

Supporting Your Student While Letting Go

The college years can be an exciting and overwhelming time for both you and your child. They are exciting because your child will be learning to live independently and explore the world around them. They are overwhelming because this means that your child is growing up and your relationship is going to change. By being patient, understanding, supportive, and reasonable about your expectation you can make the transition into college life smooth. Let's look at some tips that you can try during this transition.

Tip #1: Don't ask students if they are homesick. While it is true that many students miss being at home, most are so busy in the first weeks of school that they do just fine. Even if they never bring it up, you can rest assured that they do miss you. If your student is really homesick, encourage them to stick it out for one semester.

Tip #2: Write, even if they don't write back. Students will be exploring and enjoying their independence and this is necessary for their development. Even so, they want to keep family ties and the security that brings. It's nice and exciting for students to have things in the mailbox.

Tip #3: Ask questions (but not too many). First-year students tend to resent interference with their newfound lifestyle, but most want to know that someone is still interested in them. Honest inquiries that further the parent bond are welcomed. While questions that are demanding and have hidden agendas should be avoided.

Tip #4: Expect change (but not too much). It is natural and inevitable that students will change over the course of their time here. For some, this change is gradual. For others it is quick and dramatic. This can be quite stressful for all involved. It helps to remember that young adults should be forming their own identities, and that it is counterproductive to try and stop them from doing so. Maturation can be a slow and painful learning process. Please be patient.

Tip #5: Don't worry excessively about moody behavior. You might find parenting during the college years to be pretty thankless. Students may sometimes feel overwhelmed with all that is happening, and they might turn to you in distress. But, you may rarely hear from them when things are going well. You are serving as a "touchstone" for your student, someone he or she can turn to when he or she feels the need. Regardless of whether your student admits this or not, this is very valuable he or she.

Tip #6: Visit (but not too often). Whether they admit it or not, students usually appreciate when parents visit. This gives them a chance to connect to both of their "worlds" at once. "Surprise" visits are usually not appreciated because they can feel disrespectful. It is better to wait and make plans for a visit.

Tip #7: Avoid the "These are the best years of your life" speech. The college years are full of discovery, inspiration, good times, and friends. But they are also marked by indecision, insecurity, disappointment, and mistakes. It is likely that your student will learn that college is much more challenging than he or she imagined. It may seem like college students "have it made," but in reality life for them is full of highs and lows.

Tip #8: Communicate your expectations and stay informed. It is entirely appropriate for you to expect reasonable outcomes for your investment. Attendance, decent grades, safe choices, and signs of increasing responsibility should be evident to you. Negotiate and discuss these with your student, then look for that evidence.

Tip #9: Trust them. Finding oneself is a difficult enough process without feeling like the people you most respect and whose opinions matter most are second guessing you.

Adapted from information provided by
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