

Drinking Is Not a Fair Game

ALCOHOL EDUCATION CONVERSATION STARTER

Alcohol doesn't affect everyone the same way, and it doesn't always affect you the same way from one night to the next.

If you choose to drink, understanding what's influencing your experience can help you make safer decisions.

In this document, questions to ask and points to make verbatim are in **bold**. Notes and instructions for facilitators are in *italics*.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

KNOW WHAT'S IN PLAY

STRENGTH

- Not all drinks contain the same amount of alcohol.
- Beer, wine, seltzers, mixed drinks and shots can vary significantly in alcohol concentration.
- A larger pour or higher ABV can mean more alcohol than you think.

Do you know how strong your drink actually is?

Allow responses from participants.

AMOUNT

- What matters is the amount of alcohol consumed, not simply the number of cups, cans or glasses.
- One mixed drink may contain more than one standard drink.
- Keeping track becomes harder as alcohol begins affecting judgement.

Would you know if one of your drinks actually counted as two, three or even more?

Allow responses from participants.

TIME

- How quickly you drink matters.
- Drinking several drinks in a short period can cause your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to rise quickly.
- Your body needs time to process alcohol. Coffee, cold showers, food and exercise do not make alcohol leave your system faster.

What is a safe and responsible amount for you to drink over the course of an evening?

Allow responses from participants.

THE SAME RULES DON'T APPLY TO EVERY "BODY."

Two people can drink the same thing, at the same pace, and experience very different effects.

YOUR BODY IS PART OF THE EQUATION

WEIGHT

- Body size and body composition can influence alcohol concentration in the body.
- Generally, the same amount of alcohol can produce a higher BAC in a smaller body than in a larger body.
- Weight is only one factor – it doesn't tell you whether someone is "safe" to drink more.

Why might the same two drinks affect two people differently?

Allow responses from participants.

BIOLOGICAL SEX

- Biological differences can affect how alcohol is distributed and metabolized.
- On average, the same amount of alcohol will result in a higher BAC in females than in males.
- Alcohol affects males and females very differently. There are four reasons for this:
 1. On average, females have higher fat content in their bodies than males. This translates to less fluid volume. In other words, a female has less blood going through her bloodstream than a male of the same weight. This results in alcohol getting more concentrated in a female's bloodstream.
 2. We all have a liver enzyme that results in the oxidation of alcohol. Males have a gastric version of this enzyme. Research suggests that females have, at best, trace amount of this same gastric enzyme. This means that males have a head start at burning off alcohol.
 3. There is monthly variability in BAC for females. Depending on where a female is in her menstrual cycle, it can impact the BAC she attains, and it will take her longer to burn off alcohol since the rate of oxidation will change. This seems to be the case during the phase right before a female's next period.
 4. If a female is taking an oral contraceptive (birth control pills), not only will she feel more intoxicated when she does drink, she will stay intoxicated longer.

Why isn't matching someone else's drinking a reliable way to judge your own risk?

Allow responses from participants.

PUT THE FIVE TOGETHER

STRENGTH + AMOUNT + TIME + WEIGHT + BIOLOGICAL SEX

These factors interact. That's why "I feel fine" or "everyone else is drinking this much" aren't reliable measures of risk.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO DRINK, REDUCE YOUR RISK:

- Know the ABV and serving size of what you're drinking.
- Count standard drinks, not just cups or cans.
- Slow down and space drinks over time.
- Eat before and while drinking.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with water or other nonalcoholic beverages.
- Don't pressure someone to drink or "keep up."
- Never drive after drinking; plan transportation before you go out.
- Avoid mixing alcohol with medication or other drugs when interactions are unknown or dangerous.
- Watch out for friends – and take signs of alcohol poisoning seriously.

KNOW WHEN IT'S AN EMERGENCY

Someone who can't be awakened, is vomiting repeatedly, has slow or irregular breathing, has a seizure or has pale/blue/clammy skin may be experiencing alcohol poisoning.

Call 911. Stay with them. Place them on their side if they are unconscious and breathing. Don't assume they can "sleep it off."

DRINKING IS NOT A FAIR GAME.

You can't control every factor. You can make choices that reduce risk.

Before your next drink, ask yourself: *What's in play for me tonight?*

