



# TALKING ABOUT ALCOHOL

Pennsylvania state law and Villanova's policies forbid the purchase, possession, consumption or transportation of alcohol by anyone under 21 years old. Having said that, it is true also that there are young people who use their newly increased freedom to abuse alcohol or (more rarely) other drugs. Realistically speaking, it must be said that your son or daughter will confront choices about alcohol while in college. You want them to make wise choices and so do we. Sometimes a poor choice can impact a student's life long after the party is over. Remember, excessive drinking is not normal and students have a good time at Villanova without abusing alcohol.

Talk with your son or daughter about choices and the consequences of their actions. The conversations you have will strongly impact the decisions they make while away at college and lead them to healthier choices. This section contains some general information and provides guidance to lead the discussion with your child.

## 1. THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE IS AN OPTIMAL TIME TO INITIATE AND/OR CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION.

- Research has shown that 90% of students have tried alcohol at least once outside the home before graduating high school.
- Brain research has come a long way. We now know that the brain is developing into the mid-twenties, and the earlier someone begins drinking the more their brains are primed for problem alcohol use in college and into young adulthood.

- Brain research has also shown that someone who begins drinking at earlier ages and continues to drink in college are doing significant, and potentially irreversible, damage to the white matter in their brain. This directly impacts cognitive ability and could also negatively impact a student's academic performance.
- Parents and students report different ideas about what is acceptable and responsible use of alcohol. At Villanova, 72% of parents have said that they believe that responsible drinking is okay but a student should never get drunk. When we asked their sons/daughters about their parents' attitudes, most reported that their parents actually believed that occasionally getting drunk is okay, as long as it does not interfere with their academics or other responsibilities.
- Is there a family history of alcoholism and/or other substance addiction? This is a very important conversation to have with your son/daughter before they leave for college. More than 25% of incoming Villanova students report having at least one family member with a history of addiction.

## 2. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PARENTS WHO TALK ABOUT ALCOHOL JUST PRIOR TO COLLEGE LEAD TO LOWER ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION DURING THE FIRST YEAR.

- **It's time to move beyond the "don't drink and drive" conversation. What does responsible alcohol use mean?**

- The culture of alcohol use on college campuses is different than it was 25 years ago. Gone are the days of chugging beer and keg stands. Today's college students are drinking more, drinking more hard liquor, and are pre-gaming before events to prime themselves for the night. Pre-gaming describes students drinking in small groups before a bigger event (e.g., game, formal, party) where they might not have access to alcohol. By pre-gaming, students are often consuming more than 5 drinks over the course of an hour before they even get to another event where they continue to drink.
- As part of the "alcohol" conversation, discuss your expectations of your son/daughter. If we asked your son/daughter how you would answer these questions, what would they say?
  - 1) My family expects me to abstain from alcohol until I am 21.
  - 2) My family expects that if I choose to drink, I will not drink and drive.
  - 3) My family expects that if I choose to drink, I do not exceed a certain amount of alcohol.
  - 4) My family expects that if I choose to drink, my grades are not affected.

- 5) My family expects that if I choose to drink, I do not put myself in a dangerous situation.
- 6) My family expects that if I choose to drink, I do not get into trouble.
- 7) My family expects that if I choose to drink, and someone is in trouble, I will call for help.

### 3. THE MOST CRITICAL TIME IN A COLLEGE STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE IS THE FIRST SIX WEEKS OF THE FIRST SEMESTER.

- **Profile of the incoming Villanova student (BEFORE they arrive on campus): 60% identify as non-drinkers; 20% identify as light or moderate drinkers (less than 4 drinks for women; less than 5 drinks for men); and 20% identify as high-risk drinkers (more than 4 drinks for women; more than 5 drinks for men).**
- Abuse of alcohol has been consistently associated with higher incidences of unplanned sexual activity, sexual and physical violence, injury, trouble with campus and local law enforcement, and fatality. First year students are at even greater risk for these consequences in the first six weeks of their first semester on campus.
- Parents often mistakenly feel as though their influence ends when their son/daughter goes to college. Nothing could be further from the truth. Particularly in the first year, parents are still cited as the #1 source of information and advice for college students. It is critical that parents still leverage this influence in conversations with their son/daughter about a variety of things, including alcohol.
- Even if your son/daughter did not drink in high school and have said that they are committed to not drinking until they are 21 (or at all), realize that MOST college students experiment with alcohol at some point in their college career. In fact, within the first six weeks of their first semester, many students who identify as non-drinkers begin drinking.

### 4. TIPS AND STRATEGIES FROM THE EXPERTS

- **Understand that the conversation about alcohol should continue and adapt to the changing experiences of your son/daughter. Talking about alcohol in high school is a different conversation than a pre-college conversation about alcohol. The key is to keep checking in and talking about it.**
- Students think they know it all when it comes to alcohol. However, statistics continue to show that students are not translating what they learn into the decisions that they are making. Talk about what you have learned and challenge them to think through their decisions rather than accept that they have “heard it all before.”

- Be curious. Ask questions in a supportive, non-threatening way. For example, do you know someone who drinks a lot? Have you felt pressured to drink? To drink more than you wanted to? What does a typical weekend at Villanova look like? Sometimes your son/daughter can paint a more complete picture if you ask questions that are not always targeting their own alcohol use.
- Avoid falling into the “everyone is drinking” trap. Other students can influence your son/daughter in two ways: 1) there is an active social influence in which friends may suggest that they “go get drunk”; and 2) there is a passive social influence in which your son/daughter perceives that everyone else is drinking and/or getting drunk and that it is acceptable. Resist the desire to reinforce their thinking. The reality is not everyone at Villanova is drinking (in fact, a majority of Villanova first year students fall into one of two categories: 1) they are non-drinkers, or 2) they do not drink a lot. It can be easy to assume that their perceptions are the reality.

## 5. VILLANOVA’S ALCOHOL POLICY

- Villanova has a medical assistance policy that encourages students to seek care and assistance for their fellow students. The policy provides that students who seek medical assistance for an intoxicated/impaired student will not be subject to formal University disciplinary action, if they, too, are intoxicated or in violation of the University Alcohol Policy at the time of the notification.
- Villanova complies with federal and commonwealth law which allows students to drink at age 21. We do not turn a blind eye to illegal use of alcohol, but we do consider illegal and irresponsible alcohol use differently. The following key areas further delineate our approach and policies pertaining to student alcohol use at Villanova: 1) Villanova’s policies apply to student behavior on and off the campus; 2) Villanova is not a dry campus—students who are of legal age can possess and consume moderate amounts of alcohol; 3) Villanova addresses alcohol violations through education, counseling and disciplinary measures. Students found responsible for alcohol intoxication involving transport to the local hospital will subsequently meet with the Associate/Assistant Dean in their academic college to discuss the potential impact of their behavior on their academics.
- When a student is placed on disciplinary probation, suspended or expelled for alcohol offenses, the University reserves the right to notify parents about the disciplinary status.
- The consequences for underage drinking in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are as follows: 1) \$500 fine for first offense and suspension of driver’s license for 90 days; 2) \$1,000 fine for second offense and suspension of driver’s license for one year.

Take advantage of the resources available to you as a parent before and during their Villanova experience:

Resources for Parents:

Details

AlcoholEdu® and Haven course

A 30-minute demo course which introduces you to the two student courses required of all incoming freshmen and provides printable handouts on talking with your student about alcohol and sexual violence.

The Student Advocate

A monthly publication available at: <http://readsh101.com/villanova-pp.html>. This is the companion e-publication for parents to Student Health 101. To receive a copy of *Student Health 101* to read what your students are reading, text **VILLANOVA** to **40691**.

BACcards.com app

A free smartphone app for all Villanova students which has been customized with Villanova resources and activities, in addition to serving as a confidential, personalized tracking system for students who drink.

Parents Website

This site contains suggested readings and other parent resources regarding college students and alcohol.

Weekend Campus Activities

Sign up for the **Campus Activities Team (CAT)** text alerts to know what is happening on campus each weekend and share with your son/daughter. Text **NOVACAT** to **71441**.