

# Parental Notification

## *Considerations for college administrators*



Deciding when and how to notify a parent when their college-aged child has been involved in an alcohol-related incident can be challenging for college administrators. The desire is strong to foster students' development of adult qualities like independence and personal responsibility, but it might be at odds with a competing need to promote the safety of all students. Many college administrators have adopted a policy of notifying parents at the first alcohol violation or alcohol-related incident, and their experiences align with recent research suggesting that parental notification can facilitate constructive parent-child conversations and mitigate more serious alcohol involvement.<sup>1</sup> This is unsurprising because of clear research evidence that parents have an enduring influence on their child's alcohol drinking behaviors, even during college.<sup>2-6</sup> Understandably, colleges vary in their approaches to parental notification policies. This fact sheet highlights some key issues for administrators to consider in relation to such policies.

### *What do parents want?*

In a study of parents who received parental notifications, 86% agreed or strongly agreed that parents should be notified every time for a drug or alcohol violation.<sup>1</sup> The parents also felt that parental notification can have positive effects, such as the early warning of problems with alcohol use/abuse.

### *What options do colleges have?*

Colleges have the right to notify parents whenever they decide it is appropriate for the health and safety of the student.<sup>7</sup> Some colleges have decided to give parents an "opt-out" option—that is, the college will notify all parents unless parents choose to opt-out of being notified.<sup>8</sup>

### *What typically happens after a parent is notified?*

Researchers have surveyed parents about what actually happened when they were notified of their students' transgressions.<sup>1</sup> Two thirds of parents who received notification noticed positive behavior changes in their students, while only 2% saw a negative behavior change. In general, notification opened up communication between parents, students, and the university.

### *Does the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prevent colleges from notifying parents about alcohol-related incidents or violations?*

No. FERPA specifically stipulates that colleges are not prohibited from contacting parents for alcohol-related issues.<sup>7</sup>

To get more information about FERPA and parental notification, please visit our website

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# References

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