As your student leaves high school, it’s natural to want to educate them about alcohol and the choices they will face in the college setting. Often parents worry about excessive use of alcohol on campuses and may wonder how to help their student negotiate this new social environment. Many parents aren’t sure how to start a conversation about alcohol, a substance that’s not legal for most first year students to consume. Below are some points other parents have found helpful in engaging their student in a productive conversation about alcohol BEFORE arriving on campus:

- First, don’t assume your student will choose to drink. “Everyone drinks in college” is a common misperception. A positive way to start the conversation that won’t add to misperceptions might be: “I want to talk to you about alcohol because some college students choose to drink. Understanding alcohol might help you make decisions about your own behavior and help others, as well.”

- Consider checking out BAC (blood alcohol concentration) calculators together online. An example of a BAC calculator can be found at http://bloodalcoholcalculator.org. You need to understand serving size to use them. Quiz yourself and your student on how many servings of alcohol are in different drinks.

- Talk about the fact that some day during college, your student will be 21. Help your student figure out what level of consumption is related to the pleasurable effects associated with alcohol without crossing over into negative consequences.

- Establish an expectation that your student never drinks and drives and never gets in a car with a driver who has been drinking. Either choice can end up with deadly and costly consequences.

- Encourage your student to call for an ambulance if he or she suspects a friend has alcohol poisoning. Students looking out for other students save lives.

- Please remind your student that VCU follows all state, federal, and local laws. It is illegal to drink under 21. VCU’s police force is composed of sworn officers. If your student is arrested, the legal charge may result in time spent at the Richmond City lockup and no one wants to spend a Saturday night there! For more information on VCU’s Alcohol and Other Drug Policy, see www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/alcoholdrugpolicy.pdf.

- Students found violating residence hall policies (including drinking underage) can face sanctions through housing. Depending on the severity of the offense, a student’s housing contract could be cancelled. Most VCU students aren’t drinking extreme amounts of alcohol. If yours is, a visit to University Counseling Services might provide a valuable reality check (www.students.vcu.edu/counseling).

### Tips for talking to your college student about alcohol

#### Serving Size is Hard to Figure Out in America.

For example, consider the supersized alcohol malt beverages like Four Loko or Joose. The caffeine is gone, but one 23.5 ounce can packs close to six standard drinks and sells for under $3.

**One mixed drink** with 1.5 fl oz (44 mL) of 80-proof liquor (such as vodka, gin, scotch, bourbon, brandy, or rum)

**5 fl oz (148 mL) of wine**

**12 fl oz (148 mL) of beer or wine cooler**

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