a high blood alcohol concentration (BAC)

If you think your student has a problem with alcohol, let them know you're concerned and willing to help. You can refer your student to Health and Wellness Services for substance abuse assessment and counseling services at no cost.

Alcohol Abuse and Other Health Issues

Mental health and substance abuse or addiction are often intertwined. Students may use alcohol to cope with stress and/or depression. Asking about your student's drinking may help to start a dialogue about other issues.

Policies at FHSU Regarding Alcohol

In compliance with state law, FHSU prohibits the use and possession of alcoholic beverages by persons under age 21.

When University Police or City of Hays police officers encounter a student who is nonresponsive, disoriented, unable to answer simple questions, or otherwise determined to pose a risk to themselves, they may transport the student to a safe place such as a hospital emergency room for medical monitoring.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence is a reality that affects students on college campuses nationwide. Discussions about gender-based violence are often not addressed when families prepare their student for college. We encourage these conversations as they are important in helping your student learn skills to avoid victimization.

Gender-based violence includes stalking, dating and domestic violence, and sexual assault. Sexual assault is defined as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient. Examples of sexual assault include unwanted touching; kissing; fondling; or penetration of the mouth, vagina, or anus.

Start the Conversation

Start and continue conversations with your student about the realities of sexual violence. Unfortunately, it is more prevalent than is often thought. For example, statistics show that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 9 men have experienced some form of physical violence by an intimate partner.

Campus sexual violence statistics from the RAINN website (<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>) state that while in college:

- 1 in 5 women and 1 in 16 men are sexually assaulted.
- More than 90% of sexual assault victims on college campuses do not report the assault.
- Students are at an increased risk of sexual assault during the first few months of the first and second semesters of college.

Rather than attempt lengthy conversations, ask simple, open-ended questions, and listen without judgement. Encourage your student to explore what they want from their social life or dating experiences, and look for opportunities to weave topics of sex, dating, and communication into everyday interactions (e.g. ask your student what they think about a TV show, news story, or social media post).

Talking Points

In visiting with your student, try these talking points surrounding respect and communication:

Try

- *“Communication is an important part of sex and dating.”*
- *“No one has the right to cross your personal boundaries or push you further than you want. This is something you can always talk to me about.”*
- *“How would you help your friend or roommate if you suspected they were in an abusive relationship or being stalked?”*
- *“What could you do if you thought your friend was trying to take advantage of someone at a party?”*
- *“Look out for others. Alcohol or partying is never an excuse for coercive or hurtful behavior.”*
- *“What did you think about the freshman seminar presentation?”*
- *“What do you think are realistic ways to intervene if you saw something that was a red flag for sexual assault?”*

Avoid

- *“Sex and dating are filled with mixed signals and messages.”*
- *“Some girls dress in such skimpy clothing. What do they expect?”*
- *“Don’t let what happened to your friend/roommate happen to you.”*
- *“Boys will be boys.”*
- *“What happens between two people is their own business. Don’t get involved.”*
- *“You’ll see people getting handsy at parties...that’s just college.”*

Discuss Warning Signs

Encourage your student to think about the red flags, or warning signs, for sexual assault and dating violence. Red flags can include someone who does not respect boundaries, who is sexually aggressive, who “feeds” another person drinks, or who is jealous and controlling in dating relationships. Red flags also include isolation, coercion, and/or emotional abuse. What will their plan be for identifying and interrupting this type of situation when they come to campus?

Listen and Support

Imagining your student in a situation where they are experiencing sexual assault or an abusive relationship can be difficult. However, if they do experience gender-based violence, your support, words, and actions make a difference. Students who experienced victimization before coming to college may feel more comfortable telling their families after they come to campus. It’s common for victims to reach out to people they trust after experiencing victimization. A validating, trustworthy support system can help a student heal from trauma, pursue educational opportunities, and regain equilibrium.

Listen with patience and without judgement. Believe them. Allow your student to share as much or as little as they feel comfortable sharing with you. Thank your student for trusting you, and reaffirm that you’re there for them. Listening and being empathetic may be the most important things you do.

Gender-based violence is about having the power taken away. Support your student in whatever choice they make—it’s a sign of trust for them to talk with you. Focus on their options, not your opinions. Allowing the survivor to decide how they proceed after an assault or after leaving an abusive partner is how they regain control over their own body and psyche. Offer to serve as a support person to accompany your student to related meetings or appointments, or help them contact a victim advocate. Options, a local provider for support in dealing with gender-based violence, has advocates that assist FHSU students. They can be reached at 785-625-4202.

Keep in mind that a student’s specific situation is confidential, and many campus offices cannot directly discuss a student’s situation with parents and family members without the student’s explicit, written permission.

Talking Points

In visiting with your student, try these talking points to support them if they have been victimized:

Try:

- *“I believe you.”*
- *“It is not your fault.”*
- *“What will help you feel most supported?”*

- *“Do you want help talking to your professors?”*
- *“I love you. I’m here for you.”*
- *“I support you. Thank you for trusting me enough to share this with me.”*
- *“Do you want to talk more about it?”*
- *“There are people on campus and in the community who can help even if you don’t want to report.”*
- *“If you want to report, who would you like to be there with you?”*
- *“You can come home if you need. I will support you in the choices you make.”*
- *“Have you thought about getting an STI test or a forensic exam?”*

Avoid:

- *“Why aren’t you going to class?”*
- *“I don’t know what to tell you. You’ll have to figure out how to get out of this mess on your own.”*
- *“What did you think would happen when you went to that party?”*
- *“This is making me uncomfortable. Can we change the subject?”*
- *“Are you sure this wasn’t just a bad hook-up or misunderstanding?”*
- *“We need to report right now.”*
- *“You don’t have a choice in the matter.”*
- *“I know what’s best for you. If you knew what was best for you, this would not have happened.”*

Follow up with your student. Make sure you recognize that your student is a whole person with many elements to their developing identity. It’s common for survivors to experience trauma symptoms for months and years. Remind your student that they can get help at any time even if the incident(s) happened in the past.

Just like you support your student, support is available for you. Some parents and family members find it helpful to consult with a professional regarding their student so they may better support their student. It’s common to have questions and concerns and to experience feelings of anger, shock, shame or denial. Trauma may also be part of your own history or experience.

Reporting What Happened

FHSU encourages student victims to make the best decisions for themselves, which may include reporting to a campus office, a law enforcement agency, both, or neither. All reporting will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly, promptly, and fairly. Sexual assault, gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking are forms of gender discrimination and violations of Title IX, state law, and the FHSU Student Code of Conduct. Victims of these crimes are entitled to certain rights including reasonable accommodations, safety measures, and access to information regardless of whether they choose to report.

If a student knows they do not want to report, they may explore confidential services through campus offices that do not initiate an investigation. University employees who are not specifically designated as confidential, including Residential Life employees, may have obligations to report disclosures of sexual violence to the campus Title IX Coordinator who may investigate the report.

Prevention

All first-year and new transfer students are required to participate in education about consent, healthy relationships, bystander intervention, and support for survivors. There are also several opportunities for additional education in this area on campus throughout the school year, especially during the first 40 days.

ALCOHOL AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Alcohol, not Rohypnol (“roofies”) is the number one “date rape drug” on college campuses. Alcohol use alone does not cause sexual violence—it is often used strategically by perpetrators to increase vulnerability, diminish resistance, and convince themselves that the victim is sexually available.

Policies

FHSU expressly prohibits sexual assault, sexual harassment, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. When misconduct is reported, Fort Hays State University will act promptly to investigate, provide safety accommodations for the victim, and address any concerns regarding a hostile environment.

At FHSU, consent is:

- Enthusiastically wanted
- Mutually agreed upon
- Informed
- Freely given
- Never assumed or implied

Consent can be withdrawn at any time and any sexual contact without consent can be considered sexual assault. Consent cannot legally be obtained if an individual is incapacitated due to alcohol or other drugs, is unconscious or asleep, or has limited mental capacity.

FHSU is committed to addressing common barriers to reporting sexual assault and ensuring the safety of its students. Anyone wishing to report has the opportunity to talk to both confidential and non-confidential individuals about concerns they may have.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Mental health conditions are relatively common among college students, and it's likely that your student or one of their friends will need help at some point in their college career. Conversations allow you and your student to plan for the unexpected and to know what to do if they experience emotional distress, develop a mental health condition, or experience worsening of an existing condition.

Keep in mind, FHSU students have reported that they are most likely to talk with a friend or roommate first if they experience emotional distress. By talking with your student about mental health, you're supporting them and also preparing them to be a caring campus community member.

Mental Health Statistics

In recent years, students who started counseling services at FHSU Health and Wellness Services reported the following regarding mental health concerns:

Depression/Anxiety

- 58% felt isolated and alone while in the college setting.
- 53% reported experiencing symptoms of depression.
- 76% reported issues with racing thoughts and anxiety issues.
- 38% reported experiencing symptoms indicating panic attacks.

Issues Stemming from Mental Health

- 62% reported sleep difficulties that affected their academics.
- 56% reported it is hard for them to continue to stay motivated in their classes
- 61% noticed a decrease in their ability to concentrate in their classes.

Topics to Cover

Here are some important suggestions in visiting with your student about mental health:

- Encourage healthy habits and discuss overall well-being.
- Correct misconceptions about "normal" college life. Unrealistic depictions of college often glamorize and normalize negative health habits including pulling all-nighters, increased stress, high-risk drinking, and unhealthy food. Help your student make the connection between self-care and mental health before they get to campus. Make sure they know that you support them in making decisions to take care of themselves.
- Create a plan for how often and in what ways you and your student will stay connected. During your conversations, be sure to ask your student about their health and well-being. By making this a regular part of checking in, parents and loved ones are more likely to notice if a student is struggling.
- Normalize the idea of getting help. One of the best ways parents and family members can promote positive mental health is to make sure their student knows that treatment works, that asking for help is normal, and that getting help is a sign of strength and maturity.
- Remind your student that there is no cost for counseling services at FHSU and that all health services are confidential with the exception of circumstances involving danger to the student, others, or as required by law.

- Let them know they are welcome to bring a friend to their health appointment for support. Most FHSU students have indicated that they would talk to a friend or roommate first if they experience emotional distress. Sometimes, having this person accompany them to their first appointment can be helpful.
- Remind your student that you support them no matter what. College is a time of significant growth, and mistakes are a part of life. A perfect GPA isn't worth it if it comes at the expense of your student's mental health.

Possible Conversation Starters

- *"I know you're excited about starting school, and I'm excited for you, too. Before school starts, I'd like to talk with you about some common struggles that people experience in college."*
- *(If relevant) "We have a family history of mental illness or substance abuse, so I'd like to talk with you about mental health and taking care of yourself in college."*
- *"FHSU gave me a guide with information about mental health and wellness on campus. There are a few interesting things I want to share with you."*

Consider Your Tone

While the information you share with your student about mental health is important, students also take away how they felt during the conversation. Your tone can help demonstrate that you are a safe, approachable person for your student to come to if they struggle.

- Be positive. Focus on self-care, resources, and resilience. Your student will be able to tell if you're nervous about this conversation. If you are, acknowledge the nervousness and share that you are talking to them because it's important and you want to be a source of support and information. This will help to normalize what can often be a difficult or awkward conversation, and can also invite your student to talk with you even if they feel anxious.
- Avoid scare tactics. Don't share information, stories, or statistics about mental health with the intention of raising awareness through fear. Remember, you're having this conversation with your student to set them up to succeed, not to leave them worried.
- Express empathy and care. Don't offer judgments or make blanket statements about people with mental health conditions.
- Encourage questions during the conversation and at any point in the future.
- Use open-ended questions and invite them into the conversation. Check in with them about how they feel about the topic.

Stressors and Warning Signs

While some stress is normal and healthy, significant life changes and increases in stress levels can negatively impact mental health. It's important to keep lines of communication open and watch for warning signs that indicate your student is struggling or experiencing a mental health concern. Stressors and warning signs can vary from person to person.

It can also be challenging to know how seriously you should take warning signs. Check in with your student early and often. If you're seriously concerned about their well-being, contact the FHSU Student Affairs Office, Health and Wellness Services, or University Police to discuss your concerns and get guidance.

Common Student Stressors

- Developing and managing new relationships
- Increased academic demands
- Feeling alone or homesick
- Feeling marginalized, misunderstood, or like they “don’t fit in”
- Financial stress
- Unhealthy relationships and gender-based violence

Warning Signs

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest in activities
- Changes in appetite or sleep
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Feeling isolated or like they don’t belong
- Increased alcohol and/or other drug use
- Increased anxiety
- Sense that life has no purpose
- Feeling worthless
- Unable to perform academically
- Feeling trapped or hopeless
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Unable to contact your student

Intervening

If you are concerned about your student, have a conversation with them about their mental health and show you care. Here are some helpful conversation strategies:

- Speak to your student as a supportive loved one first and foremost.
- Express genuine concern and care.
- Don’t argue or act shocked by their responses. This can make them feel guilty or ashamed.
- Don’t attempt to diagnose your student.
- Prioritize getting help over the fear of stigma, judgment, or reputation.
- Focus your conversation on practicing self-care, normalizing and encouraging them to seek help, and demonstrating that you support and love them.

Talking Points

In visiting with your student, try these talking points to encourage communication and provide guidance:

- *“The last time we talked you mentioned you’re feeling stressed with classes. I’m just calling to talk and see how you’re doing. How do you feel today?”*
- *“With all you mentioned about feeling down, I’m wondering if you would consider talking to someone at FHSU. It seems like it would be worth going at least once to see if it’s helpful.”*
- *“That sounds really tough. It can be helpful to talk through how you’re feeling. I’m here for you and want to help. But you may prefer to talk to someone else about what’s going on. Have you heard about the free counseling services at FHSU?”*

- *“I notice that you’ve been mentioning how hard things have been lately. Can you tell me more about what is going on?”*
- *“It sounds like school is pretty stressful right now. I just want you to know that I love you and want you to be healthy, first and foremost. How can I be supportive?”*
- *“Everyone needs help sometimes. And it’s a good idea to take advantage of the free resources on campus. Do you know how to make an appointment at FHSU? I can help you find that information.”*

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students nationwide. It is preventable, and we encourage all students to intervene if they are worried about a friend’s safety.

Take all suicidal behavior and discussion seriously, even if the student has been drinking. Alcohol can increase suicide risk. Encourage your student to get help for a friend in crisis and to understand the warning signs of distress. Many people fear that asking, “Are you thinking about suicide?” will give someone the idea. Research overwhelming shows that this is not true. Asking about suicide opens up the conversation and can save a life.

Incoming Students with Mental Health Conditions

If your student is already under the care of a mental health provider, talk with your student and their provider about how to best continue that care in college. Some students find it helpful to transfer care to a provider on campus or in Hays so they have access to treatment and support during their time in college. Others may prefer to maintain providers in their home communities. If needed, Health and Wellness Services can help in coordinating the transfer of your student’s care.

Academic Accommodations

FHSU’s Student Accessibility Services Office provides accommodations and academic services for FHSU students with disabilities, including some students with diagnosed mental health conditions. Students are required to provide documentation that verifies that a diagnosed condition meets the legal definition of a disability covered under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the Americans with Disabilities Amended Act (2008). We encourage students interested in exploring academic accommodations to contact the Student Accessibility Services Office prior to arriving on campus.

Leave of Absence

For some students, a leave of absence is needed to manage mental health conditions, recover, and get back on track. Sometimes this lasts a few days, and sometimes students need to consider withdrawing for a semester or longer. Contact the Student Affairs Office to learn about the options available for your student’s situation.

Amnesty at FHSU

Your student may find themselves in a situation where they can assist another member of the campus community. As responsible students, they should never feel like they cannot call for help if they have been drinking.

In situations where a student has been a victim of sexual assault and/or a violent crime while under the influence of alcohol, Student Affairs, Residential Life, and the University Police Department will not pursue disciplinary actions against the student victim (or against a witness) for their improper use of alcohol (e.g.,

underage drinking). A student victim who is under the influence of alcohol at the time of a sexual assault is entitled to university and community assistance.

Privacy and Confidentiality of Student Health Information

For many students, college is a time when young adults become independent in managing their time and their health care. Many parents want to support their students while still respecting their confidentiality. The privacy of health care information/medical records for university students maintained by Health and Wellness Services are protected by federal law and several state laws. In compliance with these laws, FHSU only releases information in accordance to those laws or with written consent of the student. In an emergency situation, our staff will exercise professional judgment to determine if family members should be informed of the situation even if the student withholds consent.

We are often asked if students can sign a “blanket” release of information (ROI) form and the answer is “no.” A student may obtain an ROI after they establish medical or mental health care at FHSU. The ROI is valid for the time that is specified on the release and can be revoked by the student at any time.

RESOURCES

On-Campus Resources

Health and Wellness Services

Personal Counseling, Drug and Alcohol Counseling, Accessibility Services, and Medical Services

Fischli-Wills Center for Student Success, Third Floor, Room 301

785-628-4401

Office of Student Affairs

Sheridan Hall, Room 208

785-628-4277

University Compliance Officer & Title IX Coordinator

Sheridan Hall, Room 314

785-628-4175

University Police Department

Custer Hall, Room 112 (Basement)

785-628-5304

To make a report outside of office hours, call 785-625-1011 and ask for a campus officer.

In an emergency, call 911.

Off-Campus Resources

Hays Police Department

105 W. 12th Street

Hays, KS 67601

Non-Emergency: 785-625-1011

Emergency: 911

Options Domestic and Sexual Violence Services

2716 Plaza

Hays, KS 67601

785-625-4202

24-Hour Helpline: 800-794-4624