

Check-In Tool

Checking In: When, Where, Why, and How

Why Talk?

You hear it all the time: experience is the best teacher. But we don't learn from experience when we laugh off a serious alcohol-related incident or focus on telling stories about how crazy someone acted when they were drunk. When we do that, we actually ensure that the same thing—or something worse—will happen the next time. By talking through the situation, you give the person a chance to think about what happened and decide whether they want to make different choices the next time.

What Are We Talking About?

The goal of having a check-in conversation with a member of your organization is to help the person reflect on their answers to the following questions:

- What happened?
- Is what happened what I wanted to have happen?
- If not, where did things go off track?
- What do I really want? How is doing what I'm doing helping me or not helping me get what I want?
- If the outcome I got is not what I wanted, what could I do differently in the future to get the outcome I want?

It's not your job to answer these questions; only the individual you're checking in with can do that. But as a caring friend, you can help pose the questions and be a sounding board as the person thinks things through.

It may be hard for the other person to answer these questions. For example, if they were very intoxicated or blacked out, they may not know what happened. Part of why you need to have a talk is to make sure the person knows what happened and who was affected. Doing so requires that you present the facts without judgment.

When Is It Time to Talk?

It is ideal to have a check-in conversation following a serious incident where a group member or others were hurt or experienced a negative consequence. Consider having a check-in conversation after a group member:

- Needs emergency medical services either because of alcohol poisoning or because they were physically injured while intoxicated.
- Causes injury or harm to another person.
- Is arrested, cited, or taken into protective custody.
- Causes disruption or acts inappropriately during an event because of their intoxication.
- Damages property.
- Behaves in such a way while intoxicated that others are alarmed or distressed.
- Demonstrates that they have significant trouble following the standards and policies of your student organization.

When Should the Conversation Happen?

We recommend having the conversation as soon as possible after the event, such as the next day. The conversation should not happen later than a week after the incident. The person you're checking in with should be fully sober and able to participate in the conversation privately and without distraction.

How Will This Not Feel Really Weird and Awkward?

We get it. Most of us don't feel comfortable speaking with someone we know after the person did something that caused harm or negative consequences to themselves or someone else. We might tease the person, talk about it with everyone else, or say nothing at all. But, in this situation, as a member of your student organization, you have an opportunity to help a fellow member in ways they may appreciate for the rest of their lives.

The following strategies can help you to prevent having the situation become unnecessarily uncomfortable for you or the other person:

- Your organization's leaders (or you, if you're the leader) should let group members know that, as part of making your organization FailSafe, senior members are going to check in with any group member who meets with significant negative outcomes as a result of their drinking. Let the entire group know that:
 - Check-in conversations are not part of the group's disciplinary system.
 - The conversations are an opportunity to talk through the situation with a friend and make some decisions about it.
 - The conversations are confidential and private.
 - During the conversation you won't be told to do or not do anything. It's an opportunity to support you and help you make decisions.
 - There's nothing you can say during the conversation that would be wrong or bad. The goal is to be honest and think about what happened.
- Don't make the conversation a formal "talk" and don't announce the need for the conversation to the person in front of others. Just find a time when the person is alone and talk with them as you might any other day.
- Remember that your goal is simply to help the person reflect. Let them know you're there to listen, not to lecture.
- If the person shows signs of not wanting to talk, either because they are preoccupied or uncomfortable, try again another time. If there never seems to be a time when the person is willing to talk, gently making that observation can be helpful ("It seems like you never want to talk about this. Why is that?").
- If your student organization or your school initiates a formal disciplinary process as a result of the incident, it's important to keep that process separate from the check-in conversation.