**ASK VERONICA**

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Tell them how their drinking affects you. Very often, people don't realize that their behavior has an impact on other people. Tell your friends how their excessive drinking has made you feel, how it's affecting your day-to-day life, and how it could affect your friendship. Use "I" statements such as, "I don't feel comfortable with the way you've been drinking lately. I find it hard to enjoy myself, knowing that you're drinking because you're hungry, you act like a different person." Explore some of the underlying causes for their drinking. Their perceptiveness is a great asset. You are right to think that your friends are privately reading your behavior and interpreting it as contributing to their excessive drinking. Very often people turn to drugs when faced with extra stress, heartache, or fear. Your friends need to find other ways of coping and talking with you about their worries can be a first step. You can start the conversation with, "Hey, I know you've been under a lot of stress lately. What's going on?" or, "How have you been feeling since you and broke up?"

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ChALLENGE your friends to think about their behavior. They may be drinking out of habit, since it's sometimes hard to try something new. Or, maybe they're so overwhelmed by their troubles that they don't know what else to do. You can offer to hang out with your friends, step in when the urge to drink strikes, or plan diversions. You can also ask your friends to try drinking less.

**Present options.** Your friends might not be ready to spill on their guilty secrets. They may not want to admit they have a drinking problem. If you've opened the door, though, they're more likely to look to you for help when they are ready. You can offer specific assistance, or simply make a habit of offering.

**YOU can use any or all of these suggestions.**

The bottom line, though, is that your friends will need to recognize for themselves the ways in which their drinking is affecting their lives. It is impossible to be addicted and to get better without being able to recognize the problem. They need to be motivated from within, too. Also, be sensitive to your own needs in these discussions. It's important to suggest that you offer help, but you cannot determine, as well as a few others, will have to take on the responsibility of solving the problem yourself. The cast also includes a drug user whose sobriety the audience cannot determine, as well as a few "at risk" teens.

The play has several interesting and rather unexpected features. Despite the seemingly dark theme of this play—rejection, anger, and suicide—Dykstra manages to infuse "Silence!" with a great deal of humor. In one of the last scenes, a character makes a real gamble by making what the audience expects to be an incredibly serious scene into a hilarious one. The humor is a testament to the writer's confidence and skill, and this approach works better than a serious view would have. The play also has a great deal of foul language, including some homophobic slurs. These slurs drew the ire of some members of the audience as being unnecessary, gratuitous, and insulting, but most agreed that the language added a degree of realism to the efficacy of the play. One of the most interesting aspects of the play is the feeling of hope that runs throughout it, despite the overwhelming despair that confronts the characters. Dykstra does an excellent job of portraying the newfound hope of the characters at the end of the play, with use of lighting and imagery, demonstrating that the strengths of one person’s convictions and the companionship of friends can bring light and hope out of the darkest of situations.