HELPING SOMEONE WITH AN ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG PROBLEM

Determining if your friend has a drinking or drug problem
It’s not up to you to decide if your friend has a problem; that is something only they can do for sure. But you do know if the behavior they are exhibiting because of their use is unacceptable and affecting you. Some of those behaviors may be:

- Frequent intoxication and/or use of other drugs
- Use at inappropriate times – like before class or before driving
- Skipping classes because of hangovers or activities related to use
- Missing assignments or getting significantly behind in schoolwork
- Mood changes/personality changes – a “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” effect
- Having health problems like getting sick frequently, deteriorating personal hygiene, or having bruises and cuts
- Blacking out or passing out frequently
- Disruptive incidents including yelling, fighting, vandalism
- Excessively denying they have a problem
- Violating their values such as experimenting with other drugs, disregarding safety issues for themselves or others, embarrassing themselves

The best time to talk with a friend
Unless you need to confront your friend for safety reasons, it is rarely helpful or effective to talk with them when they are under the influence. Choose a time when both you and your friend are not emotionally charged.

Planning your talk
Before talking with your friend, prepare yourself. Recognize that you want to become involved because it is the right and caring thing to do. Talk with someone else to whom you can express your frustration and concerns as well as review your options. Be familiar with the substance your friend is using. Then gather some information:

- Specific examples of his/her behavior
- Support names and/or numbers
**How to talk to your friend**

Remain calm, unemotional, straightforward and honest in speaking with your friend. Focus on the care and concern you have for them; your motive is not to punish, criticize or hurt them.

- Be simple, direct and relaxed as possible.
- State the specific behavior you are concerned about and describe how it was objectionable to you. Use “I” statements.
- Make them see what you see in case they are not aware of the effects of their use.
- Avoid judgments, such as “You were obnoxious.”
- Do not preach values.
- Emphasize how much you like your friend and his/her “sober” behavior – give examples!
- Stick to the issues at hand - avoid getting sidetracked.
- Provide them with support numbers or services.

**What responses can you expect**

- Upset and defensive
- Anger and possibly violence
- Excuses and rationalizations
- Promises of change
- Challenging your use or your over reactivity to their use
- None
- Agreement

**After the intervention:**

- Follow through on your promises of support but don’t become a caretaker.
- Encourage and support your friend’s positive new lifestyle
- If your friend responds negatively, make the commitment to try another time
- Continue to let the person know you care for him/her but not their behavior
- Set limits for yourself:
  - Do not take over responsibilities for your friend like doing homework or papers
  - Do not make excuses or lie for your friend
  - Do not plan to go out with your friend if they are going to abuse a substance
  - Do not accept guilt or shame for another person’s behavior
  - Do not martyr yourself
- Know when to quit – if talking doesn’t work, you may need to remove yourself from the situation.
- Get help for yourself to deal with the frustration and turn the focus back on yourself, living the best life you can.