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## **My sister is drinking too much!** <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

Help! My sister is a first year college student and never drank in high school. Now that she's away from my parents, she's using her freedom to drink heavily at parties and take rides home with guys she doesn't know. I'm very concerned, but she always regards my concerns as interference. Everything I say, even a simple question about her day, is taken the wrong way. She asks if she has to tell me where she's going and when she'll be back. I don't agree with her drinking, but the main issue is that I want her to be more careful. I offered to pick her up after parties and she just laughed and said, "Like you'd be up then." I told her that I was, but it also didn't matter what time it was, I'd come get her. One more thing, she doesn't know that I know she's drinking. I have several reliable sources that are telling me. How do I approach her without threatening her and our relationship, and without using the tactic that "I'll tell Mom!"?

Thanks,  
Very Concerned

### **Answer**

Dear Very Concerned,

Your sister is experiencing one of life's big transitions: moving away from home (perhaps for the first time) to go to college. She has the chance to make her own decisions now. People adjust to these kinds of life changes in all sorts of ways, and based on what you've heard, your sister may be making some risky choices. Her excessive drinking may impair her judgment and affect her behavior. While she might think that your worries come off as melodramatic, there are ways that you can connect with her about your concerns.

Since your previous attempts to talk with your sister has resulted in her being defensive, consider focusing the conversation on the social scene, rather than whether or not she's drinking alcohol at parties or drinking too much. You could start by saying, "So, what was the party like last night?" or, "Did you have fun?" or, "Were there any hot people there?" If the conversation becomes fairly comfortable, you could talk about some of your concerns and the risks associated with certain decisions she might be making, along with [safer drinking strategies](#) [2]. You might consider the following steps in a conversation:

- **Share your concerns.** You might say something like, "I've noticed you are drinking more than you did in high school" or "I'm worried because you said you are getting rides from people you don't know well."
- **Ask about what she likes about drinking and why she chooses to drink.** This may give you a better idea of what is going on in her life. Then, see if she has any concerns about her drinking or her social life.
- **Find out whether she's open to advice or suggestions before you give any.** If she is open to it, then share. Example: "Before going out for the night, it's a good idea to figure out who could be a DD (designated driver)." or "If you are worried about waking me up late at night for a ride, could I offer you some money for cab fare to get home safely?"

If you want additional information on how you can prepare for and strike up a conversation with your sister, check out [Help for friends who drink too much](#) [3].

If you're still unable to connect with your sister, maybe the messages you want to get across would be better received from someone else? You mention "reliable sources." Perhaps these are friends who could talk with her. Or maybe she has a trusted roommate or friend whom she'd be willing to speak with? Being a responsible friend, or in your case, sibling, sometimes means involving people who can most effectively help. Maybe your parents need to know; perhaps they would be best at connecting with her. Clueing your parents in on what is happening with her is not calling her out; it's being responsible, caring, and compassionate. Even though you may be worried about upsetting her, it's okay to reach out for help when her safety is at risk.

Before chatting with your sister, you may find it worthwhile to strategize further with a professional, like a counselor or health educator. These people can help you practice what you want to say before talking with your sister, as well as provide you with support regardless of her reaction — make sure to take care of yourself, too! Your sister may not respond right away, or at all, but you will have done what you can. While you *can't* control her decisions and behaviors, you *can* control your own and how you handle this situation.

Alice!

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[Friend misusing alcohol](#) [7]

[How do I drink in moderation?](#) <sup>[8]</sup>

[Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

[Help for friends who drink too much](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

[How can I help my drunk friend?](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

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