

Navigating the Transition:

When to (Not) Be Concerned

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Health & Counseling Center
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



Presentation Agenda

Part 1: Introduction

Part 2: Mental Health

Part 3: Substance Use & Misuse

Part 4: Questions

Introduction

Austin Gane
Coordinator, Mental Health
and Suicide Prevention



Kelsey Compton
Coordinator, Alcohol & Other
Drugs and Peer Education

Mental Health

Transitions

can be hard...

We know that new environments can be difficult as they pose:

- new stressors
- a shift from stability
- distance from previous support services
- “friction” in switching to new support systems

77% of US college students

Reported their stress as high or moderate in the last 30 days
**Compared to 81% of DU students*

48% of US college students

Screened positively for loneliness on the UCLA Loneliness Scale
**Compared to 45% of DU students*

44% of US college students

Indicated they got enough sleep to feel rested on most days
**Compared to 48% of DU students*

National statistics are drawn from the 2024 National College Health Assessment; DU statistics are drawn from the 2025 National College Health Assessment.

Mental Health Conditions

are more prominent at DU.

Not because students are more likely to develop the condition at DU, but because they are more likely to enter with it.

44% of US college students

Reported ever having a diagnosis of at least one mental health condition

**Compared to 61% of DU students*

39% of US college students

Had ever received counseling for a mental health condition (31% before starting college, 8% after)

**Compared to 59% of DU students (51% before, 8% after)*

34% of US college students

Received mental health services in the last 12 months

**Compared to 53% of DU students*

National statistics are drawn from the 2024 National College Health Assessment; DU statistics are drawn from the 2025 National College Health Assessment.

What is “Normal”?

It isn't possible to definitively define normal and concerning behaviors, so take these with a healthy portion of salt. These are just some things to keep an eye out for. Trust you know your family member best and look for major changes in behavior (positive or negative) and check in. Avoid assumptions.

<u>Normal</u>	<u>Concerning</u>	<u>Alarming</u>
<i>You can still support them; just don't worry</i>	<i>One instance, meh. A few? Time to check in.</i>	<i>One is enough. Time for a serious conversation.</i>
Having less time for check-ins	Regularly failing to respond to messages	Complete isolation. Waiting till absolutely necessary to reach out
Feeling like they have a lot-maybe even too much-on their plate	Always seeming to be overwhelmed	Shutting down due to overwhelm. Leaving responsibilities unaddressed
Self doubt or imposter syndrome. Wondering if they can do this.	Never overcoming that doubt. Genuinely believing they don't belong.	Equating their failure with their value, or lack thereof. Catastrophizing.
Missing a class or two	Regularly missing class. An unexpected class drop.	Missing weeks of class. A late drop.
Having some bad days	Regularly having bad days	Not having any good days



To support their growth, there needs to be balance:
of independence and connection;
of challenge and support

How to Help

- 1 Anticipate the new relationship
 - Give space for growth, while remaining interested and available
- 2 Keep track of signs and don't be afraid to check in
 - Maintain a tone of care and concern, not oversight
- 3 Increase support to match increased stress
 - Return to what has worked in the past
 - Keep things in perspective
 - Focus on the person, not the student
 - Remind them of their resources (next slide)

Top DU Resources

This is not even remotely an exhaustive list. It is a shortlist of top reference points to offer to a student who may need additional support from campus.

01

Health and Counseling Center

Low to no cost for all students. Individual and group counseling. Located conveniently on campus. Assistance with medications available.
du.edu/hcc or 303-871-2205

02

Student Outreach and Support

Assistance identifying and navigating a wide range of institutional and external resources. Offer connections to financial, legal, medical, basic needs, leave, and academic supports, among many others.
studentaffairs.du.edu/student-outreach-support

03

DU Help

A consolidated list of resources to support students' well-being, finances, safety, connectedness, academics, professional lives, and more. A great starting point for anyone who seems to be struggling.
studentaffairs.du.edu/du-help

Substance Use & Misuse

Substance Use

Can be common during college, as students explore new freedom and seek new experiences.

We'll start by covering what substance use and support looks like at DU, and then talk about how you can support your students.

DU By The Numbers

77.4 % of DU Students
have drank alcohol
(in the past 3 months)

29.9% of DU students
have used tobacco or
nicotine
(in the past 3 months)

44.5 % of DU Students
have used cannabis
(in the past 3 months)

How DU Supports Students

- Clearly Communicated & Enforced Policies
 - Medical Amnesty Policy
- Responsive and Cautious Campus Safety Response
- Substance Use Education & Resources (like me!)

How You Can Support Students – Start the Conversation!



Check in Regularly

Ask about their academics, their social engagements, and their life in general



Ask about their friends & roommates

Ask about the people around them, what they do when they hang out, how they make them feel.



Use open-ended questions

Avoid yes or no questions – ask questions that encourage more sharing

Use these to help prompt substance use conversations

Navigating Substance Use Conversations



React without judgement

Students often gauge what is acceptable to share or not based on your reaction. To encourage sharing, avoid negative or disappointed reactions



Ask About Their Experience

Don't avoid talking about substances or parties – ask questions to further communicate it's okay to talk about these topics



Ask about & encourage safe behaviors

Prompt them to think about safety behaviors, like asking if they got a safe ride home, if they remembered to drink water.

Cheat Sheet

React Without Judgement

Avoid:

- Blaming/Shaming
- I can't believe you would do that
- You're not supposed to drink until you're 21
- Words like: Can't, shouldn't, disappointed

Try:

- Maintaining a neutral expression
- Asking follow up questions
- Thanking them for sharing
- Responding with curiosity and openness

Ask About Their Experience

Avoid:

- Changing the subject
- Rushing through the conversation
- Avoiding the topic
- Minimizing their experience
“everyone does that in college”

Try:

- Thanks for telling me. How did that go?
- That sounds like an interesting night, how was it?
- That sounds like it was a big decision, how are you feeling about it?

Ask About & Encourage Safe Behaviors

Avoid:

- Ending the conversation before getting to the safety topics
- Hinting/Implying things
- Spreading Misinformation

Try:

- Prompting safety conversations
- Setting your expectations
- “How did you all get home safely?”
- “I’m so glad you had fun. Did you make a plan with your friends before you went out?”
- “I’m sorry you ended up feeling so bad. Have you thought about what you could change next time to avoid that?”

Safer Substance Use Strategies

Strategies that students can use to keep themselves or their friends safer while engaging in substance use.

Students should choose strategies that work the best for them, but it's helpful to suggest some!

Everything	Alcohol	Other Substances
Plan ahead	Eat before and/or while drinking	Avoid mixing substances
Trust your instincts	Alternate with non-alcoholic drinks	Start low and go slow
Use a designated driver or rideshare	Count or limit your drinks	Never Use Alone

For powder & pill substances

Individuals using powder or pill substances are at increased risk of opioid overdose due to the presence of fentanyl in the drug market. As a result, we actively encourage students to test their drugs, and to carry Narcan (an opioid overdose reversal agent) if they're choosing to use.



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<i>Can be common, and not a sign to worry</i>	<i>One instance, meh. A few? Time to check in.</i>	<i>One is enough. Time for a serious conversation.</i>
Trying substances for the first time	Regularly missing class or assignments	Academics, job or social life is suffering
Going out to parties or other events with alcohol	Using substances despite not really wanting to	Engaging in dangerous behaviors like drunk driving
Experiencing getting drunk or high	Negative side effects (Bad hangovers, throwing up, etc.)	Trying to stop or reduce substance use, but can't
Saying substances make things more fun	Saying they can't have fun without substances	Regularly using substances to cope with stress, anxiety, sadness or others

Top DU Resources (Again!)

You'll notice this list is the same as our top mental health resources – they're interconnected and great places to keep in mind for any struggle your student may be facing!

01

Health and Counseling Center

Low to no cost for all students. Individual and group counseling. Located conveniently on campus. **Has a counselor who specifically serves students with alcohol and other drug concerns or substance use disorders**

du.edu/hcc or 303-871-2205

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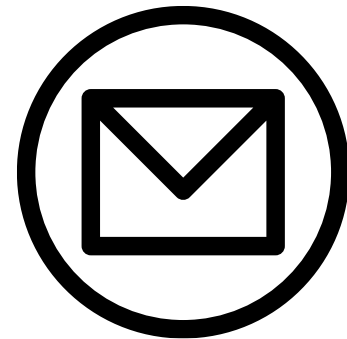


Questions?

We're here to help!

Thank you for your time!

Keep in touch!



Email our team at
hcc.thrive@du.edu



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