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# Combating the 'College Drinking Culture'

Parents and teens talk about alcohol.


By [Mary C. Stachyra](#) [Email the author](#) August 1, 2011 [Print](#)

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Dr. William Hauda, a physician at INova Fairfax Hospital, is tired of seeing otherwise healthy college kids spend the night in the ER after downing 10, 15 or even 20 drinks in a single evening.

Jeff Levy's son rode in a car driven by an intoxicated teen, and died in a crash.

In his young life, Virginia Tech student Ryan Smith has already lost two friends to car crashes that involved alcohol, and a close friend's mother was paralyzed because of a drunk driver.

These men come from three different backgrounds, but they have something in common: they have witnessed the destructive effects of the drinking culture on college campuses across the country. On July 27th, they spoke at a forum held at [Westfield High School](#), along with police Captain Bruce Ferguson, commander of the FCPD Youth Services Division, and Casey Lingen, chief deputy at the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney for Fairfax County. The goal: to raise awareness among teens and their parents of the perils of underage and binge drinking.

The night started off with a showing of "[Haze](#)," the story of Lynn Gordon Bailey Jr., who died after a college hazing incident involving binge drinking. Afterwards, parents and teens asked questions—some of which demonstrated as much about the dangers of drinking as the statistics and stories the panelists shared.

One teenager knew a girl who got drunk at a party and was sexually assaulted while she was unconscious, but wouldn't report it. "She got taken advantage of," the teen said. "That's what she called it. I call it rape. What do you do in that situation?"

"My roommate has a drinking problem. To give you an idea of how bad it is, she even got hit by a car. It's been since freshman year, and now as a senior it's the same," one college student said, asking the panelists how she could talk about it with her roommate.

There weren't any one-size-fits all answers. "Ask if they're happy with the behavior," Ferguson suggested to the college student. "You don't remember your night, was it really that fun?"

"It's probably going to be the most awkward conversation you've ever had," Lingen added, but said that he regretted not speaking with someone in a similar situation.

according to the [2009 Fairfax County Youth Survey](#). That number skyrockets to 38 percent among high school seniors. And as they enter college this fall, rising freshmen are likely to see more and more underage and binge drinking. Levy and several other panelists said that they believe the problem starts with underage drinking.

"The kids who have a glass of wine at home with their parents, when they get off on their own, they don't have just one," Levy said, a statement Smith agreed with.

"My friends who started drinking before age 21, they started drinking once or twice a month. Now it's more," Smith said.

#### What to do:

**If you're at a party:** "Never accept a drink that you didn't see poured. From *anyone*," Ferguson said. Police constantly see cases of young people drugged and subsequently assaulted. "If you set your drink down, that drink is as good as if someone spit in it."

**If you are concerned about peer pressure to drink:** "Go to parties with a soda in your hand," Ferguson suggested. Have a plan: what are you going to do when someone offers you a drink? What if you refuse and they keep offering it to you?

**If you are sexually assaulted while intoxicated:** Being intoxicated doesn't make one any less of a victim. The best thing to do is report it and seek treatment, the panelists said. Hauda also noted that even if a victim does not want to report the attack, hospitals can still treat them free of charge. They can also run a rape kit in the event that the victim changes their mind later.

**If someone you care about has a drinking problem:** Talk to them. Let them know that you care about them, Ferguson said, and that's why you are bringing the subject up. Even if the topic is uncomfortable, you'll sleep better at night than if you ignore the situation.

**If you need to talk to someone confidentially:** Talk to a doctor, the school counselor, the FCPS School Safety and Wellness Office, the [Student Assistance Program](#), or a community organization like the [Washington Regional Assistance Program](#). A full list of organizations is available at the [Unified Prevention Coalition of Fairfax County Public Schools](#) website.

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