

Tips for Parents of First Year College Students

Letting go is difficult, but necessary. Be supportive, not intrusive.

Particularly if this is your first student going to college, you may have a hard time letting go as s/he becomes more independent. In order to gain confidence, your students will need to know you believe they can venture out into the world and succeed. Examples of ways to do this are:

- letting them decorate their rooms, but helping if you are asked;
- calling no more than once a week, but allowing them to call as often as they need;
- sending an occasional care package or card (students LOVE to get mail!).

Realize that life for your student is changing while yours may be remaining relatively the same.

When your students come home for a break or holiday visit, the rules regarding such things as curfews might be a source of conflict. Be ready to discuss expectations and compromise, but let them know that you expect them to do the same. The good news is that along with their new *independence*, in all likelihood they'll have a new *appreciation* for you, too.

Keep in mind that grades in college may not be as good as grades received in high school.

Parents, you may be surprised by lower grades, particularly during the first term while your son/daughter is adjusting to the new rigors of college and the campus social environment. Encourage your son or daughter to use support services: s/he can go to Supplemental Instruction sessions (SI), the Wartburg Writing/Reading/Speaking Lab, Career Services, Counseling Services, talk with professors, talk with a Pathways Peer to work out a study schedule. Be supportive without doing the work for them. Let them know the important thing is that they try to do their best and learn as much as they can.

Talk with your son/daughter about the tough topics of sex and drugs/alcohol.

Help your students think about their limits and values. Discuss *how* to say "no" rather than just preaching, "Just say no." (See also the Tips for Preparing Students for the Campus Social Scene on the back.)

Insist that they take the responsibility (and consequences) for their own actions.

Sometimes we have to learn by failing, so do not be too quick to rescue your student. It is better to stumble now than later; the consequences now are often not as serious. Ruined laundry may teach a student to read directions on the detergent box; a failed test now because of inadequate study time is better than a firing later for not getting a big project at work completed on time. And learning that they can cope helps students build confidence, trust in themselves and their ability to find and use resources, and self-reliance.

Record these times.

Save notes and e-mails. Keep a journal. These are important times that you and your student will want to remember—perhaps even more than the events that are recorded in the baby books. Besides, you may want to say, "See, I told you so!" some day. ☺

Be proud of yourselves.

You have successfully raised a student into a young adult. They will take what you have taught them and continue to grow, now on their own initiative. This is also an opportunity to move into a new phase of life for yourselves. You may feel some sadness during the transition, but if you remember that this is an opportunity for both you and your student to grow, this can be a rewarding time for all.

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Tips for Parents Preparing Students for the Campus Social Scene

- 1. Ask your student to share his/her values/standards regarding drinking.** Let your son/daughter know that though they may see isolated examples that make it seem otherwise, drinking is NOT necessarily the norm. Many students choose NOT to drink at all, and most choose to wait until they are of legal age and then they choose not to drink to excess if at all. However, while the ideal is to abstain from alcohol until legal age, data indicate that the vast majority of students experiment with alcohol prior to their graduation from high school. Certainly, their values regarding the use of alcohol are well formed by the time they are high school seniors. Not all use is abuse and the majority of students use alcohol in a responsible manner. Where does your student fall?
- 2. Create realistic expectations.** For most students, their freshman year is the first time that they will live away from home. Talk about the temptation to do all the things they couldn't do if they were home. How will their social life affect their academic goals?
- 3. Lay down the ground rules.** Tell your student if s/he decides to drink and gets into trouble that results in fines or other discipline, s/he must pay the attendant penalties. You will not "bail them out." Research shows that while people are aware of the possible negative results of the abuse of alcohol, they do not believe that these problems can happen to them. Protecting your student from these consequences only fosters this erroneous belief.
- 4. Clearly identify dangers that are related to intoxication.** Does your student recognize the inherent danger of accidents that are associated with a high level of intoxication? The most significant threat to college students from alcohol is accidental injury. These injuries aren't just from drinking and driving. The majority of contusions, abrasions, lacerations, and broken bones that occur late at night are related to drinking. A simple fall can sometimes have serious consequences. Does your student also recognize the consequences of alcohol altered behavior? Lowered inhibition is one of the most frequently cited "favorable" effects of drinking. But much of the violence that exists on college campuses is alcohol related. The phenomenon of "beer muscles" leads many individuals into situations that can result in negative consequences. The incidence of sexual contact, unprotected sex, and sexual aggression occurs more frequently under the influence of alcohol.
- 5. Support their growing independence.** Discuss this step in terms of its being their emancipation. Show them that you care for and support them without "smothering" them.

