ALCOHOL and OTHER SUBSTANCES

Alcohol is the most widely used psychoactive drug. In addition to being the preferred drug on college campuses, it is common to find students who abuse alcohol also abusing other drugs, both prescription and illicit. Fads and peer pressure affect patterns of use.

Nationally, forty-three percent of college students engage in binge drinking defined as five drinks in a row (four for women). Consuming alcohol in large quantities quickly can be lethal. Other adverse effects include: hangovers, hospitalization for alcohol overdose, poor academic performance, missing classes, injury, and unprotected sexual activity.

Prevention strategies have not been very effective in reducing the amount of binge drinking due to its glamorization at society parties and local bars which promote happy hours, all-you-can-drink specials, weeknight discounts, ladies’ nights, etc.

The effects of alcohol on the user are well-known to most of us. Student alcohol abuse is most often identified by faculty when irresponsible, unpredictable behavior affects the learning environment (e.g., drunk and disorderly conduct in class) or when a combination of the health and social impairments associated with alcohol abuse sabotages student performance.

Because of the denial that exists in most substance abusers, it is important to express your concern about the student in terms of specific changes in behavior or performance (not your suspicions about alcohol/drugs).

Helpful to:
- Confront the student with the behaviors that are of concern.
- Address the substance abuse issue if the student is open and willing.
- Offer support and concern for the student’s overall well-being.
- Suggest that the student talk with someone about these issues and maintain contact with the student after a referral is made.

Not helpful to:
- Convey judgment or criticism about the student’s substance use.
- Make allowances for the student’s irresponsible behavior.
- Ignore signs of intoxication in the classroom.