We’re over four weeks into the semester already here at Grand Valley. Whether it’s your first or last semester, every year brings new challenges. The independence away from home gives new opportunities and responsibilities. It can be overwhelming with classes, jobs, clubs, and especially forming new relationships with our peers. As we grow from the teenage years to young adulthood, we often find ourselves searching for who we are. We strive to form new connections, so we’re not strangers and have a sense of identity in college. When exploring friendships, partying or small gatherings you’ll likely be faced with navigating alcohol or other substances. For a lot of us, alcohol can be an easy solution to helping us make friends or feel like we fit in. Especially for first year students, they’re most vulnerable to drinking during the first six weeks of being on campus. The American College Health Association found 72.6% of GVSU students drank in the past 30 days prior to a survey in 2017.

Within that percentage, many students could find themselves pressured into drinking when they didn’t want to.

Hello, I’m Zachary Plisko, your new host for season two of, “In the Mix,” through the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services here at Grand Valley. On this show and throughout the semester, we’ll discuss many topics of alcohol use in the college environment and the many different drugs that are affecting students. I’m here to inform and help listeners be safe, smart and responsible if they use substances. Season two, episode one let’s talk about peer pressure. We’ll discuss various topics such as defining what peer pressure is, why there’s a fear of saying no, how to not give in to peer pressure, and help on how to find like-minded friends that have similar interests.

Let’s begin with defining what peer pressure is. The fancy definition is, “A feeling that one must do the same things as other people or groups to feel belonged or fit in.” We all know, no one wants to be a stranger on campus. There’s a sense of urgency to find new peers right when the school year starts. Whether it’s classmates asking to hangout or finding invitations on social media to party, peer pressure can occur when we attend such events and try to open up to others. When we find ourselves at social gatherings, we sometimes find alcohol. Friends, classmates and others may tempt you to drink though you don’t want to. It’s a matter of setting the boundaries and communicating with these peers to regulate how much you drink or not drink at all.

Students often are afraid of saying no or else they may be excluded from a group or peers.

Peer pressure often gains intensity as you age through college. Students in higher grades are closer to adulthood or turn 21 where restrictions are lifted, leading to easier access to alcohol. The pressure of this is students have the desire to be “cool”. Students don’t want to feel obligated to drink because they’re the age to do so, but peers often see getting alcohol and drinking with others as a new rite of passage. As for those under 21, the rebellious feeling of drinking under the legal age limit is the “cool” thing to do. Students have older peers get alcohol for them or have a fake ID to gain social capital. Then, at parties drinking is often the obvious common social ground and not doing so, can leave you feeling like an outsider. Saying no to drinking as other pressures add up, no matter the age, which leads to giving in to the peer pressure. So, what do we do when we feel this way? Let's go over some strategies on how to say no and not be impacted by peer pressure.

Strategy one. Volunteer to be the designated driver. If people know you’re planning to drive, they are less likely to continue pressuring later on during the party or event. Get your friends home safe while not having to drink. If you have a car, great. If not, ask to drive your friend’s car who’s drinking.

Strategy two. The “I have to…” mentions you have important activities going on the next day such as, “I have to study for a big test, drive here, visit with these people, go here to do this, a job interview… and I can’t drink the night before. Usually, people are understanding if you mention the important agenda you have the next day.

Strategy three. If at a party, have a drink in hand such as pop or tea. Something that looks like you’re drinking when you’re really not. When peers see something in hand, they’ll think you have a drink and won’t bother or pressure you into drinking more and if they say anything, you can hold up your drink and say, “I’m all set.”

Strategy four. Simple. Look busy. Go dance or socialize. When standing alone, that’s when you’re most approachable. Peers will come up asking to drink with them or take shots for more involvement.

Strategy five. Limit yourself. Make the decision to only have one or two drinks and make that clear with peers. If they ask you to drink more you can say, “Nope. I’ve already had a couple drinks tonight and met my limit.”

Now, here are example scenarios of direct social pressure to show how one of the strategies works.

Scenario one, all eyes on you. A lot of peer pressure occurs as the whole group wants you to drink so you feel apart. Here you can use the “I have…” strategy.

Friend 1: “Come on and drink with us.”

Friend 2: “Yeah, a small shot can’t hurt you.”

You: “No, sorry I can’t tonight. I have to study for my first exam of the semester and don’t want to mess it up.”

Friend 1: “Really? Not even a little bit.”

You: “Yeah, no thanks. I need to start the school year right and get a good grade.”

Friend 1: “Alright that’s fair.”

As long as your friends are respectful of your decision, you can still have a good time without drinking. When you enforce your responsibilities, peers should be understanding, if not, head out the door. You don’t need to be in a negative social environment, there are plenty of other people on campus that will be understanding and supportive.

Scenario two. Setting the limits. Again, if you don’t want to drink a lot, set your limits. This scenario will go over how to convey limitations with peers.

Friend 1: “Hey, do you want to drink a few beers with us.”

You: “No, thanks. I already hit my limit for the night of two drinks.”

Friend 1: “Another drink can’t hurt, it barely has alcohol in it, you won’t feel it.”

You: “No. Again, I hit my limit.”

Friend 1: “Are you sure?”

You: “Yup, told you, I reached my limit.”

Friend 1: “Alright, fine…”

Feeling attacked is really startling, but reinforcing or sounding like a broken record of repeating yourself may work. Be sure to stick to your answer as the repetition may sway your friends from bugging you again.

Sometimes, indirect social pressure happens too. Meaning, the group around you may not say anything to you or offer a drink, but it’s being in the environment that tempts you to drink. If this happens, you can use the pop or tea strategy where it looks like you’re drinking and try socializing.

Worst comes to worst if it feels like everyone is bugging you whether it’s direct or indirect to drink, you can leave. Don’t feel like you have to stay. If you didn’t commit to being a designated driver, shoot a quick text saying you’re leaving. If you feel fine walking at night, that works, but ask a friend to join or use the Guardian app provided by Grand Valley. Guardian can be set up on your mobile device to notify GVPD or people you trust to check in when you’re alone or heading somewhere unfamiliar. You set a timer for any time you would like someone to check in on you. Also, call or text GVPD right away if you feel uncomfortable or something happens.

Ending the night on a sour note is okay. In the moment it’s tough, but the next day you can look forward to other opportunities to gain peers that don’t pressure you.

Finding like-minded peers can be hard, let’s talk about some ways to discover new friends.

Grand Valley offers many apps, websites, and events to help students in discovering friends with similar interests. LakerLink is a website where you can find clubs, events, and keep up with the latest news or recaps around campus. An easy way to find organizations that suit your interests and you can attend at any time. With 410 clubs at Grand Valley, try out something that catches your eye. All clubs are welcoming, friendly, and offer a social environment that involves no pressure. The website for LakerLink is gvsu.campuslabs.com/engage/.

Another way to find like-minded friends is through an on-campus job. Handshake is an easy job searching tool where you can filter and narrow down the kind of job that best fits your interests. Not only does it help students connect with Grand Valley staff, it also has the ability to connect students together that are pursuing a similar interest. Head to gvsu.edu/studentjobs/ to start job searching.

Lastly, through the Alcohol and Other Drug Services we provide Ultimate Game Nights. Visit gvsu.edu/aod/gamenight. Join in on something fun to do on a Friday night. Socialize, make new friends, have fun, and win prizes. The next event will be October 15th from 6:30PM to 8:30 PM at the Grand Valley Apartments Community Center.

That wraps it up for the first episode of season two of, “In the Mix.” Remember, partying and drinking isn’t the only way to socialize. Don’t be afraid to get out more and involve yourself with campus events, clubs or jobs. Until next time, I’m Zachary Plisko.