What Parents Need to Know About Supporting Your College Student

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Enjoying this New Stage of Parenthood with Your College Student.

As parents prepare their son or daughter to leave for college, here is some advice to help YOU prepare as well. Experts in this field are parents like Dennis and Joyce Kinde who have sent four children, ages 19-24 off to college in four states in the past six years. Here are the basics first.

1) Have a family plan for your cell phones. This is your best line of communication with your student and their siblings. Include Grandpa and Grandma if you can. A weekly phone call to your student is a good level of contact.

2) Have an easy way to deposit funds into their bank account. Your student should have their own account to pay their own bills and it can also be used as an avenue to becoming an in-state student if necessary. Make sure they know how to access this account on-line or keep very careful records of their checks and debit card charges - the cost of overdraft is expensive. Remind your student that money does not grow on trees and there are limits.

3) Avoid credit cards if you can.

4) Send your student with a copy of their health card and that they know how to use it. Remember that most health insurance companies require that your student dependent be a full-time student-minimum of 12 credits per semester.

5) Remember that the good student driver GPA is probably still in effect for auto insurance and you will need to send official transcripts to your auto insurance company at least yearly.

6) Books and supplies are expensive! Expect costs to be $100-200 per class. Know other channels for purchasing books and supplies, i.e. Target, Walmart and textbook sites on-line such as ebay.com.

7) It is best if your student has his or her own computer. Check for a link on your students college website for what type of computers they suggest are brought to campus because those will be best support. Also consider your students major when looking at the type and storage capacity. The Kindes youngest son, an aspiring architect, needed a lot of RAM and storage for drawings and graphics. You cannot have too much.

8) First year students living on-campus generally do not need a car. Parking is often expensive and it is one more responsibility your student may not need through the first year of big changes at college. Also, if your student does not have a car this reduces liability and cost because they will not be the one driving others around.

9) Dorm food does get boring. Tell you student to avoid ordering pizza every night for a number of reasons including the freshman 15 pounds generally gained by
freshmen students eating on campus. Send gift cards for local eateries and they will appreciate the chance to eat out. Send favorite foods if possible.

10) Know their address and their dorm room telephone number. If you live some distance away, send mail or packages occasionally. Tell them they are coming so they will know to look for packages at the front desk of their dorm. Especially for emergencies, know their roommates telephone number and get to know them.

11) There is usually a wealth of knowledge on the schools website. Just search your questions or call someone in the admissions department they will direct your call if necessary.

Now, parents, here is the emotional preparation you need to make:

12) Know your students schedule. Knowing how many credits they have and what classes they are enrolled in will give you an idea of their stress level. Know what else can create stress in their life: is there a girl or boyfriend who can create more stress, how are the roommate or floor mates, are the academics on par with their expectations. The first semester is very stressful and may require a lighter load of coursework.

13) Parents are an easy and safe target for stress outbursts and there will be some.

14) The flu generally lasts only 24 hours and, yes, it is scary to be sick away from home the first time.

15) Keep communication proactive; “I don’t know” is not an answer to the question “what do you think”? Students need to make their own decisions sooner than later. Be patient. Give advice, but don’t make any calls for them to professors, roommates, etc. unless they have totally exhausted every effort on their own behalf. It’s OK to be a helicopter parent; do not be missile parents. When your student calls you to ask “what do you think?” don’t just give them the answers; give them the tools. Empower your student.

16) Know that at just about six weeks into the semester your student will be homesick. They have come to the realization that school is not summer camp and college life is hard. Listen, but don’t automatically send a ticket to come home - most will get through this phase and be back to normal within a week or so.

17) Instill integrity and independence in your student. Talk to them about parties and drinking, drugs, etc. It is not the responsibility of the university, college or you to monitor your students every move, they need to have judgment and the ability to say no to situations they are not comfortable with. Help your student understand this. Give them personal knowledge and independence.

18) Encourage them to be outgoing and friendly. This is not high school. Out of this large group will come their support group away from home. Encourage them to take a wide range of classes and consider study abroad.

19) A great way for your student to meet others in their dorm or apartment building is to play games. Board games are non-threatening and they may learn a lot about themselves and their roommates and floor mates in a fun, non-judgmental way as they play.
20) If it appears that your student is depressed and you are worried, you should contact the resident hall director or academic advisor. Depression is not to be taken lightly by you nor will it be by the school. Often times your student does not even know that they are depressed. Look for signs of depression such as lack of appetite, lack of energy or interest in what is going on around them. If they do not leave their room for days, there is something wrong and you should contact officials who can help.

Enjoy this new stage of parenthood, says Joyce. Four years of college go even faster than the high school years. Remember the saying you may have heard before Parents give their children roots to grow and wings to fly? Parents, it is time to let them fly.