

Empathy

- Adopt a professional, reflective and understanding style. Avoid a blaming, confrontational or coercive style.

Directness

- Maintain eye contact and raise the subject, “I would like to take a few minutes to talk about your alcohol use.” Be very direct with patient in front of family.

Data

- Feedback: “I am concerned about your drinking.” Our screening indicates that:
 1. You are above what we consider the safe limits of drinking; and
 2. You are at risk for alcohol-related illness, injury, and death.”
- Offer comparison to national norms (See Quick Reference Card - Screening for Alcohol Problems in the ED)

Identify willingness to change

- “How ready are you to change your drinking patterns?”
- If the response is negative, then ask, “Why not?”
- If the response is positive, then the patient is ready, move on to recommendations.
- The response will help the physician to identify discrepancies and assist the patient to move along the continuum from ambivalence to change.

Recommend action/advice

- All Patients:
“We recommend that you never drive after drinking.”
- At-Risk/Harmful Drinkers:
Statement of recommended drinking limits (See Quick Reference Card - Screening for Alcohol Problems in the ED)
Follow-up with your primary care physician
- Screen positive, but unsure if dependent drinker:
Abstain from drinking, and refer for further assessment to social work, psychiatry or a specialized treatment facility or alcohol counselor.
- Dependent Drinkers:
Abstain from drinking and refer to a detoxification center, specialized alcohol treatment facility, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and primary care.

Elicit response

- “How does this sound to you?” or “Where does this leave you?”

Clarify and confirm action

- Possible clarification with family presence:
“We have just completed a screening test for a whole spectrum of alcohol problems that may lead to an increase risk of illness and injury. We are not attempting to label you as an ‘alcoholic.’ We want you to follow up with your primary care physician, just as we would with any patient who has screened positively for other health problems such as high blood pressure or a high sugar level.”
- Possible confirmation with family presence:
“We are very concerned about your drinking. In the interest of the health of your family and yourself, we recommend immediate referral for further assessment and treatment. We know that cutting back or abstaining from alcohol is very difficult to do on your own. We would like to offer you help.” Alcohol is affecting your health, and if you do not do something about your drinking, you will continue to have complications which will harm you.

Telephone referral

- “Would you be willing to speak with a counselor, social worker, etc. now?”
- “I’d like to call right now for an appointment or referral. What do you think?”