

The First Year

As a parent or family of a Loyola student, it is important to discuss issues surrounding first-year students and reasons they may choose to drink. The first six weeks are crucial and the potential exists for excessive alcohol consumption. Listed are topic areas for discussion with your son or daughter.

Make sure boundaries are clear about your expectations. Remember students and parents/guardians can have a very different perspective of what moderate or social drinking is.

Your student needs to understand that Loyola University Maryland does follow Maryland State Law and that it is illegal to drink as a minor, college student or not. Sometimes students think that somehow being at college negates the fact that they are not 21.

Talk with your son or daughter about the ways in which their decisions can impact their future plans. Encourage them to make decisions to protect future plans of going abroad, getting into graduate schools, job opportunities, or other future endeavors. Most students do not think ahead and instead live in the moment, or believe it won't happen to them. Developing a drinking pattern is a process. The more time that passes without "getting caught" leads to the increased belief that it won't happen.

Drinking to Excess

Some students away from home want to experience the freedom from parental rules and experiment with drinking. This developmental stage is quite normal. Discuss personal development and decision making with regard to the new freedom that comes from living away from home.

First-year students are looking to find a new social group. Discuss with your son/daughter the importance of attending activities on campus during the weekend that does not involve consuming alcohol. Make sure to tell your student that they can develop healthy friendships that are not based solely on the party social scene—and, in fact, they probably have developed many friendships prior to coming to college that were not at all related to drinking or other alcohol related activities. If your student believes there is nothing else to do on the weekends they should visit student activities. Encourage your son/daughter to look at opportunities to volunteer with CCSJ, to participate in club sports, campus ministry, OPTIONS, or any of the other campus organizations. Remember there are always numerous entertainment experiences on the weekend.

As a parent, it is important to realize that students find a social group that best fits how they feel about themselves. If the group they develop seems to drink a lot, your student could be struggling with esteem issues, adjustments to school, or caught up in college myths. It is also possible that your student was drinking or had an established drinking pattern prior to arriving at Loyola.

Discuss with your son or daughter that alcohol can be potentially fatal when used in excess. Drinking games, and taking shots, are dangerous practices and can lead to a student drinking much more alcohol than they are aware of.

Myths and advertisements can set students up to believe that drinking is an expected rite of passage. The reality is that the majority of students are responsible on most occasions. Have your student step back and observe how many students are not intoxicated or out of control before he or she makes decisions about social behavior. The loud drinkers give the impression everyone is intoxicated because they are the ones noticed. Social responsible drinkers are not noticed at parties or at the bar. Heavy drinkers tend to be the students that are encouraging others to abuse alcohol as they want to believe their drinking is normal.

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The Drinking Culture at Loyola University Maryland

Statistically the drinking culture at Loyola University Maryland is not much different than most colleges across the nation. Loyola does allow a limited amount of alcohol in the residence halls for students of the age of 21. The majority of campus sponsored activities are alcohol free.

Every two years, Loyola surveys our students to evaluate the drinking culture on campus. The reality is that the majority of our students do drink responsibly on most occasions. As a parent/guardian, encourage your student(s) to understand the alcohol policy and Maryland law, and to make decisions that will keep them safe.

If You Have Concerns about Your Student

Parents tend to only know about 10% of what their student is doing. As much as we want to believe we know what is going on, students want to keep privacy to create a sense of independence. If you have concerns, do not ignore them. As a parent explore your concerns, however most students are over 18 and are considered adults. Know that not all information about your student's college experience will be available to you.

- First, express concern with your college student. Be very specific about behaviors that concern you.
- Second, speak with hall staff – either the AR, or Rector – to check out concerns.
- Call professional staff at the Loyola's Alcohol and Drug Education and Support Services. Although we cannot speak directly about your student, we may be able to help with some guidelines.
- Encourage your student to seek options through the Counseling Center or Alcohol and Drug Education and Support Services.

Topics of Conversation

Before your son or daughter comes to college

- How will you decide whether or not to drink at college?
- How will you decide how much to drink?
- What kinds of friendships do you want to establish?
- What do you want to achieve during your first year at Loyola?
- What will you do if your roommate only wants to party?

Other conversation starters

- Do you see others making friends, or just drinking buddies?
- How are you getting along with your roommate?
- Are you enjoying residence hall life?
- What is the party scene like?
- What are your personal values and expectations regarding alcohol and drug use?
- What various social experiences would you like to have at college? How are you achieving these social goals?
- What are the risks of excessive alcohol use? What are some ways to avoid these risks?
- How might alcohol or drug use affect a student's academic performance, and what are your views/expectations regarding this issue?
- In the unlikely event that your behavior led to an intervention from campus officials, how would you and your family respond?
- What are the risks of using alcohol and/or drugs? What are some ways to limit your risk?
- How might your views regarding alcohol and drug use differ from those of people you are living with? How might you deal with possible situations that may arise?
- What is the history of alcohol and drug abuse and/or addiction in your family? How might this impact your decisions regarding your own alcohol and drug use? Where can you go for support?

Tips for Parents

- Keep it real: Be a good role model - avoid contradictions between your words and your actions.
- Be factual and straightforward—stay away from scare tactics.
- Allow your son or daughter to express fears and concerns without interruption.