

The Off-Campus Housing Conversation

Why is This Important?

Many students choose to live off-campus for a variety of reasons such as more space, wanting more freedom, or financial reasons. Regardless of the reason, living off-campus means that your student is completely independent and unsupervised. Talk to your student about the legal consequences of underage and excessive drinking that exist while living off-campus. There are a variety of legal problems that can arise including underage alcohol citations, providing alcohol to minors, noise complaints, property damage, and eviction.

Stress that safety is a priority when it comes to living off-campus for them and others who visit them. Off-campus parties are the main setting where heavy drinking happens, and students who live off-campus are the ones who are most likely to attend such parties—more so than students who live in dormitories or at home.¹

Some schools have a policy that extends the Code of Conduct to off-campus environments. This means that if your student gets in trouble for something done off-campus, it can be reported back to the school, which can then follow up with a disciplinary measure. Check to see if your student's school has this policy in place by looking up the online copy of the Code of Conduct provided by your student's school.

✓ SAY THIS

"I know you are living off-campus and aren't subject to the residence hall rules, but I want you to make smart decisions living on your own."

"I want you to remember you came to college to learn. I don't want you to be distracted by alcohol or other substances. And I realize it might not be you doing the drinking, but other people's drinking can also interfere with your life."

"Do you keep in contact with your landlord/management company? Have they told you about their policies for your house/apartment?"

Start the conversation with some general guidelines about living off-campus.

“What kind of ground rules have you established?”

“I want to make sure you are safe and comfortable in your living arrangements. Have you spoken to your roommate about ground rules?”

“I don’t want you to end up in trouble because of something your roommate is doing. Have you tried talking to them about this issue?”

“If you are having difficulty resolving any conflicts (i.e., noise, personal space, etc.), you can bring it up with your landlord. If you feel uncomfortable with the situation you should address it with them.”

You might also want to talk to your student about the importance of open communication with their roommates. It is important that your student realizes they can be impacted negatively by their roommates’ decisions to drink underage or participate in any other illegal activities. A good way to avoid problems is for roommates to have a set of “ground rules” about alcohol and other drug use in their apartment or house.

Sometimes, first-year students live off-campus because there is no room on campus for them or for other reasons. If this is the case, chances are they will not have any RAs or anyone else to ensure their safety during their first year. These situations promote high-risk behaviors, and you should speak to your student about making good decisions in these environments, especially because peers over 21 often provide alcohol. In one study, 85% of recent college students of legal drinking age provided alcohol to minors at least once, usually to friends or family members.² Make sure to look into specific policies pertaining to their housing units.

X NOT THIS

“You can do whatever you like in your own house.”

Don’t underestimate the impact of the law. Saying “You can do whatever you like in your own house” is inaccurate. Underage drinking can lead to a variety of legal consequences for you and your student.

Don’t scorn your student about their decision to live off-campus. Your student might feel like they cannot talk to you. You want to be able to keep open communication with them about the risks and responsibilities that come with living off-campus.

Scientific References

1. Harford T, Wechsler H, Seibring M. Attendance and alcohol use at parties and bars in college: A national survey of current drinkers. *J Stud Alcohol.* 2002;63(4), 726-733.
2. Arria AM, Caldeira KM, Moshkovich O, Bugbee BA, Vincent KB, O'Grady KE. Providing alcohol to underage youth: The view from young adulthood. *Alcohol Clin Exp Res.* 2014;38(6):1790-1798.

Disclaimer: Unfortunately, even with the “best” parenting practices, there is no guarantee that students will refrain from starting to use drugs or alcohol, developing a drug problem, or even worse, experiencing serious drug-related consequences. Conversely, the worst of circumstances does not necessarily predispose one to a life of addiction.