

Live Well Be Well

Title:

Let's Talk the College Environment and Substances

Introduction

Welcome to Live Well, Be Well! A podcast where we speak candidly about all things health and well-being! My name is Christine Glissmann and I'm a Health Educator in Health Promotion Services here at UC San Diego.

On this episode of Live Well Be Well, we'll be discussing the college environment and substances.

So we hope you get inspired, we hope you feel connected, and we hope you discover new ways to live your best life. Let's get started!

My primary role on UCSD's campus is to help educate on alcohol and other drugs, to promote safer usage if people decide to use, and to support those in recovery from substances or any other kind of addictive behavior. My main goal for this role is to help shift the culture in regards to substances- ideally I would like to make them less cool, so people didn't care about using them, glamorize the dumb stuff they do while on them, or feel the need to use them when life comes crashing down in their face. Sadly, substances work really well, they give relief quickly, and our culture hypes them up.

I got into substance work because I did misuse and abuse substances in high school and undergrad. I put myself in a lot of risky situations, most of the time I was good because I had more sober friends to look after me, but that wasn't always the case. Since then, I've reflected a lot. I did the work to shift my motivations and to cultivate a healthier relationship with substances- based on moderation at all times (even including the higher use holidays and breaks) and to never use to cope or to conform. My hope is that I get students at UCSD to think about their use, why they use, to understand the risks associated with substances, and how to live in moderation. Substances are clearly not risk free or everyone would be using them 24/7.

I want to first talk about what the college environment looks like now and why it can at times promote riskier behavior. I'm just going to list them off. 1) Prevalence of binge

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drinking (which is classified as 4-5 drinks within a 2 hour period) – about 35% of college students report binge drinking compared to 33% of other persons of the same age. That percentage doesn't seem astronomically different, but if you think about all the people that are 18-22 years old in America- the difference is in the 100 of thousands (around a 610,000 person difference). 2) The ease of drug availability 3) exposure to drug experimentation- most people go through driver's ed to help them operate a XXX. Each year about 37,595 people die from car accidents yearly. Whereas, substances are responsible- indirectly and directly- for over 750,000 deaths per year. 585,000 of those are premature deaths due to increased risk of a particular disease or injury. 166,000 of those deaths are from drug overdoses. 4) peer pressure 5) lack of parental/guardian influence 6) normalization of drug use among peers- High schoolers entering college might have a certain perception of the college experience- based on the media, friends, etc. 7) low perceived risk of harm from drug use – because drug use is normalized in our minds- it can't be risky or dangerous, right? Hopefully you heard the sarcasm, because any substance use is not without risk- some being riskier than others. Young people among others also can have what is called the myth of invincibility- basically the belief that they won't suffer any negative consequences like they won't get caught, or substances won't impact their physical or mental health, etc. and LASTLY 8) those that use, but don't normally consume heavily do consume more heavily over breaks and holidays

The current culture regarding substances is problematic. This environment in itself can lead to a plethora of problems- like trouble academically, mental health issues, injuries, etc. When this environment is coupled with general risk factors for substance abuse the likelihood of developing a substance use disorder is greater. Some of the risk factors include: untreated anxiety and depression, unresolved childhood trauma, social isolation, and poor distress tolerance. In order to protect yourself against a substance use disorder or problems regarding substances one should aim to heal from the past, develop love for oneself, develop skills to deal with the world, and change their controllable environment. There's this quote I really love from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (great name) that says, *"Tell me whom you consort with and I will tell you who you are; if I know how you spend your time, then I know what might become of you."* If you are around people that use heavily or skip classes consistently or whatever- all of those things become normal and acceptable. They also change your perspective on what the rest of the world around you is doing.

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If you need help doing these things, you have support here at UCSD including the Collegiate Recovery Program. You can be a part of this program if you are wanting to change your use, find support in your sobriety, or need support with a sex addiction, gaming addiction, self addiction, etc. We are here to support you.

This next week and the month of April are awareness weeks or months for alcohol and drugs. I encourage you to tune in and check out our social media and newsletter to stay updated on the events that will be occurring. These may help change your relationship with substances or give you the skills to talk to a friend about theirs.

Closing

So that concludes this episode of Live Well Be Well! If you like what you heard and would like to learn more about topics related to health and well-being, there's much more to come! Be sure to check out our website hps.ucsd.edu and follow us on Instagram and Facebook under @UCSDHPS. Stay tuned for our next episode of Live Well, Be Well.

Until next time, be kind, be true, be you. And remember, to be well is to live well.