



For Parents:

Supporting your student

Fortunately, parents can do a lot to help their students make a successful transition to college. Among the suggestions most frequently mentioned by veteran parents are:

- ◇ **Convey your confidence in your student's ability to be successful.** Expressed parental support and encouragement are much more important than students will typically acknowledge. First year students especially need to know that their parents believe in their ability to handle the new challenges college will bring.
- ◇ **Text, schedule regular calls, email, or send snail-mail packages (even if they don't respond back).** Although first years are typically eager to experience all the away-from-home independence they can in those first weeks, most are still anxious being away for family ties. This surge of independence may be misinterpreted as rejection by sensitive parents, but most first years want some news of home and family.
- ◇ **Don't rush or push your student into a major or career.** Most 18 year-olds do not have the wisdom or life experience required to be definite about such an important decision. Rushing the decision to select a major or pushing a student into a career in which he or she has no interest is an almost certain recipe for disaster. Career development research indicates that to foreclose on a major or career decision too early and without thorough exploration can be detrimental.
- ◇ **Don't rush in and solve problems.** Students need the experience of solving problems on their own, because valuable lessons are learned and confidence built in the process. Remember, you will not always be there when a problem comes up. In fact, among the most important words a parent can utter to a first year are "What do you think you should do about this problem?"
- ◇ **Keep the lines of communication open.** When parents respond too harshly to a first year's first mistake or failure, the student often becomes defensive and will no longer offer important information (e.g., about grades, roommate problems, dating relationship, etc.). As a result, minor problems that could be easily solved with a little parental guidance may become major crises. Give your first years a chance to openly talk about concerns, and then follow the next suggestion.

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- ◇ **Visit.** Visits by parents (especially those that include a shopping spree or dinner out) are another event that first years may be reluctant to admit liking, but do appreciate greatly. Pretended disdain of these visits are just another part of the first year syndrome. These visits give students a chance to introduce some of the important people in both his/her worlds (home and school) to each other. Additionally, it's a way for parents to become familiar with (and more understanding of) their student's new activities, commitments and friends. Spur of the moment "surprises" are not usually appreciated (preemption of a planned weekend of studying or other activities can have poorer results). It's best to schedule a special time, such as Family Weekend, to see your student and the school; that way you may even get to see a clean room.
- ◇ **Talk about finances, especially credit cards.** Before they hit campus, clearly let your student know what you will and what you will not contribute to college expenses. Based on this, help them to develop a monthly budget to determine how they will make ends meet. A student should have no more than one credit card and pay off the entire balance at the end of each month.
- ◇ **Learn about the campus resources available to your student.** Take advantage of the faculty and staff who have years of experience working with students in all areas of college life. If your student tells you that there is no one to help, encourage further investigation. He or she has probably not looked in the right place.
- ◇ **If your daughter or son cruises through the first year, that's great. But the real test may be yet to come.** In some courses the first year is designed to make sure everyone has covered the same basic course content – and then in the second year the course becomes tougher. So your student will need your continued support.

Adapted From: Eastern Illinois University Counseling Center

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