



Off to College: A Guide for Parents

The transition to college can include various experiences for both you and your student. The following sections include information about this new season of life:

What You May Experience

The college experience is a significant transition for family and guardians, it natural that you will experience a variety of feelings. You may have periods of happiness, excitement, and pride when your student leaves for college, you may also have a sense of sadness, pain and worry about losing your as they become more independent. Parents can be concerned about student's ability to effectively care for him/herself, how their child will cope with the pressures of living independently and make healthy choices about alcohol, drugs and sexual relationships. These are natural feelings for a parent to be feeling as their student starts this next phase of life.

How You Can Support Yourself

Although you are there to support your student, don't lose sight that as a parent you will also need support. Recognize that it is normal to have mixed feelings when your student leaves home. Feelings of pain and loss often accompany separation from loved ones. You may also feel a sense of relief at getting your student off to college, relishing some time alone.

Here are some suggestions for coping with these feelings:

- Talk to others who have already been through the adjustment period or those who are also going through it, they can often provide a sense of supportive understanding.
- Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions arise during this period of adjustment; develop and maintain your own support systems.
- Do your best to maintain your own sense of well-being, include eating and sleeping well, exercising, and setting new goals for yourself.

What your Student May Experience

For your student, college will most likely be a period of intellectual stimulation and growth, career exploration and development, increased independence, self-exploration and discovery, and social involvement. During this time, your student may forge new identities or seek to clarify his/her values and beliefs. This may require an examination of family, friends, and self. He/she may challenge the values you hold dear. The changes a student may experience can occur quickly, as he/she begins to develop new peer relationships, gain competence in new areas, and learn to manage her/his independence. It is important to recognize that every student will experience her/his own unique set of challenges and adjustments. Likewise, you might have different expectations for and reactions to your student's college experience.

How You Can Support Your Student

- Maintain a supportive relationship with your student as this can be critical to her/his success in college, particularly her/his first year.
- Maintain regular contact with your student but also allow him/her the space to figure some things out on their own. Let your student know that you respect and support her/his right to make independent decisions.
- Know that your student may accept your advice one day and reject it the next – this is normal!
- Refrain, if possible, from burdening your student with problems s/he has no control over and can do nothing about.
- Remind your student of the various supports on campus which can be helpful. These individuals can include academic advisors, deans, counselors and residence hall staff.

