

FOUR GENERATIONS OVERCOMING ADDICTION

Conversation Guide: Parent to College-Age Child

The college years are often a time of intense social activity—activity that can involve alcohol or other drugs. And while your grown child is now at an age that's beyond the grasp of your authority, he or she still wants and needs your approval. If your child is struggling with alcohol or other drug addiction, he or she needs your help, too. College-age children need to know you're aware of what's going on, that they are not alone, and that there is help.

If you suspect your college-age child has a problem with alcohol or other drugs, the following steps can assist you in getting that difficult first conversation about the disease started.

- 1. Learn as much as you can beforehand** about alcoholism and drug addiction. Try the following resources:
 - [Al-Anon](#): Support for friends and families of alcoholics
 - [HelpGuide.org](#): Drug abuse and addiction: signs, symptoms and help
 - [Families Anonymous](#): Support for family members of addicts and alcoholics
 - [Hazelden](#): Articles and resources for family members
 - [College Drinking – Changing the culture](#): National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
- 2. Adopt the right attitude:** Here are some things to keep in the back of your mind as you talk with your college-age child:
 - ✓ Remember, it is not your child's fault. Addiction is a disease and it often runs in families. It is not a moral issue.
 - ✓ Tell your child exactly what you are seeing and how it is affecting you.
 - ✓ Be concerned, caring and non-judgmental. Keep in mind you are starting a conversation—a two-way conversation with your child. Let your child have his or her say—without judgment or condemnation on your part.
 - ✓ Manage your expectations. This will likely be the first of many conversations you will have about this topic. These are not easy talks to have, and not all of them will go well. Remember, addiction treatment and recovery are a process and they take time.
- 3. Determine your key messages:** Oftentimes when chemicals and emotions are involved, conversations can have a way of getting off track. Choose a few key messages you'd like to convey and repeat them often. These messages could include:
 - ◆ Addiction runs in our family and it's nothing to be ashamed about. (This is where you may want to share a personal story about your or another family member's experience with the disease.)
 - ◆ You are loved and can come to me anytime without judgment.
 - ◆ There is help available when you need it.

4. **Set the right stage:** Avoid having these conversations when there are other issues to discuss or emotions are running high. These types of conversations need to come about in a neutral, unhurried environment.
5. **Leave it with love.** Not all conversations will go perfectly, but they can end on a hopeful note. Even if your child gets angry, remind him or her of your love and concern and reiterate your willingness to be there when he or she is ready.
6. **Know where to go for help:** If you think your college-age child may be addicted to drugs or alcohol, there is help available. In some situations, it may be appropriate to call on the services of a professional interventionist. For more information on treatment or other options, contact Hazelden 24 hours a day at 800-257-7810 or online at hazelden.org.

Print out this conversation guide and have it ready as a refresher when you are ready to sit down with your college-age child.

Check for more information, content updates and inspiring new stories of addiction and recovery at www.fourgenerations.org