Stopping a drunk driver? [1]

Dear Alice,

What can I say to prevent someone from drunk driving?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Kudos to you for looking out for the safety and well-being of others. Unfortunately, there are no magic words to prevent someone from driving drunk. While it’s not always an option, the best way to prevent someone from driving intoxicated [2] is to be prepared ahead of time. However, if you find yourself in a situation when someone has consumed too much and you’d like to prevent her/him from driving, here are a few strategies to help you manage the conversation carefully to ensure that it’s a productive one:

- Try to keep the tone light and non-confrontational.
- Stay firm and assertive, but avoid being judgmental or aggressive. Try using statements such as ?How about making the next one a soda??
- If you have also consumed too much alcohol, have a sober friend help.
- If possible, talk to the individual in a quiet, private environment.
- Provide a reason for why you are taking action. Try saying something like, ?I?m sorry it?s the law, and I don?t want you to get into trouble?.
- Be clear in explaining and justifying your concern.
- Offer options for getting home safely such as calling her/him a cab or giving her/him a place to crash and sleep it off.
- Use ?I? statements rather than ?you? statements, such as ?I don?t think driving home is a great idea? or ?Can I help arrange a different way home??.
- If you live in a city with public transportation, encourage her/him to take alternate means of transportation to and from any events at which alcohol will be consumed.
- If you live in a rural area, arrange a place for the individual to sleep ahead of time.
- Offer to be the sober designated driver, or pre-arrange for a sober friend to come pick her/him up after they are done partying.

There are also ways to create a responsible environment that helps to prevent impaired driving and maximize the fun while minimizing the risk:
• Intervene early to help people stop or slow down and to avoid problems later.
• Set an example for others by consuming alcoholic beverages in a responsible manner [3].
• Discourage the overconsumption of alcohol, including minimizing or avoiding drinking games.
• Keep an eye out for behavioral cues that suggest someone may be drinking too much.
• Pay attention to how much alcohol the other people around you drink.
• Serve food and periodically bring out snacks. Eating before or during drinking is a great prevention strategy to avoid negative consequences associated with overconsumption.
• Stop serving alcohol towards the end of the evening.
• Have plenty of non-alcoholic beverages on hand for people to drink throughout the night.
• When a situation is beyond your ability to comfortably handle it or when someone needs medical attention, seek help immediately.

Rates of alcohol-related deaths while driving are currently about 3/100,000 a year? that?s an average of one every 46 minutes. In alcohol related crashes, 60% of drivers had a high blood alcohol content level (BAC) over 0.15 ? and of those, two-thirds had a BAC above 0.20. At that level, symptoms include highly impaired motor skills, confusion, and disorientation. The risk of death from a motor accident while driving with a high BAC is nearly 400 times that of a sober driver.

It?s important to note that a designated driver is someone who is sober or has not consumed over the legal driving limit ? rather than the ?least drunk? driver. The legal limit is measured by BAC and depends on the state in which you reside. In the state of New York, no person may legally operate a vehicle with a BAC of 0.08 or above.

If you?re unsure of what to do or how drunk someone is before they get behind the wheel, it?s better to err on the side of caution. You may find it helpful to refer your friends to a counselor, or a substance abuse counselor.

For more general information about alcohol, check out the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol, Nicotine, & Other Drugs [4] archive.

Alice!
Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs [6]
Alcohol [6]

Related questions

Help for friends who drink too much [7]
Mixing alcohol with energy drinks ? safe or risky? [8]
Marijuana and driving [9]
Alcohol poisoning [10]
Hangover helper and tips for healthy drinking [11]

Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside) [12]
Columbia Health BASICS program (Morningside) [13]
Mental Health Service (CUMC) [14]
Student Health Service BASICS program (CUMC) [15]

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