

Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students

SUPER: Substance Use Prevention Evidence-Based Resource, UCLA ISAP

Developer website: <https://depts.washington.edu/abrc/basics.htm>

Practice record last updated August 29, 2025

Cost	Prevention Category	Practice Focus	Practice Focus
Over \$500	Indicated	SU	MH

Practice Summary

The Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students (BASICS) is a program for college students aged 18-24 who engage in heavy drinking. The program consists of two individual sessions within three months, focusing on students' drinking habits, social norms, and personal risks. It uses motivational interviewing to encourage safer drinking behaviors, reduce negative outcomes, and promote informed decision-making. BASICS is adaptable to various settings and is conducted by trained professionals to help students develop moderation strategies and coping skills for alcohol-related risks.

Practice Details

Substance Use Prevention Category	Indicated
Practice Level	Individual
Substance Use Prevention Strategy	Problem Identification and Referral
Practice Components	Individual - Cognitive Behavioral Strategies - Connection to More Services - Motivational Enhancement - Psychoeducation - Self-Efficacy or Self-Esteem Enhancement - Self Monitoring - Skills Training Relationship - None Community/Society - None
Population Age	- Age 18-20 - Age 21-24
Populations of Focus	- Black or African American - Hispanic or Latino - Students in College
Settings	College or University
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	No parent or caregiver involvement

Recommended Staffing	• Health or social work counselor, therapist or professional (licensed) • Health or social work counselor, therapist or professional (unlicensed) • Prevention staff • Teachers or educators
Prevention Focus	Substance Use Prevention Focus • Alcohol Mental Health Wellness and Promotion Focus • Depression • Mental Health - General
Training and Technical Assistance	The BASICS website recommends referring to the BASICS book, <i>Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students</i> (1999), for information about the intervention. The developers advise that the practice can be implemented by providers who are trained in motivational interviewing. For information about training, contact Dr. Jason Kilmer at jkilmer@uwashington.edu .
Program Costs	Over \$500. Please visit the developer's website listed above for updated information about implementation costs.
Adaptations	BASICS has been adapted for virtual implementation, and there are versions that allow for implementation with text messaging. The program has been translated into German and Portuguese, and it has been implemented successfully in tribal colleges.

Risk and Protective Factors

Youth Substance Use Risk and Protective Factors

Level	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Individual	• Early and persistent antisocial behavior • Early initiation of substance use • Favorable attitudes towards substance use • Negative emotional state • Poor coping skills and behaviors	• Ability to adapt to change and the belief in one's ability to control what happens • Positive social orientation (e.g. engaging in healthy activities, accepting rules and community values, positive social engagement) • High self-esteem • Personal engagement in two or more of the following: school, peers, athletics, employment, religion/spirituality, culture • Strong coping skills (e.g., problem-solving skills, ability to stand up for beliefs and values)
Family and Relationships	• None	• None
School, Peer, and Community	• Accessibility or availability of substances • Peer aggression or violence • Academic failure • Low commitment to school • Norms favorable towards substance use • Substance use among peers	• Community norms, beliefs, and standards against substance use • Opportunities for prosocial engagement in the school and community • Positive social norms

Youth Mental Health Risk and Protective Factors

Level	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Individual	• Low self-esteem • Negative emotional state • Poor coping skills and behaviors	• High self-esteem • Personal engagement in two or more of the following: school, peers, athletics, employment, religion/spirituality, culture • Strong coping skills (e.g., problem-solving skills, ability to stand up for beliefs and values)
Family and Relationships	• None	• None
School, Peer, and Community	• Academic failure • Low commitment to school • Norms favorable towards substance use • Substance use among peers	• Clear expectations for behavior • Opportunities for prosocial engagement in the school and community • Positive social norms

Shared Substance Use and Mental Health Risk and Protective Factors

Level	Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Individual	• Negative emotional state • Poor coping skills and behaviors	• High self-esteem • Personal engagement in two or more of the following: school, peers, athletics, employment, religion/spirituality, culture • Strong coping skills (e.g., problem-solving skills, ability to stand up for beliefs and values)
Family and Relationships	• None	• None
School, Peer, and Community	• Academic failure • Low commitment to school • Norms favorable towards substance use • Substance use among peers	• Opportunities for prosocial engagement in the school and community • Positive social norms

Empirical Evidence of Impact

Prevention Focus	Outcome	Population Age	Evidence Strength and Study Populations of Focus
Alcohol	Changes in Knowledge, Attitudes, or Beliefs	18-25	Moderate (Students in College) [References 1-2]
Alcohol	Reduced Use or Delayed Initiation	18-25	Strong (Students in College) [References 1-7]
Anxiety	Symptom Prevention or Improvement	College (18-24)	Promising (Students in College) [References 7]
Depression	Symptom Prevention or Improvement	College (18-24)	Promising (Students in College) [References 7]
Mental Health (General)	Behavior, Attitudes, and Functioning	College (18-24)	Promising (Students in College) [References 7]

References

- [1] Turrissi R, et al., (2009). A randomized clinical trial evaluating a combined alcohol intervention for high-risk college students. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 70:555-567. <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsad.2009.70.555>
- [2] Murphy JG, et al. (2010). Computerized versus motivational interviewing alcohol interventions: impact on discrepancy, motivation, and drinking. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 24(4):628-639. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021347>

- [3] Larimer ME, et al. (2001). Evaluating a brief alcohol intervention with fraternities. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 62:370-380. <https://doi.org/10.15288/jsa.2001.62.370>
- [4] Terlecki, MA, et al. (2015). Randomized controlled trial of BASICS for heavy drinking mandated and volunteer undergraduates: 12-month outcomes. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 29(1):2-16. <https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000056>
- [5] Marlatt GA, et al., (1998). Screening and brief intervention for high-risk college student drinkers: results from a 2-year follow-up assessment. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66(4):604-615. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006x.66.4.604>
- [6] Tomaka J, et al. (2012). An evaluation of the BASICS alcohol risk reduction model among predominantly Hispanic college students. *Substance Use & Misuse*. 47(12):1260-1270. <https://doi.org/10.3109/10826084.2012.692754>
- [7] Whiteside, U. (2010). A Brief Personalized Feedback Intervention Integrating a Motivational Interviewing Therapeutic Style and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy Skills for Depressed or Anxious Heavy Drinking Young Adults. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Washington. https://www.nowmattersnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/2010.Whiteside.Dissertation.A_Brief_Personalized_Feedback_Reduced-File-Size.pdf

What California Providers Are Saying

We have not yet spoken to any California providers who have experience implementing BASICS. If you have implemented it, we would love to hear from you. Please [contact us](#).