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Freshman Dangers

By CWK Network Producer

"There are things that are acceptable in college that aren't acceptable anywhere else. If we had a 35-year-old man at a Christmas party funneling beers, we'd be appalled. But you go to a fraternity house and you've got kids funneling beer, and that's sort of the norm."

-Heather Hayes, LPC, Licensed Professional Counselor

Recent studies show that every year more than 1,400 college students die because of alcohol poisoning, drunk driving, dangerous pranks and other risky behaviors- all involving alcohol. And, almost half of those killed are freshman.

For some students, that first year in college is one long party.

"Sex, skipping class, not taking their education seriously," observes 20-year-old Scott about freshman life.

"Club-hopping, bar-hopping," adds 21-year-old Nicholas.

"Certain people that I know definitely have a lot of casual sex," says 22-year-old Nikki, "like, two- three times a week with different people."

Experts say some freshmen can't handle their newfound freedom. They skip class, get into credit card debt, and binge drink.

"There are things that are acceptable in college that aren't acceptable anywhere else," says Heather Hayes, a licensed professional counselor. "If we had a 35-year-old man at a Christmas party funneling beers, we'd be appalled. But you go to a fraternity house and you've got kids funneling beer, and that's sort of the norm."

So how can parents prepare high school students to handle the freedom of college?

"One thing that you can do is, in their [high school] senior year or in the summer before they go off to school, give them a nice transition period," says Dr. Ken Carter, an assistant professor of psychology at Emory University's Oxford College. "If you've had some rules in the house, in terms of curfew, to sort of back-up on those a little bit."

Dr. Carter says most schools offer courses to teach freshman how to be safe. "There is evidence that students who take those freshman seminar courses end up more well-adjusted, stay in school longer, and sometimes even have better grades."

Finally, he says, there are no *magic words*, no *single talk* you can have, with your kids, before they leave for college.

"It's all those years that you have been there, and helped them and instilled them with values- that's what is going to be important," says Dr. Carter. So rather than telling them what not to do, it's probably better to remind them of what your hopes are for their behaviors."

Alcohol and Brain Damage

By CWK Network, Inc.

Alcohol is the most commonly used drug among teens. Seventy-one percent of eighth graders and 95 percent of high school seniors say that it would be easy to get alcohol if they wanted some. Although many youngsters try alcohol (52 percent of eighth-graders and 80 percent of high school seniors), most don't drink regularly and disapprove of heavy drinking.

Research shows that adolescents may be more vulnerable to brain damage from excessive drinking than older drinkers. Alcohol impairs brain activity in the receptors responsible for memory and learning, and young people who binge drink could be facing serious brain damage today and increased memory loss in years to come. If one begins drinking at an early age, he/she is more likely to face alcohol addiction. Consider the following ...

- Imaging studies have revealed a connection between heavy drinking and physical brain damage.

- Neither chronic liver disease nor alcohol-induced dementia, the most common symptoms of severe alcoholism, need be present for alcohol-induced, physical brain damage to occur.
- Alcohol-induced brain damage usually includes extensive shrinkage in the cortex of the frontal lobe, which is the site of higher intellectual functions.
- Shrinkage has also been observed in deeper brain regions, including the cerebellum, which helps regulate coordination and balance, and brain structures associated with memory.
- Alcohol abstinence has shown positive results. Even three to four weeks without alcohol can reverse effects on memory loss and problem-solving skills.

What Parents Need to Know

Adolescents have a better chance of recovery because they have greater powers of recuperation. If you suspect your child has alcohol-related brain damage, it is imperative to have him or her assessed by a medical doctor or psychologist. Treatment depends on the individual and the type of brain damage sustained. People with impaired brain function can be helped. Often it is necessary to reduce the demands placed on the patient. Also, a predictable routine covering all daily activities can help. Consider the following points when easing your child's routine ...

- Simplify information. Present one idea at a time.
- Tackle one problem at a time.
- Allow your child to progress at his or her own pace.
- Minimize distractions.
- Avoid stressful situations.
- Structure a schedule with frequent breaks and rest periods.
- Consider joining an alcoholism support group.

Resources

- [The Alcoholism Home Page](#)
- [Better Health Channel](#)
- [National Youth Violence Prevention Center](#)
- [Psychological Assessment Research and Treatment Services](#)

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