

“Don’t Help Me!”

Tom is a sophomore at a prestigious college. He comes from a low-income household and is the first member of his family to attend college. During his freshman year, Tom did well academically and socially, though he sometimes consumed alcohol at parties, and he was twice cited by the school for drinking in the dorms. Going into his sophomore year, Tom already had “two strikes”: One more citation for underage drinking on school property and he would lose his scholarship.

During the semester, Tom and his friend Kevin are drinking at a party in a university-owned apartment. Tom, dancing merrily, accidentally smashes a glass bottle and badly cuts his hand. Bleeding profusely, Tom begins to feel lightheaded and wobbly. Concerned for his friend and beginning to panic, Kevin reaches for his phone to call for help. But Tom pleads, “Just bandage me up as best you can—if you call for help the school will find out I’ve been drinking and I’ll lose my scholarship! I’ll go to the health center tomorrow morning and everything will be fine.”

Kevin is uneasy with this plan. He’s not trained to clean and bandage a wound and doesn’t want to be responsible for Tom sustaining a serious, permanent injury. On the other hand, Tom insists that the decision to seek help is not Kevin’s to make.

Tom says that he’s willing to risk his health in order to avoid getting kicked out of school and compromising his future. By calling an ambulance, Kevin might be changing Tom’s life forever.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Is it morally wrong of Tom to ask Kevin not to call for help? Why or why not?
2. Can Kevin permissibly do what he thinks is best? If not, is this because he should call for help or defer to Tom’s judgment? Explain.
3. Imagine that Kevin calls for help and that Tom ends up losing his scholarship. Would it be reasonable for Kevin to feel guilty? Alternatively, imagine that Kevin defers to Tom’s judgment and Tom ends up suffering permanent damage in his hand. Would it be reasonable for Kevin to feel guilty? Explain.
4. Suppose that Tom is clearly too drunk to be capable of making an informed decision about what to do, but that Kevin is fully aware of his academic and disciplinary situation. What should Kevin do in that case?