Coaches Believe

• Every student-athlete matters
• Most student-athletes will respond to clear expectations about alcohol and drug use
• We must step up and intervene when needed
• My behavior matters

How To Recognize a Student-Athlete Needs Help (including emergencies)

How to Voice Your Concerns

How to Access Campus and Community Resources
Notice problems
Take problems seriously
Feel responsibility for acting
Check on protocol for your department/school
Initiate a conversation
Make an appropriate referral
Follow up as needed
Coaches are not expected to take on a counseling role, but the information below can help you identify student-athletes in distress and provide appropriate assistance. Here are some of the areas where students may display concerning behaviors:

**Drop in grades/academic performance**

**Teammates express concerns**

**Sports performance changes**
- Late for meetings/practice
- Increase in sport-related errors
- Disorganized or erratic performance

**Self-destructive behaviors**
- Alcohol/drug misuse
- Self-inflicted injuries

**Changes in physical appearance**
- Worsening personal hygiene
- Unkempt appearance
- Excessive fatigue
- Visible changes in weight

**Changes in mood or interactions**
- Disproportionate anger
- Negative statements
- Loss of interest in activities
- Social withdrawal
- Statements of hopelessness
- Marked changes in eye contact
Student-Athletes may share experiences with staff that indicate a substance abuse problem. **Pay attention to learn more about problem severity** if you hear a student-athlete talk about any of these experiences, especially related to alcohol or other drug use:

- Had a hangover
- In trouble with police or other college authorities
- Had a memory loss (blackout)
- Missed class
- Damaged property, pulled fire alarm, etc.
- Got into an argument/fight
- Was hurt or injured
- Was nauseated or vomited
- Expressed sadness for two weeks or longer
Diagnosis needs to be conducted by a trained professional. But if you’re trying to determine if a referral is needed, here are some questions you can ask your student-athlete:

Use “CAGE” as a guide to determine if the problem is related to alcohol abuse.

- Have you ever felt you should **Cut down** on your drinking?
- Have people **Annoyed you by criticizing** your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or **Guilty about your drinking**?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing when you wake up to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover (also known as an **Eye opener**)?

One “yes” answer suggests a **possible** alcohol problem.
**More than one “yes”** means that it is **highly likely** that a problem exists.
How to Recognize a Student-Athlete Needs Help:
Do You Need to Intervene?

- Trust your instincts and take signs seriously.
- If you experience unease about a student, it is important to pay attention to those inner signals and not disregard what you've observed.

**EARLY identification and intervention increases successful outcomes.**
How to Voice Your Concerns:

How to Prepare

- **Drum up your will power!** The conversation you will have is not easy, but it IS important.

- **Be aware of difficult times:** Holidays, birthdays, anniversary dates, etc. can increase unhealthy behaviors.

- **Get sobriety on your side:** When people are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, they will be more resistant to your efforts to confront their behaviors.

- **Get sound advice** from professional colleagues to provide you with helpful phrases and approaches (see referral section).

- **Be prepared for opportunities.** If student-athlete approaches you with a concern, this indicates he/she needs to talk. Be prepared to speak with them immediately.
Talking about a problem does NOT make it worse. This is the first step toward getting help.

Specifically point out signs you’ve observed and ask what is wrong.

Keep the discussion focused on facts you have personally observed (“I saw you do [this].... I heard you say [that]”) and on your emotions concerning the student-athlete’s behavior (“I feel scared for you when you....”).

For example, you could say:

"I wanted to talk to you because I notice you've been late to practice recently and I'm concerned about you. Would you like to talk about it?“
How to Voice Your Concerns: While Talking to Your Student-Athlete

- Indicate you want to help.
- Give your total attention - look at the person.
- Assure confidentiality (within limits).
- Keep it focused - only address what you’ve personally noticed in the student’s behavior – avoid hearsay.
- Don’t pile on criticism - frame the conversation as a concern for well-being.
- LISTEN.
- Ask questions only for clarification without judgment.
- Expect denial (see separate section for tips on how to handle this).
- Ask if there is anything he/she needs.
- Follow through – help the student-athlete take next steps and be persistent.
When talking with the student, avoid making sweeping promises of confidentiality.

- Students who are suicidal need swift professional intervention and pledges of absolute confidentiality may make this more difficult.
Many students will have trouble articulating the source of their difficulties.

Be available.

Show interest and offer support.

Try not to get upset or communicate your own personal judgments.

Be calm, receptive and serious, conveying that you can tolerate hearing about their painful feelings.

Sometimes what a student does NOT say is as important as what the student does say. Ask additional questions to help understand the root problem.
How to Voice Your Concerns:

Handling Resistance

- It’s normal for someone with a substance abuse problem to deny there is a problem. When this happens, direct confrontation is not helpful.
- Instead, try one of the following approaches:
  - **Reflect** – “I know it’s not easy to hear what I have to say.”
  
  - **Reframe** what you hear – “You’re right, a lot of people on the team drink and I need your help to get them to realize how it hurts them.”
  
  - **Emphasize the right to disagree** – “You don’t have to agree with me, I’m just asking you to consider this before you continue.”
  
  - **Emphasize personal choice and control** – People are likely to feel overwhelmed if they believe that their right to personal choice is being challenged. “I’m just offering information. You have the right to decide what to do.”
Encourage the student to see a professional counselor. You may need to address the student's concerns about counseling.

- "All sessions are confidential and free of charge."
- "If you like, we can call the campus office now to set up an appointment."
- “Being willing to get help for a difficult situation is a sign of strength and intelligence.”
Engage appropriate athletic staff
- Team Physician
- Athletic Trainers
- Life Skill Coordinator

Build relationships with campus resources who may include:
- Clinical Sports Psychologist
- Health and Counseling Center Staff
- Alcohol/Other Drug Educator
- Dean of Students

Identify and follow existing intervention and referral protocol with athletics department and/or your counseling center.

If you plan to make a referral, communicate plan with appropriate athletics staff (sports medicine and senior administrator) and respect the confidentiality of the student-athlete.
Do not discuss the student's name or problem in public areas OR with anyone who does not have a direct need to know this information.

You can contact campus and community resources for general information on how to get the student-athlete help without revealing the student’s name or specific problem details.
Use your on-campus relationships/partners to connect you with the appropriate off-campus resources.

Where to start:
- Local emergency health clinical or treatment centers
- Local mental health association
- Hospital mental health/substance abuse center

Two free national resources to find local assistance:
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator
  Sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov/)
- Hazelden Treatment Hotline – 866-819-1927
  Fee confidential 24-hour service. Can also identify a provider in your area.
Addressing alcohol & other drug issues is important for performance, health and life balance.

Treatment works!

Coaches and administrators can provide encouragement and support.

By addressing substance abuse, coaches and administrators show they truly care for the well-being of their student-athletes.
NCAA and Other Resources

NCAA Mental Health Handbook
www.ncaa.org/health-safety

Step Up! Bystander Intervention
www.stepupprogram.org

External Resources
BACCHUS Network
www.bacchusnetwork.org  www.peoplepreventsuicide.org

Screening for Mental Health
www.mentalhealthscreening.org

Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Institute
www.qprinstitute.com

Jed Foundation
www.jedfoundation.org  www.halfofus.org