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University of Southern
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Articles

[Strategies to alcohol harms](#)

[Alcohol's effects on health:
College drinking](#)

[University of Kansas: Jayhawk
Buddy System](#)

[Conscientious, Protective
Behavioral Strategies, and
Alcohol Use](#)

[Protective Behaviors](#)



Substance Misuse Prevention Newsletter: A Collection of Readings

Protective Behavioral Strategies for Alcohol Use



A Brief Overview

Protective behavioral strategies (PBS) are behaviors that can be utilized to reduce harmful consequences of alcohol consumption. An increasing amount of attention has been brought to the use of these behavioral strategies, particularly on college campuses, as an intervention to reduce harmful behaviors related to alcohol use. Among college samples, evidence shows that the use of alcohol PBS is a factor associated with lower alcohol use and fewer alcohol related consequences (Montes et al., 2019). According to the National Institutes of Health, harmful college drinking presents significant health problems that take a toll on students across the United States.

The Importance of Education on Protective Behavioral Strategies on Campus

Many college alcohol problems are related to binge drinking, which pose serious health and safety risks.

Recent NIAA (2022) Statistics:

- About 1,519 college students ages 18 to 24 die from unintentional alcohol-related injuries
- 696,000 students ages 18-24 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking
- About one in four college students report experiencing academic difficulties from drinking, such as missing class or getting behind on schoolwork

Protective Behavioral Strategies

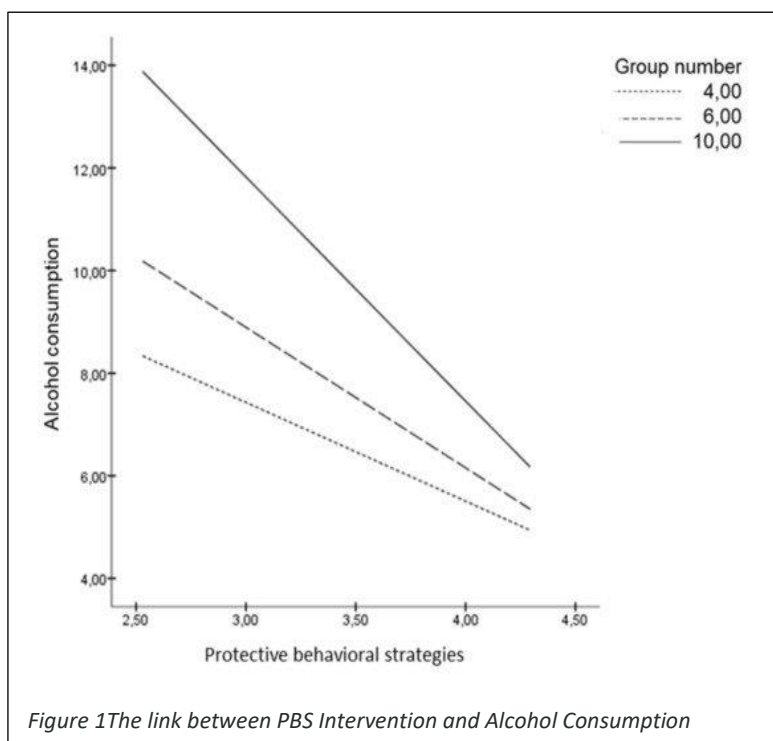
- Eat before drinking alcohol
- Keep track of how many drinks you are having
- Arrive and leave gathering with the same friends
- Set a drink limit
- Pace drinks to no more than one per hour
- Avoid drinking games
- Always pour your own drink
- Never leave drink unattended

A Review on Alcohol Protective Behavioral Strategies among College Students

A review was conducted by Pearson (2013) of PBS literature in an effort to move research on PBS forward. Overall, strong support was found regarding the fact that many types of self-reported PBS use are negatively correlated with self-reported alcohol use and problems. The majority of studies reviewed have defined PBS to include behaviors that are used immediately prior to, during, and/or after drinking to reduce alcohol-related harm. The review analyzed the antecedents and predictors of PBS utilization. The most highly evidenced predictor is gender, with women having been found to use PBS overwhelmingly more than men (Pearson, 2013).

PBS and Alcohol Consumption

The figure below is from a study by Tabernero et al. (2019) which investigated the influence of PBS on alcohol consumption in a sample of 286 individuals at an average age of 23, 67.5% of whom were female. The study also examined how the size of peer groups influenced alcohol consumption in relation to PBS. As the figure demonstrates, the more PBS young adults used, the lower their alcohol consumption was regardless of what group size they were a part of.



For comments on this newsletter or suggestions for future articles please contact: Diane Geyer LCPC, LADC, CCS, NCC~ Clinician and Coordinator of Clinical Substance Use Services at USM or Mary Furlong, Graduate Assistant~ Email: diane.geyer@maine.edu mary.furlong@maine.edu