

MSU's Parents Guide to Difficult Conversations with Students

Montana State University



Finances

- Review the cost of attending MSU and expectations around their contribution with your student.
- If your family is receiving financial aid, discuss the differences between grants and loans.
- If your student is utilizing student loans to supplement their enrollment, discuss a realistic plan on how to re-pay loans after graduation.
- Discuss the pitfalls of credit card companies that target college students.

Substance Misuse

- The first few weeks of college can pose the highest risk across a variety of behaviors as can the transition to college life. We encourage all parents to start conversations with their student early. Open lines of communication and knowing campus resources can help guide you. Some suggested conversation starters include;
 - Do you know what the “party scene” is like at MSU?
 - Do you know how you will handle social situations that may or may not include alcohol and/or other drugs while you are at school?
 - Do you know who to call if you need help?
 - What are some things you or your friends can do to help reduce your risk around substance misuse?
- We encourage you to check-in with your student throughout their time here to see if they need help reaching out to resources or helping them navigate difficult situations for themselves or a friend. (www.montana.edu/oha/)
- Talk to your student about joining clubs, sports teams or volunteering or finding other activities to participate in on campus.

Make sure your student knows the true campus climate. Our perception of college campus culture around substance misuse is far off from actual behaviors (60% of incoming students report being non-drinkers)

Residence Life

- Please talk to your student about the challenges of living with a roommate. This should include expectations for cleanliness, hours for visitation, consideration of sleep schedules, music. Etc.
- We are willing to coach parents anonymously if desired, but the student needs to be prepared to negotiate through their experience directly with the University.
- Reminder for parents: Montana has a restrictive privacy law. We are limited in what we can share with parents unless the student signs a release of information for a specific purpose.
- Make sure your student knows to discuss any potential roommate issues that make them uncomfortable with a Resident Assistant or how to appropriately confront or resolve an issue on their own. If you have any additional questions/concerns please contact 406-994-2661 for assistance and direction.

Preventing and Reporting Crimes

- Be aware of your surroundings. Personal safety is largely about paying attention to your surroundings as well as appearing to others that you are observing everyone and everything around you.
- Limit consumption of alcohol, especially in social situations. Over consumption of alcohol can contribute to miscommunication and lead to other issues that may cause you to become the victim of crime.
- If you see something...say something. Police in any jurisdiction can be reached by dialing 911 on your phone. If you have a non-emergency need, contact MSU Police at 406-994-2121. Crime prevention is everyone's responsibility. Locking your doors (car and room, even while you are in them) and securing your personal property is the best way to prevent being the victim of property crime.
- Theft of unsecured or improperly secured bike is MSU's biggest property crime. Secure your bike at all times with a quality u-shaped lock securing the frame as well as any quick release wheels.

At MSU, every residence hall is assigned a residence hall police officer. This officer frequently eats meals in the cafeterias, puts on safety presentations, and routinely gives tips designed to keep you safe. If you see an officer, say hi. If you have a question about your safety ask them how you can improve, if you don't see your officer and want help with any safety issue, call MSU Police at 994-2121

Mental Health

- Have a proactive discussion about depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts.
- Make sure they know that suicidal thoughts are a sign of a crisis situation and/or depression, and that they should talk about those with you or with someone on campus.
- Encourage them to seek help at MSU Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS), Student Health, or any other support agency on campus should they feel like they are struggling personally, emotionally, or academically.
- If you are aware that they are struggling, check in to see how they're doing. Don't be afraid to directly ask them if they are having suicidal thoughts: If the answer is yes, you can help them access help.
- Students and parents can access CPS at 406-994-4531, and there is a 24-hour crisis line available at 1-800-273-8255.

Healthy Relationships

- Safe relationships begin with healthy communication. Again, we encourage you to have a conversation with your student. In the Office of Health Advancement, we encourage our students to begin any relationship with clear expectations. (www.montana.edu/oha/)
 - What are your boundaries – what type of relationship is this going to be?
 - What do you want physically?
 - What do you want emotionally?
 - What risks are you willing to take or not take?
 - Have you or your partner been tested for Sexually Transmitted Infections?
 - If you do choose to be sexually active, do you know how to protect yourself?
 - Do you know what resources are available on campus for Sexual Health?

Sexual Assault

- Start the conversation. Ask your student if they have heard about the national attention that sexual assault among college students is receiving and what their thoughts are. It's important that all students are engaged in the conversation as sexual assault can impact everyone.
- Discuss the real risks, not the myths. Reinforce the fact that a sexual assault is never the victim's fault.
- Encourage them to trust their instincts. They may be engaged in new experiences, feel pressure to conform to behaviors of their peers, but they should feel confident making their own decisions. If a situation feels uncomfortable, encourage them to find a way out or alert someone about the situation.
- Encourage students to look out for their peers and intervene in potentially harmful situations. If they see something that doesn't look or feel right, step in or get help. They can intervene directly or subtly by redirecting a conversation, making up a reason to leave, or suggesting their friend join them outside.
- Talk about consent. Discuss the need for obtaining verbal/affirmative permission or consent before engaging in sexual activity. Encourage them to abstain from having sex with someone who can't verbally consent. Help your student understand the role that drugs and alcohol play in being able to provide consent, and that people who have been drinking or consuming drugs may be incapacitated and unable to consent to sex.
- Discuss campus resources such as the VOICE Center, Police Department, or Title IX Office. Do students know where they can go for help if they or a friend is in need? Encourage them to build relationships with these organizations and trusted advisors on campus.
- Keep the communication lines open. Let your student know they can discuss things like sexual assault with you and they can tell you things regardless of the situation.
- Confidential staff and advocates are available 24/7 through the MSU VOICE Center at 406.994.7069 to provide information, support, and options for anyone impacted by interpersonal violence.

MSU Resources and Contact Information

MSU Police Department.....406.994.2121
Dean of Students Office.....406.994.2826
Counseling and Psychological Services...406.994.4531
MSU VOICE Center.....406.994.7069*
MSU Title IX Coordinator.....406.994.5326
Health Advancement.....406.994.4380
Residence Life.....406.994.2661

www.montana.edu/msupd
www.montana.edu/deanofstudents
www.montana.edu/wwwcc
*24-Hour Confidential Support Line (call or text)
www.montana.edu/equity
www.montana.edu/oha
www.montana.edu/reslife