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## Stopping a drunk driver? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

What can I say to prevent someone from drunk driving?

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Kudos to you for looking out for the safety and well-being of others. Unfortunately, there are no magic words to prevent someone from driving drunk — but it's critical to intervene when you see someone who's intoxicated try to get behind the wheel. Read on for tips on how to manage the interaction in the moment and strategies for prevention in the future.

First, a bit about alcohol-impaired driving. In the United States, there's a fatality nearly every 50 minutes in the United States due to alcohol-impaired driving crashes. With a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.08 or higher, no person in the United States may legally operate a vehicle because folks typically experience decreased muscle coordination, decreased ability to concentrate, and impaired perception — all of which are key for motor vehicle operation. If you find yourself in a situation where someone has consumed too much alcohol and you'd like to prevent them from driving, here are a few strategies that may help you manage the conversation carefully and ensure it's a productive one:

- If possible, talk to the individual in a quiet, private environment.
- Try to keep the tone light, calm, and non-confrontational. Try to stay firm and assertive, but avoid being judgmental or aggressive.
- It may help to remind yourself that you're talking with someone who's intoxicated. Talk slowly and clearly, and try not to become emotional. If you've also consumed alcohol, you might enlist the help of a sober friend or multiple friends.
- Use 'I' statements rather than 'you' statements, such as "I'm concerned about you driving home," or "Can I help you figure out a way to get home?"
- Provide a reason for why you are taking action. Try saying something such as, "I don't want you to get into trouble," or "I don't want you to hurt yourself or anyone else."

You could offer some alternatives to driving such as:

- Calling them a cab or rideshare. If you live in an area with public transportation, and the person is well enough to travel, encourage them to take a bus, subway, or train home.
- You might even offer to travel with them to make sure they get home safely.
- Collect their keys. You might recommend letting them crash at your place to sleep it off.
- If absolutely nothing else works and they insist on driving, you may want to call law enforcement — it's a better option than having someone injured or killed.

While it's not always an option, the best way to prevent someone from driving intoxicated is to be prepared ahead of time. If you're designating drivers, it's good to note that a designated driver is someone who is sober — rather than the 'least drunk' person in the room. If you're unsure of what to do or how drunk someone is before they get behind the wheel, it's better to err on the side of caution. Creating a responsible environment might also help set the tone for lower-risk drinking, reduce the likelihood of impaired driving, and maximize the fun while minimizing the risk. Whether you're preparing to be a hospitable host or a [gracious guest](#) [2], having [strategies for preventing drunk driving](#) [3] may help you set the tone for safety at your next get-together.

Lastly, if you're [concerned about your friend's relationship with alcohol](#) [4] or you recognize a pattern of negative consequences associated with their drinking, you may find it helpful to refer them to a mental health professional or a substance abuse professional. Finding a private place and talking with your friend when you're both sober are just some of the tips in starting this conversation.

Hope this helps you assist others in getting home in a smart, safe, and responsible way!

Alice!

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## Related questions

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## Resources

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