

## **A parent's guide to opening the doors to communication with their college child**

### **MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES**

As students leave high school and enter college life, they are most likely excited about this important time in their lives (and may have some feelings of anxiety about what lies ahead). Students also face some challenges and transitions associated with their first year of college. One of the challenges that all students will encounter at some point during their time in college is the decision to participate in or associate with high-risk behaviors.

#### **What are high-risk behaviors?**

- Binge drinking, participating in drinking games, or drinking shots.
- Drinking alcohol with the purpose of getting drunk.
- Driving after drinking alcohol or riding in a car with someone who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Not knowing what they are drinking or leaving a drink unattended.
- Mixing alcohol with medications, energy drinks, or other illegal drugs.
- Illegally using prescription drugs.

Talking with your student about making healthy decisions and staying away from these high-risk behaviors is an important conversation to have before your student leaves home for JWU. Opening the lines of communication will help educate you about the resources available at JWU, and will guide you through this conversation.

#### **How can parents encourage low-risk behaviors and healthy choices?**

##### **Remind your student:**

- That it is illegal to consume alcohol if they are under the age of 21; and,
- To think of the consequences, both academic and legal, that can result from making a poor decision.

##### **Encourage your student to:**

- Think about whether he or she will drink before going out for the night or to a party;
- eat a meal before drinking;
- drink no more than one drink per hour and no more than three drinks per day;
- always know what he or she is drinking; and,
- know before going out how he or she will get home safely.

### **EDUCATING STUDENTS ABOUT RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING**

#### **Wildcat Wellness**

Wildcat Wellness provides educational programming for students at JWU. Wildcat Wellness partners with a variety of organizations, campus departments and faculty and staff throughout the year to ensure the greatest reach possible to JWU students. Wildcat Wellness programming includes the following topics:

- stress;
- relaxation/meditation;
- nutritional health;
- alcohol/drug abuse;

- sexual health;
- Financial health;
- depression; and,
- self-esteem/body image

For additional information about Wildcat Wellness, please call the Center for Academic Support at 305-892-7026.

## **PRESCRIPTION DRUG USE AND ABUSE**

An increasing number of students are entering college familiar with and using prescription drugs. It is important to monitor the number of prescriptions your son or daughter has filled and talk with him or her about the dangers of taking or sharing prescription drugs without proper doctor consent and monitoring.

### **What is prescription drug abuse?**

Prescription drug abuse is taking medication that was prescribed for personal use or another person in a manner or dosage other than what was prescribed.

What are some commonly abused prescription drugs?

- Opioids (OxyContin, Vicodin)
- Central nervous system depressants (Xanax, Valium)
- Stimulants (Ritalin, Adderall)

### **What could happen as a result of abusing prescription drugs?**

When taking medication, people may experience side effects, and some of those side effects can be very serious. Before doctors prescribe medication to a patient, they consider the specific reason for the medication, the prescribed dosage, and possible side effects. Many people who abuse drugs don't take into consideration what could happen to them as a result of using the medication in a way that was not prescribed by a doctor, and the possibilities of becoming addicted or experiencing symptoms of withdrawal that are not monitored. They focus on the feeling of getting high, relieving the pain, or helping them stay alert, and they disregard the damage it could do to their body.

### **What are the dangers of mixing prescription drugs with alcohol?**

When mixing alcohol with prescription drugs, the results can be unpredictable, dangerous, and sometimes fatal. Each person's body reacts differently to the combination of alcohol and prescription drugs. The reaction can vary depending on the type and quantity of medication and alcohol ingested the time frame involved, and the person's tolerance to both the drugs and to alcohol. Talk with your student about the dangers of mixing medication with alcohol, and encourage him or her to speak with health care professionals before taking any combination of medications or alcohol.

Source: *National Institute on Drug Abuse*

## **OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES TO DISCUSS**

### **Depression**

As students begin their transition into college life, there may be times when they seem sad or have feelings that they are not finding connections on campus. While this is a very common for students to experience as they adjust to their new and

independent lifestyle, for some students, these feelings either do not disappear or they become stronger. Symptoms of depression can include sad or empty feelings, irritability, changes in appetite and sleep patterns, fatigue, and in extreme cases suicidal thoughts.

Students have the opportunity to receive counseling from our counseling center as part of tuition. If you feel a little overwhelmed and stressed, encourage him or her to make an appointment with the counseling center by calling 305-892-7013.

### **Healthy Relationships**

While away at college, having positive and healthy relationships is an important component to having a healthy and enjoyable experience. As family members, you should create opportunities to talk with your daughter or son and assist them in making and maintaining long lasting friendships while at JWU. The following are a few tips that may help in that conversation:

- Encourage participation in Wildcat Welcome events.
- Encourage your student to talk to one new person a day. By asking a classmate a question about homework, or about a fun weekend idea, your student can make new friends more easily.
- Encourage him or her to join clubs or groups. This is the easiest way to meet new people with similar interest.
- Remind your student to smile and say hello. Simply being friendly with classmates and other residential students will help your student find friends quickly.
- Support student's efforts to make friends and remind him or her not to give up, all new students are finding their way around campus in the first year and it may take some time before your student starts meeting people that he or she connects with.

### **PREPARING FOR A CONVERSATION**

College is a time of new experiences, new friendships and memories that will last a lifetime. Students enter an environment that is often their first living experience outside the home and they face many situations requiring good decision-making skills. Sometimes, students don't think about the possible consequences before making decisions about alcohol or other drugs and parents can help educate them.

Before your student leaves home to begin his or her college experience at JWU, we encourage you to have conversations about the risk and consequences of alcohol and other drugs. Talk about your own experiences, encourage responsibility of your son or daughter does choose to drink. Use these tips to help start your conversation.

#### **Before you begin...**

- Avoid contradictions between your words and actions.
- Be prepared to establish an ongoing conversation rather than give a one-time speech. The first discussion is likely to be the toughest to indicate.
- Assess and review your own feelings about alcohol and other drug use.
- Talk to parents of other college students who have learned by experience.

#### **Starting the conversation ...**

- Be prepared to initiate the discussion and exchange information face-to-face rather than over the phone.

- Find teachable moments in television programs, books, or newspapers that deal with substance use in college.
- Do not try to initiate this conversation if your son or daughter is intoxicated. Wait until the next day.

### **When you talk...**

- Speak calmly and openly. You do not need to exaggerate. The facts speak for themselves.
- Listen actively and try to understand your student's point of view.
- Allow your student to express his or her fears and concerns without interrupting or lecturing.
- Use anecdotes or work through situations your student may encounter in college. Talk about ways your student might handle each situation, which one works best and why.

### **TALKING POINTS FOR THE CONVERSATION**

Not every college student chooses to drink, but many do. Help prepare your student for "actual" versus "assumed": college norms, students consistently misperceive what is normal on campus, of those college students who choose to drink, the majority consume four drinks or fewer per occasion according to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

- Remind your student to take charge of his or her health, including sleep, nutrition, physical activity, and sexual behaviors. Students who don't see limits risk exhaustion and illness, which often result in poor grades.
- Encourage your students to balance his or her social and academic commitment. Plenty of opportunities exist for socializing without alcohol. Students can meet others in a variety of ways, including joining student organizations, attending on-campus activities, and taking advantage of the Wildcat Fitness Center.
- Support your student in his or her efforts to either not drink or drink moderately and responsibly when he or she is in a situation where drinking is occurring.
- Listen openly and thoughtfully to your student's concerns and questions. He or she may feel the need to fit in and needs your understanding and support.
- Explain your own expectations, as well as laws and campus policies against underage drinking and other drug use.
- Continue to talk with your student about this topic after he or she arrives on campus. The first weeks are a critical period for first-year students, and we encourage you to stay connected with your student during this time. Utilize different communication methods (phone calls, emails, text messages, Skype conversations, care packages), and keep him or her informed about life at home so he or she will continue to feel connected to your family, even though you may be hundreds or thousands of miles away.

### **STAYING HEALTHY AND INVOLVED**

Physical activity and healthy diet are key elements in managing stress and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Talk with your student about these topics and encourage him or her to explore the many opportunities to stay healthier at JWU.

#### **Campus recreation**

The **Wildcat Fitness Center** promotes health and wellness on campus. The center offers a fitness studio for group exercise classes, a wide range of fitness equipment

for student, faculty and staff use, including free weights, strength training, cardio equipment, medicine balls and Swiss balls for core training. Open gym times are available for basketball.

The **Intramurals Program** provides opportunities for students to experience the great outdoors in the South Florida region. For leisurely-paced camping and biking trips to more challenging hikes or canoeing, we sponsor programs for all levels of interest and ability. Join us for some outdoor fun.

The **Outdoor Pool** is open year-round. It offers students a place to relax or swim laps. The pools are located at Biscayne Commons residence hall.

### Campus Activities

The following are activities for the students and are offered throughout the year.

- The Campus Activities Board consistently programs events. Comedy nights, karaoke, bingo, open mic nights, Universal Studios Halloween Horror Nights and other events occur regularly throughout the year.
- Wildcat welcome occurs during the opening week of school with free activities and programs for students occurring both on and off campus. Free transportation is provided for students and events in the past have included Rapids Water Park, trips to South beach and more!
- Many student organizations host events throughout the year that students can enjoy with their friends.
- Casual dress days for a cause occur once a term.