

STARTING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

MARINES 21ST BIRTHDAY

Approximately 21,000 Marines turn 21 every year. Going out with fellow Marines to celebrate the 21st birthday is often seen as a “rite of passage” event. Due to this tradition, educating young Marines on the benefits of making no/low-risk choices related to alcohol use is critical to the well-being of Marines. Each turning 21 event provides an opportunity to create conversations that educate all of us. Following, are tips for a Marine to speak to another Marine about the role of alcohol on their 21st birthday representing three common perspectives

#1 - CLARIFY THE WHAT?

Use the images and steps below to guide the next conversation you need to have with a Marine about drinking on their 21st birthday from one of these different perspectives.



Non-Drinker

One way to protect what you've earned and prevent negative consequences from alcohol misuse is simply not to drink.

Alcohol is legal and easy to obtain, but it is still an intoxicating/addictive substance that has many negative effects on the human mind and body. It reduces inhibitions, damaging a person's capacity to make rational decisions, making it the number one cause of aggressive or reckless criminal behavior. Drunk driving (DUI) is the most common alcohol-related crime in the United States.



Low-Risk Drinker

Risk is related to quantity (amount) and frequency (how often) of consumption. According to scientific studies, low-risk drinking means no more than one standard drink an hour, no more than three on any day, and no more than 14 in a week. Studies also mention that these levels should be lower for women-no more than 2 per day total- due to the physical differences between males and females.

This brings up another question- what's considered a standard drink? Standard drinks are defined as follows:

Beer - one 12 ounce can/bottle
Wine - one 4 oz. glass
Liquor - 1 oz. of 100 proof

In other words, pouring a wine glass full with 8 oz. of wine is actually two drinks-not one!



Heavy Drinker

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) defines binge/heavy drinking as a pattern of drinking that brings a person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08 grams percent or above. This typically happens when men consume 5 or more drinks or women consume 4 or more standard drinks on any single occasion (in about 2 hours). But then, you must define standard drinks to understand how much alcohol that actually means. A standard drink is defined as follows:

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#2 - HAVE STRAIGHT TALK



Do you believe that most people drink-and often drink a lot? Scientific studies do not support this belief. Thirty percent of American adults don't consume alcohol at all. Of those that do drink, the average number of drinks per week is only three or four. This indicates that most Americans either do not drink at all, or they make low-risk drinking choices. Choosing not to drink at all and making low-risk drinking choices actually makes you part of the majority.



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Talking about the potential consequences of binge or heavy drinking may help to better understand the benefits of making low-risk choices regarding alcohol. Making low-risk choices from the start will make it less likely that you will suffer negative consequence as a result of alcohol misuse. Drinking excessively can lead to various short and long term consequences, including serious health problems, life or career altering incidents, legal problems, relationship trouble, financial problems, etc.

#3 - SHARE ALTERNATIVES



What are some positive alternatives to assist with your choice not to drink? Some simple activities where you can go with friends, family, or fellow Marines and have a great time without drinking are available both on and off of the installation. Many Semper Fit, Single Marine Program, and local community organizations sponsor positive, alternative events. These are activities where you can just enjoy time with your family and friends, such as bowling, arcades, and sports events. It just takes a few minutes to locate these activities on your local MCCS website.



What are some positive alternatives to assist with making low-risk choices related to alcohol use? Look around you for some simple activities where you can go with friends, family, or fellow Marines and have a great time without excessive drinking. Make sure that there are non-alcoholic beverages available as well. Many Semper Fit, Single Marine Program, and local community organizations sponsor events that would support low-risk choices. Usually, if you find something you can focus on and enjoy with others, there is not as much temptation to drink excessively—you're too busy just enjoying time with family and friends. You can locate these activities that will best support your low-risk lifestyle choices on your local MCCS website. You can enjoy a couple of drinks but remember the low-risk drinking guidelines, and you can enjoy without putting yourself at risk for any negative consequences, short or long term.



Now that we know what binge/heavy drinking is, are there some ways to celebrate this "rite of passage" of turning 21 without drinking too much? Do you really want to start off your lifelong career by putting your future at risk? Are there other activities you can participate in with your friends and fellow Marines where you can have a good time but not get wasted? Maybe a concert, sporting event, or bowling where you can laugh and celebrate but not drink excessively. Turning 21 is a big milestone so choosing how to celebrate it is important as well. Choosing a way to enjoy the event and still remember it the next day, with no regrets, is making an important, adult decision.

#4 - TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER



Always look out for one another. Not only is it important to keep yourself safe, but encourage others to join in making safe, no/low-risk choices as well. Share information regarding positive, alternative activities with them and encourage them to participate. Make sure there are alcohol-free beverages available. If you think others may be in trouble, stay and be sure they are safe. Ensure they have safe transportation and information regarding substance abuse services if needed (Substance Abuse Counseling Center).



If you are making low-risk choices regarding your alcohol use, not only will you help keep yourself safe and protect your future, you will also put yourself in a better position to look out for your fellow Marines that may find themselves struggling with alcohol use related issues, or other high-risk situations. Don't be wasted! Be there for your fellow Marines and loved ones when they need you.



The Marine Corps is a family. We always have each other's back. It is my duty as a Marine to ensure that you are safe. We should help each other celebrate life events safely and without excessive drinking. We want to make choices that keep us, and everything we stand for, safe at all times. We must protect each other and all that we've worked so hard to earn. If I see you making choices that put you at high risk for getting in trouble (binge/heavy drinking), then understand that I will step in to make sure you're safe, but it's better that we all just find a safer way to celebrate from the start.

#5 - TIPS FOR MARINE LEADERS WHEN SPEAKING TO JUNIOR MARINES

What should you, as a leader, tell them about alcohol? What follows are simple, practical, easy-to-implement skills you can provide to Marines to help them avoid making life and career-altering decisions.

All Marines have worked hard and sacrificed to earn and uphold the title Marine. Help the Marines understand why it's important to make good personal decisions to safeguard his or her life-long investments. This approach is meant to reinforce the Marine Corps' culture of leadership, personal action, and accountability.

As a leader, readiness of your Marines is a high priority. The negative behaviors that come as a result of drinking alcohol in excess impacts readiness.

Effective Topics to Address During the Conversation

If your Marine is thinking about consuming alcohol, then talk to him or her about low-risk drinking choices:

- What is your responsibility when you're with Marines who are engaging in high-risk drinking?
- Have you thought about celebrating by participating in activities that do not involve excessive drinking?
- Do you know what to do if you realize your drinking is out of control?

End the Conversation

The ultimate goal is a shift in behavior that is grounded in the value we place in being a Marine, which reinforces culture, preserves the force, improves quality of life, and increases readiness.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT

If you have additional questions about substance misuse, contact your installation's Substance Abuse Counseling Center (SACC). Program information and SACC contact data is available on your local Marine Corps Community Services website.

