



Dear parents,

It brings us great joy to welcome our students to campus so that they can fully engage in on-campus learning opportunities and build friendships. With their arrival, we, along with you as their family, have the opportunity to help them make healthy decisions as they navigate their college experience.

We encourage you to have an important conversation about how they can support their own wellness and how the use of substances such as alcohol and cannabis can impact their success.

Social media, movies, TV, and perhaps even past experiences may lead us to the conclusion that alcohol and other substances are an inevitable part of the college experience. However, we know from data that this is not the case. In fact, "Gen Z" drinks less than previous generations. Nevertheless, those students who choose to use alcohol and cannabis are more likely to have immediate impacts such as skipping class and getting lower quality of sleep. These impacts do add up; they lead to lower GPA's, lost opportunities such as internships, and ultimately, a lower likelihood of graduating on time, achieving long-term goals, and being ready for employment.

You may think "they don't want to hear it from me," or "my opinion doesn't matter," but we are here to tell you that IT DOES. Research has shown that families are one of the most important influences on their child's drinking and substance use habits, and that your influence remains even after your child leaves for college. **When you talk, they hear you.**

To begin, have an open conversation with your child. At Allegany College of Maryland, as part of the Maryland Collaborative, we stand firm with 18 colleges and universities across Maryland in our commitment to prevent student harm from excessive drinking and use of substances. The Maryland Collaborative's *College Parents Matter* website provides a comprehensive resource that not only shines light on the *why*, but most importantly, the *how*. When you visit *College Parents Matter*, you can find evidence-based answers to questions such as:

- ~ "I've never spoken to my child about alcohol. Is it too late?"
- ~ "What messages should I communicate regarding underage and excessive drinking?"

Helpful conversation tips and prompts provide direct advice on what to say and how to say it, which allows for more comfortable and productive conversations on topics such as alcohol, cannabis, navigating roommates and housing, spring break, and topics we hope to never encounter – sexual assault and impaired driving.

We have an opportunity to begin these discussions now to make change for the future. We, along with you, are 100% invested in seeing your child succeed. Please join me in the unwavering support of our students' success as they set foot on our campus.

With gratitude,

Renee Gibson

Student Support Coordinator & Operations Specialist
Student & Legal Affairs

Visit collegeparentsmatter.org to learn more about:
College Parents Matter, why it's important to have those conversations,
helpful things to say & what not to say, Conversation tips, resources, facts, and more!

COLLEGE PARENTS MATTER: MOMENTS TO CHECK IN WITH YOUR STUDENT

The college years can be hard sometimes. With your help, your student will feel supported in making healthy decisions for themselves and have a happier and more successful experience! Here are some behavioral health conversation prompts and reminders to talk about with your student throughout the year.

Fall

- ✓ **Move-in time!** Regularly ask about their roommates and how their relationship with them is going.
- ✓ **Make sure your student knows campus resources** that can help. Do they know which services are offered at the health and counseling centers?
- ✓ **Use fall family weekend or another visit to check in** with your student about their well-being (sleep, mental health, nutrition, etc.).
- ✓ **Fall means football (or other sports)!** Give them some ideas for tailgating that don't include alcohol.
- ✓ **Halloween in college** can be really fun, but sometimes students feel pressure to drink alcohol to celebrate. Encourage them to start new traditions!

Winter

- ✓ **It's finals season!** Have a conversation over Thanksgiving break about how they can manage stress during their upcoming exams.
- ✓ "How are you, really?!" **Set aside some time during winter break** to talk about how their fall semester went. Include topics like grades, relationships, social life, etc.
- ✓ **Ask if they've felt any need for support services** and if they've taken advantage of campus resources. Discuss any barriers they feel to getting help.
- ✓ **Discuss "break boundaries"**. Even if your student drank while away, it's still appropriate to communicate your expectations at home. High-risk events can include the Wednesday night before Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve.

Spring

- ✓ **Spring Break is here!** What are their plans? Cruises, trips to the beach, etc. can involve high-risk drinking and funding them for your student might mean inadvertently paying for alcohol. Help them explore alternatives such as a "staycation" or a service trip.
- ✓ **The cold, early spring months can exacerbate mental health concerns.** Check in regularly and encourage your student to use campus resources. Offer to help them navigate the system.
- ✓ **High-risk drinking "holidays"** include St. Patrick's Day, Cinco de Mayo, and graduation, but they don't have to be high risk! Help them explore safer options.
- ✓ **Encourage self-care habits** like good sleep, nutritious snacks, and relaxation strategies during finals. Many schools have "de-stress" events available.

Summer

- ✓ **If your student will be new to college in the fall, now is the best time to talk with them about alcohol.** College Parents Matter has lots of resources available to help make these conversations effective.
- ✓ **If your student will be moving off campus,** this is a great time to talk with them about alcohol, and how they can make their home away from home a place where they can succeed as a student. College Parents Matter has specific guides for talking about off-campus housing.
- ✓ **If your student has any ongoing mental health care needs** (counseling and/or medications), talk with their school to understand how your student can continue to access that care while away from home.

Find out more about these topics, including conversation tips and guides!

Visit us at collegeparentsmatter.org

**COLLEGE
PARENTS
MATTER**
have the conversation

**7 Tips for Good
Communication**

1. Don't be afraid to start the conversation.

Talking about drinking need not be taboo. “Detoxify” the topic. You can assume that your child has experience with high-risk drinking situations. Even if your child doesn't drink, they most likely know people who do and/or they have been offered alcohol. This website provides you with ideas on “starting points” for conversations, but it is OK to be more direct and ask about opportunities they might have had to drink or situations where drinking occurred. By asking open-ended questions, your child will be prompted to give more information in his/her answer rather than a simple “yes” or “no”. This is a great way to keep the conversation flowing. They'll be more likely to disclose what happened if you don't interrupt them or react with shocked facial expressions. By paraphrasing what they say, you show that you are really listening and want to hear and understand what they have to say. Be willing to accept without argument when they correct your paraphrased version or “justify” or “minimize.” That's your opportunity to ask for clarification. You're just trying to get a conversation going and learn more.

2. As a family member, you are allowed to disapprove of drinking. Give yourself permission to disapprove.

Research has shown that parents who communicate zero-tolerance expectations around alcohol are much less likely to have children who drink excessively during college than parents who have permissive attitudes. Therefore, it's OK to be a parent and take a stand—and not be “chummy” around this issue. It's important that your child clearly understands where you stand, even if they might not agree with you. It's your voice—and your words—that will replay in their head when they are faced with a tough situation around high-risk drinking. And they can use your message when they refuse to drink. In other words, it's OK for you to be the “bad guy” if it helps your kid save face when he refuses a drink. Your message should be clear: no alcohol is best, and certainly not excessive amounts even when they are of legal age to drink.

3. Banish any fear that your disapproval is naïve.

There is nothing naïve about disapproving of your child's drinking—although it might be naïve to expect that your child won't ever drink (or ever drink too much) just because you've stated your disapproval of them drinking. Many college students do experiment with drinking, but your stance on the matter can still have a powerful impact on when, where, and how it happens. And if they do have negative experiences along the way, your warnings make you look like a genius without ever having to say “I told you so...” Furthermore, you can have it both ways—that is, you can both say they shouldn't drink and keep the door open for future discussion about drinking experiences, because you know that, most likely, they will have opportunities to drink anyway (at least eventually). Follow-up debriefing conversations are very powerful, as you can show that even if they don't always follow all of your advice all the time, you still want to hear honestly how things are going.

4. Focus on one message during the conversation.

This is also known as the “pick your battles” principle. When you are having a conversation about something related to alcohol, it’s not a good idea to let the conversation wander to a different topic. Now is not the time to remind them to call their grandmother, or to check their schedule for their sister’s birthday celebration. Don’t allow your message to get lost in the blur of “laundry list” demands. Stick to your message. Choose a time and place that lets you minimize potential distractions from other family members or work. Silence your mobile devices—better yet, leave them in another room. Focus on talking to your child only. Otherwise, they won’t be getting the full impact of the conversation, and you might skip important things you want to say.

5. Reject the myth that discouraging drinking is useless because everyone is doing it.

We hear frequently from families and students: “... all the kids drink ... that’s what everyone does.... all the time...” Some family members believe that discouraging drinking is naïve, old-fashioned, or pointless, since drinking is such an established part of the college culture. They might say that arguing about drinking is like arguing about revealing clothing or inappropriate lyrics in popular music—what’s the point since the cat is already out of the bag? But the idea that “everyone drinks all the time” is simply false. On the contrary, although most college students do experiment with drinking, most do not drink regularly or excessively. The view of the crazy college party scene as “normal” is a myth. It exaggerates—and sometimes even glorifies—behaviors that only a small group of students actually participate in. Your goal is to steer your child away from that crowd.

6. Make communication a regular activity.

College students have a lot on their plate. They’re juggling classes, work, a social life, and other responsibilities. It’s better to schedule a time to talk with them, rather than having a conversation when they are multi-tasking or unwilling to talk. Setting up a regular phone call, such as calling every Sunday afternoon, can be a good way to establish consistent communication and ensure that your child can focus on the conversation.

7. Recognize the power of your influence.

Some family members say, “They’re 18, I can’t tell them what to do anymore.” True, they’re not little children anymore, but your attitudes and directions still matter enormously. Families play a major role in influencing their college-age child’s behavior. Reiterate that your job as an adult family member is to keep them safe and healthy, and to provide guidance that will help them get where they want to go in life. When we asked a group of fourth-year college students, “What were the most important influences in helping you achieve what you have in college,” their number one answer was “My parents.” So family members take heart: your voice still matters, perhaps more than you realize.