

Family Matters: Talking to Your Student About **SUBSTANCE USE**



NDSCS
STUDENT WELLNESS
[NDSCS.edu/Alcoholinfo](https://www.ndscs.edu/Alcoholinfo)

TAKING ACTION

It's never too early – or too late – to talk with your student about your expectations regarding alcohol, cannabis, and other drug use and the risks associated. Research suggests that one of the most influential factors for children is a strong, open relationship with a parent.¹²

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

- **Discuss Risks:** Talk with students about how alcohol misuse can impact their studies, relationships, and safety, as well as its effects on friends and the NDSCS community.
- **Review Policies and Consequences:** Ensure students are familiar with NDSCS's alcohol policy and understand legal consequences for underage drinking, especially as the school year begins.
- **Provide Support Early On:** Offer guidance during the first six weeks of fall, a critical adjustment period when students may be most vulnerable.
- **Engage in Prevention Programs:** Encourage participation in NDSCS's alcohol-education programs to support campus-wide prevention efforts.
- **Know When to Notify Parents:** Be informed about the school's policies on parental notification in cases of alcohol-related incidents.
- **Recognize Overdose Signs:** Make sure students know the signs of alcohol overdose and where to find help for themselves, friends, or roommates.¹⁶

If you have concerns about your student, please reach out to the NDSCS Student Wellness Department at [NDSCS.edu/wellness](https://www.ndscs.edu/wellness) or call 701-671-2286. The department offers free, confidential counseling services and can assist with referrals if needed. For more details, visit [NDSCS.edu/Counseling](https://www.ndscs.edu/Counseling).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NDSCS Prevention

For more information about alcohol and other drug use prevention, visit our website at [NDSCS.edu/Alcoholinfo](https://www.ndscs.edu/Alcoholinfo).

PARENTS LEAD

For more information about talking to your college-age student about alcohol, visit ParentsLead.org

PARENTS LEAD

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING CRISIS LINES



211 - Connections to community resources, emotional support, crisis

North Dakota Prevention
Prevention.ND.gov



988 - Crisis: mental health, substance use, and suicide

PARENT'S INFLUENCE

- Talk with your student about NDSCS Policy and city/state laws. When students violate the NDSCS Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs Policy, consequences vary from a \$250 fine to suspension. Education also accompanies monetary sanctions.
- Model appropriate behavior with your own use.
 - Research indicates late adolescents who have seen one or both parents drunk are more than twice as likely to get drunk in a typical month.¹³
- Minimize Risk. Although any amount of alcohol or other drugs carries at least a moderate risk, some ways to minimize risk and model appropriate use of alcohol include:
 - Never driving after drinking or any drug use;
 - Educate yourself and your student about standard drink sizes for beer, liquor, and wine;
 - Spacing drinks to no more than one standard drink per hour;
 - Never mixing alcohol with prescriptions, OTC medications, cannabis, or other drugs;
 - Not exceeding a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05.
- Continuously check in with your student regarding their use – this will need to be an ongoing conversation topic.
- Indicate your willingness to answer your students' questions or offer to help them find assistance/resources if needed.
- Encourage involvement as students who volunteer or get involved in their community are less likely to misuse alcohol and other drugs. Offer to help your student find healthy alternatives and stay informed of College events, such as:

Follow NDSCS Student Life

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Student Activities

[NDSCS.edu/Events](https://www.ndscs.edu/Events)

Wildcat Athletics

[NDSCSwildcats.com](https://www.ndscswildcats.com)

Community Resources

[NDSCS.edu/Volunteer](https://www.ndscs.edu/Volunteer)

HOW DO I KNOW IF IT IS MISUSE?

Various behaviors could indicate that your student may have developed a serious drinking or drug problem. Indications that help is needed may include:

- Declining school performance/drop in grades
- Abrupt changes in friends
- Abnormal health issues or sleeping habits
- Deteriorating relationships with family/close friends
- Less openness and honesty
- Incidents resulting from a high BAC or other drug related experience

Anonymous screening tools are available at [NDSCS.edu/Wellness](https://www.ndscs.edu/Wellness).

ALCOHOL USE

As your student begins this new chapter in their lives, we know that decisions about alcohol and other drugs are something that every student will face. NDSCS cares about student drinking and we appreciate your involvement and support on this important issue.

Many NDSCS students (42.8%) haven't used alcohol in the past 3 months and 60.3% did not drink alcohol in the last two weeks.¹ If you were surprised by this data, you are not alone. Perceptions of use vary by age group and college students consistently over-estimate how much – and how often – their peers are using alcohol. Peer influence, culture, TV shows/movies about college students, family pressures/influence, and social media can all impact student's perceptions of use.

About
1 in 3
NDSCS students have
NEVER drank alcohol.¹

ALCOHOL: THE RISKS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Underage drinking may impact student success.

- Research continues to illustrate that alcohol negatively impacts student success in college – specifically with lower graduation rates, missed classes, and career implications.
- About **1 in 4 college students** report academic consequences from drinking, including missing and/or falling behind in class, doing poorly on exams or papers and receiving lower grades overall.

Underage drinking poses a range of risks and negative consequences.

- **Interferes with brain development.** Research shows that young people's brains keep developing well into their twenties. Alcohol can alter this development, negatively impacting brain structure and function. This may cause cognitive or learning problems and/or make the brain more prone to alcohol dependence. This is especially a risk when people start drinking heavily at a young age.
- **Impairs judgment.** Drinking can lead to poor decisions about engaging in risky behavior, including drinking and driving, sexual activity (such as unprotected sex) and aggressive or violent behavior.²
- **Increases the risk of physical and sexual assault.** Underage youth who drink are more likely to carry out or be the victim of a physical or sexual assault after drinking than others their age who do not drink.²
- **Alcohol dependence.** Youth who begin using addictive substances like alcohol before the age of 15 are nearly seven times more likely to develop a substance problem, compared with those who delay first use until age 21 or older.

CANNABIS USE

Cannabis, also referred to as marijuana, is a mind-altering drug made from the dried hemp plant Cannabis. It can be consumed in a variety of ways – such as edibles, oils, vaping, and smoking.

Most (76.7%) of NDSCS students reported that have HAVE NOT used cannabis in the past 3 months and 68.1% have NEVER used cannabis.¹ It is important to have discussions with your student to ensure they understand what cannabis is and the risks associated with use.

CANNABIS: THE RISKS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Any drug – including cannabis – in any form is not safe for a child's brain development. The brain is not fully developed until a person's mid-20s. Use before this age increases chances of dependency on a drug. Other risks include, but are not limited to:
 - Issues with **attention, concentration, problem-solving, learning, and memory**, which could cause poor academic or future job performance;
 - **Lack of balance and coordination**, which could increase risk of injuries when playing sports or driving; and/or
 - **Poor judgment and decision making**,⁵ such as having unprotected sex or impaired driving.

DID YOU KNOW?

- **High THC Levels in Concentrates:** Cannabis concentrates can contain extraordinarily high THC levels, sometimes reaching up to 90%. Research shows that cannabis use may alter brain structure in young people, particularly in the prefrontal cortex, impacting decision-making and executive function. Heavy or early use also correlates with a higher risk of developing schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety.⁶
- **Increasing Cannabis Potency:** Cannabis potency has steadily increased since the 1970s. Concentrates can be up to four times stronger than high-grade cannabis, which typically has around 20% THC.⁶
- **Rise of “Dabbing” with Vaporizers:** Using an electronic vaporizer to ingest cannabis concentrates is known as “dabbing.” Dab pens are often preferred because they are odorless and easy to conceal.⁶

IS CANNABIS USE ADDICTIVE?

Cannabis use can impact your student despite it being thought of as a “natural” substance. Increasing potency levels is a concern and may lead to a substance use disorder. Research indicates that trying cannabis from a young age increases the likelihood of problems with cannabis later in life.⁷

Research suggests that about 9% of users, who begin using cannabis after the age of 21, become addicted to cannabis.⁸ This number increases among those who start young (to about 17 percent, or 1 in 6) and among daily users (25-50 percent).⁸

VAPING & NICOTINE

Electronic delivery devices, also known as e-cigarettes or “vapes”, are battery operated devices that heat a liquid to a boiling point into an aerosol used by the inhaler. The liquid usually contains nicotine, flavorings, and/or other additives. When used, the brain releases adrenaline that creates a “buzz” of pleasure and energy. Vaping devices are now the most commonly used nicotine delivery systems among youth and young adults.¹¹

At NDSCS, about 35% of students reported use of tobacco/nicotine products in the last 3 months and 44% reported ever using tobacco/nicotine products.¹

NICOTINE USE: THE RISKS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- **Exposure to Harmful Substances:** The aerosol from e-cigarettes and the smoke from other nicotine products can contain harmful chemicals, including heavy metals like lead, volatile organic compounds, and cancer-causing agents. They also contain ultrafine particles that can deeply penetrate the lungs and flavoring chemicals, such as diacetyl, which is linked to serious lung diseases.⁹
- **Impact on Brain Development:** Nicotine, whether from e-cigarettes or other tobacco/nicotine products, harms adolescent brain development. Since the brain is still developing until young adulthood, nicotine can impact behavior, concentration, memory, and learning. It increases the risk of poor impulse control and is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and stress in teens. Research also shows nicotine primes the brain for addiction to other substances.^{9 10 11}
- **Health Risks Beyond Cigarettes:** No form of nicotine is safe for youth. E-cigarettes are not safer than smoking or smokeless products, which have severe health consequences. Regular cigarettes kill half of long-term smokers, and all nicotine products carry serious risks. More research is needed to fully understand the long-term health impacts of these products.⁹
- **Physical Dangers of E-Cigarettes:** E-cigarettes pose safety risks due to defective batteries that have caused fires and explosions, leading to injuries, especially when charging.¹¹

¹ ND University System. (2021). 2020 North Dakota Student Wellness and Perception Survey NDSCS Institutional Report. Bismarck, N.D.: ND Higher Education Consortium for Substance Abuse Prevention.

² National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). Underage Drinking. January 2016. Available at <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/UnderageDrinking/UnderageFact.htm>

³ Wechsler, H.; Dowdall, G.W.; Maennler, G.; et al. Changes in binge drinking and related problems among American college students between 1993 and 1997: Results of the Harvard School of Public Health College Alcohol Study. *Journal of American College Health* 47(2):57-68, 1998. PMID: 9782661 www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07448489809595621

⁴ Center on Addiction. Teen Substance Use. 2018. Available at www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-prevention/teenage-addiction

⁵ Crane, N.A., Schuster, R.M., Mermelstein, R.J., Gonzalez, R. (2015). Neuropsychological sex differences associated with age of initiated use among young adult Cannabis users. *J. Clin. Exp. Neuropsychol.*

⁶ Just Think Twice. The Facts About Marijuana Concentrates. (n.d.). Retrieved from www.justthinktwice.gov/facts-about-marijuana-concentrates.

⁷ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2017). The Health Effects of Cannabis and Cannabinoids: The Current State of Evidence and Recommendations for Research. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

⁸ Hall, W., Degenhardt, L. (2009). Adverse health effects of non-medical cannabis use. *Lancet*, 374:1383-91.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2018). Electronic cigarettes. Smoking & Tobacco Use. Retrieved from www.cdc.gov/tobacco/basic_information/ecigarettes/index.htm

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (2016). E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health. Retrieved from https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/2016_SGR_Full_Report_508.pdf

¹¹ HHS. (2016). Fact sheet. E-Cigarette Use Among Youth and Young Adults: A Report of the Surgeon General. Retrieved from https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/2016_SGR_Fact_Sheet_508.pdf

¹² Abar, C., & Turrisi, R. (2008). How important are parents during the college years? A longitudinal perspective of indirect influences parents yield on their college teens' alcohol use. *Addictive Behaviors*, 33(10), 1360–1368. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2008.06.010>

¹³ Turner AP, Larimer ME, Sarason IG (2000). Family risk factors for alcohol-related consequences and poor adjustment in fraternity and sorority members: Exploring the role of parent-child conflict. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 61, 818–826.

¹⁴ Turrisi, R., & Ray, A. E. (2010). Sustained Parenting and College Drinking in First-Year Students. *Developmental Psychobiology*, 52(3), 286–294. <http://doi.org/10.1002/dev.20434>

¹⁵ Wood MD, Read JP, Mitchell RE, Brand NH (2004). Do parents still matter? Parent and peer influences on alcohol involvement among recent high school graduates. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 18, 19–30.

¹⁶ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. “Facts for Parents.” College Drinking - Changing the Culture, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/parents-students/parents/factsforparents. Accessed November 1, 2024.