

Quick Reference Clinical Checklist: Alcohol Use in Pregnancy

UNIVERSAL • TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED • NON-JUDGMENTAL

Core Clinical Principles

Screen universally • Normalize disclosure • Avoid punitive framing
Use collaborative decision-making • Integrate addiction, mental health and social supports • Continue engagement postpartum

UNIVERSAL SCREENING *(Ask Every Patient)*

Purpose: Normalize and reduce stigma.

Prompt to self:

Have I framed this as routine for all patients?

Suggested language:

- “I ask all my patients about alcohol because it can affect health during pregnancy.”
- “We talk about this with everyone so we can offer the best support.”

OPEN-ENDED INQUIRY

Prompt to self:

Did I use an open-ended, non-assumptive question?

Suggested language:

- “Can you tell me about your experience with alcohol before or during this pregnancy?”
- “What has alcohol use looked like for you recently?”
- “How has finding out you’re pregnant affected your drinking, if at all?”

Avoid:

- “You’re not drinking, right?”
- “You stopped as soon as you found out?”

CLARIFY PATTERN AND TIMING

Prompt to self:

Did I ask about amount, frequency and last use?

Suggested language:

- “On days you drink, about how many drinks do you usually have?”
- “How often would you say you drink?”
- “When was your last drink?”

NORMALIZE EARLY EXPOSURE

Prompt to self:

Did I reduce shame around early pregnancy alcohol exposure?

Suggested language:

- “Many people drink before they realize they’re pregnant.”
- “It’s common not to know right away.”
- “What’s most important is what we do going forward.”

RESPOND TO DISCLOSURE WITH VALIDATION

Prompt to self:

Did I thank them and avoid judgment?

Suggested language:

- “Thank you for telling me.”
- “I appreciate your honesty.”
- “My role is to support you and your baby’s health.”

Avoid:

- Alarmist language
- Threat-based comments
- Shaming “why” questions
- Immediate mention of child protection (unless legally required)

PROVIDE CLEAR, CALM RISK INFORMATION

Prompt to self:

Did I communicate risk without shame or fear tactics?

Suggested language:

- “The safest option during pregnancy is not to drink.”
- “We don’t know of a safe amount during pregnancy.”
- “If stopping feels difficult, that’s something we can help with.”
- “If you’ve had alcohol already, you’re not alone—we’ll focus on what’s next.”

BRIEF INTERVENTION *(Motivational Style)*

Prompt to self:

Did I explore readiness, goals and barriers?

Suggested language:

- “On a scale of 0–10, how ready do you feel to cut back or stop?”
- “What would make that number higher?”
- “What concerns do you have about alcohol and pregnancy?”
- “What would feel like a realistic next step?”

REINFORCE STRENGTHS AND HARM REDUCTION

Prompt to self:

Did I validate progress, even small changes?

If reducing:

- “Cutting back is a meaningful step.”
- “Even small changes can make a difference.”

If abstinent:

- “That’s a strong commitment – what’s helping you maintain that?”

ASSESS FOR WITHDRAWAL OR HIGHER RISK

Prompt to self:

Is there concern for heavy use, dependence, or withdrawal risk?

Ask:

- “Have you ever had withdrawal symptoms when stopping?”
- “Have you needed medical help to stop drinking before?”
- “If your body is used to alcohol, stopping suddenly can be unsafe—we can plan a supported approach.”

If yes - Consider urgent referral and medical evaluation.

SCREEN FOR CO-USE

(Optional, Non-Judgmental)

Prompt to self:

Did I ask without assuming or derailing the visit?

Suggested language:

- “Many people use more than one substance, especially under stress—any cannabis, nicotine/vaping or other substances you’d like support with?”

TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Prompt to self:

Did I emphasize choice, safety and collaboration?

Suggested language:

- “You’re in control of what you choose to share.”
- “We’ll move at a pace that feels safe.”
- “Sometimes alcohol is connected to stress or trauma – if that applies to you, we can talk about it.”

SUPPORT SYSTEM AND SAFETY

(As Appropriate)

Prompt to self:

Did I consider supports and safety in a trauma-informed way?

Suggested language:

- “Who supports you day to day?”
- “Do you feel safe at home and in your relationships?”
- “Would it help to involve someone you trust in your plan?”

ADDRESS FEAR OF CHILD PROTECTION

Prompt to self:

Did I clarify my role and reduce fear while following local obligations?

Suggested language:

- “Seeking help does not automatically mean child protection involvement.”
- “If additional supports were ever needed, we would discuss that together whenever possible.”

(Adapt to local legal obligations.)

CULTURAL SAFETY AND EQUITY

Prompt to self:

Am I avoiding assumptions?

Have I invited culturally relevant supports?

Suggested language:

- “Are there cultural or community supports that would feel helpful?”
- “I want to ensure our care respects your values and identity.”
- “Please let me know if anything I say doesn’t feel respectful.”

DOCUMENTING WITH CARE

Prompt to self:

Did I document objectively and avoid labels?

Tips (charting):

- “Use neutral, factual language (e.g., “reports X drinks/week,” “last use on _____”)
- “Avoid stigmatizing terms (e.g., “alcoholic,” “non-compliant”)

Optional patient-facing language:

- “I’ll document this in a factual way so the team can support you—tell me if you have concerns about what’s recorded.”

PLAN AND FOLLOW-UP

Prompt to self:

Did we create a clear next step and schedule follow-up?

Options:

- Brief intervention only
- Follow-up screening next visit
- Referral to addiction medicine
- Mental health referral
- Social work support
- Peer support/community program
- Postpartum relapse prevention planning

Closing language:

- “How can I best support you right now?”
- “Let’s make a plan that feels manageable.”

POSTPARTUM CONTINUITY

(Don’t Stop at Delivery)

Prompt to self:

Have we planned continued support postpartum?

Suggested language:

- “The postpartum period can be stressful—let’s plan supports ahead of time.”
- “What situations might make drinking more likely after birth, and what could help?”