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PART I

Changing Roles

College is a new and exciting adventure. It is also a time of transition for both students and parents. As the college years ensue, your role as a parent and the relationship you have with your child will change. While roles and relationships change, the parent-child bond does not - it will remain as strong as ever.



New Relationships

New roles and relationships.

As parents, you have watched your children grow from toddlers into young adults. You've taught, guided, and protected them, and you have watched your children go through many developmental stages.

Your college student is now at the critical stage of development psychologists call "separation and individuation." During this stage, children establish an adult identity and assume adult behaviors based on the foundations provided by their parents.

As college students, your children are expected to be independent and self-sufficient. They will nevertheless continue to need your guidance and support. You will still serve as the primary influence in your children's lives - mentor, advisor, and confidante - but at a greater physical and figurative distance. Your child may be away at college, but knowing that you are there for advice and encouragement is extremely important.

As your role as a parent changes and as your child grows and develops, you and your son or daughter will develop a new adult relationship. This adult relationship will be based on mutual respect, shared interests, and the bonds of family.

Communicating with your college student.

When your child was living at home, you likely talked every day about what was happening, where your child was going, and what he/she was doing. Now that your child is in college, your communication will change. Although you'll probably be communicating much less frequently, it's very important to keep in touch, and to keep the lines of communication open.

Hint: To keep abreast and find out how things are going, ask open-ended questions that require more than one word answers, such as "What are you studying in English now?" or "Tell me about your roommate."

Cell phones - Cell phones make it easy for parents to stay in contact with students. Since college students seem to always be "in the middle of something," it may be best to let your child call you when he/she has time to talk. You may also want to arrange specific times to call. Of course, text messaging allows for quick, short messages and updates.

E-Mail - E-mail is a great way to communicate with college students because they can read and respond at their convenience. In your e-mails, talk about what's happening at home. Students see their home as a safe haven, and with so many new things in their lives, it's reassuring for them to know that life goes on for those back home.

Home visits - Some students go home often. Others return only for major holidays. While you want your student to always feel welcome at home, encourage your son or daughter to stay on campus as much as possible during the first few months of college. This is when colleges arrange activities to help students meet new people and get acclimated to campus. Developing friendships and getting involved in campus activities early contribute greatly to a student's college success.

Visiting Campus - If you plan on visiting your student during a busy college weekend, make hotel, airplane, rental car, and restaurant reservations well in advance. Homecoming Weekend and Parents' Weekend are particularly popular, and if you plan to visit during the week of graduation ceremonies, you'd be wise to reserve a hotel room as early as a year in advance.

Snail Mail - There's nothing better than opening mail from home. Surprise your student with the occasional letter, postcard, or humorous greeting card. A "survival kit" with treats and goodies around midterms or finals is especially welcomed.

PART II

The College Experience

Every student has a different college experience. Some live at home and commute to college, whereas others attend a university far from home. Situations vary, but all college students have a great deal in common. In this section, you will learn what you can do to help your student make the most of his/her college experience.



College Living

Most first-year college students live on campus in a residence hall or they live at home and commute.

Living in a Residence Hall

Colleges and universities call a student's on-campus home a residence hall. But for the sake of simplicity, let's stick with the term most students use and call it a *dorm*. Living in a dorm is very much a "rite of passage" for new college students. Many of your student's most enduring college memories will be of dorm life and the friendships developed there.

The roommate.

The first and most challenging transition from living at home is sharing a dorm room with a friend, or more typically, a total stranger. Roommates need to make every reasonable effort to get along, and that means making compromises and setting ground rules from the very start. Everything - bed times, chores, the positioning of furniture, noise levels, visiting hours - should be addressed in order to prevent conflict between roommates.

The RA (Resident Assistant).

RAs are upper level students who live among dorm residents. Their job is to enforce rules, provide assistance, and generally ensure that everything operates smoothly on their floor. They are full-time students themselves, usually working as RAs to help finance their education.

RAs are veteran students who know the ropes on campus. They possess useful information about courses and professors and can make referrals to appropriate offices and campus services. RAs can also provide support and guidance when the going gets tough.

Dorm rules.

Each student will be given a copy of the dorm rules, spelling out exactly what students can have in their rooms, what they can do, and when they can do it. Encourage your student to read and abide by the residence life rules.

Dorm life.

Most college dorms offer a wide range of activities and services: dining and cooking facilities, laundry, TV rooms, study lounges, work-out facilities, weekend entertainment, and more. Encourage your student to take full advantage of all his/her dorm has to offer.

Tip: For many students, a big part of adjusting to dorm life is overcoming homesickness and unfamiliar surroundings. Help your student decorate his/her dorm room to give it a homey, non-institutional feel.

Tip: If your student didn't do laundry at home, teach him/her the subtleties of laundering before leaving for college.

Living at Home

Although the adjustment is not as drastic as dorm living, students who live at home must also make lifestyle changes. A student's schedule will probably be more varied than it has been in the past, which means that he/she will be coming and going at odd hours.

It's very important for students who commute to get involved in campus activities so that they feel like they're a part of the college. They'll get much more out of their college experience if they study and spend free time on campus, participate in activities, and go out of their way to make new friends.



Student Activities and Organizations

One of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of college is the opportunity to get involved in student activities and organizations. There's no better way for students to meet new people who share their interest and to also have some fun. Check the college's website for a complete list of student organizations. Here are some examples.

Community Service - Through community service organizations, students contribute their time and energy to serve the needs of the neighboring community.

Honor Societies - Superior scholarship and leadership are recognized and encouraged through these associations.

International - Comprised of students of all nationalities, these clubs are available for students who have an interest in other cultures.

Political - These groups are generally associated with a political party or a cause (e.g., environmental action, election campaigning, world hunger).

Professional - These organizations are directly related to a student's major or career. Examples include Pre-Law, Pre-Dentistry, Anthropology Club, and Accounting Society.

Social - Fraternities, sororities, and other organizations sponsor and organize concerts, speaker series, mixers, and other social activities.

Special Interest - These organizations cover a wide range of topics: Campus Spirit Club, Mac Users Groups, Entrepreneurship Club, to name a few.

Sports/Recreation - Almost any sport may be offered: soccer, Tae Kwon Do, lacrosse, Hacky Sack, softball, Ultimate Frisbee, paintballing.

Student Government - Here students have the chance to work with faculty and administrators to impact the quality of education and campus life.

"It's really important to be part of a group or to be involved in an activity. On a whim, I joined the Men's Glee Club at the beginning of my sophomore year. As it's turned out, being in the Glee Club has been my most rewarding college experience." Bradley, senior business major



Rules and Regulations

Colleges have rules regarding academic integrity, including cheating, plagiarism, and false citations in papers and essays. Additional policies exist regarding sexual harassment and assault, protests and demonstrations, the sale of products on campus, and much more. Dorms also have rules, as do rec centers, computer labs, and libraries.

Students who violate campus policies may be referred to the school's Judicial Affairs office for disciplinary action. A judicial board comprised of students, faculty, and staff meets periodically to hear cases of alleged misconduct. They recommend sanctions for students found in violation of campus policies.

Most colleges have a zero tolerance policy on drug use. Students who get caught using drugs face sanctions which could include warnings, fines, expulsion from their dorm, expulsion from the university, or arrest. If a student is caught selling, the campus or community police will likely be called in.

Alcohol policies are put in writing and are clear cut. Because of concerns regarding excessive and underage drinking, most colleges work hard to limit the misuse of alcohol on their campuses.

In addition to university rules, communities in or near college towns often rigorously enforce laws regarding alcohol use. Perhaps the most common off-campus violations involve public intoxication and displaying open alcohol containers. Students walking from a bar, Greek house, or apartment are often stopped by police for appearing drunk or carrying open containers. The citation may be compounded for underage students.

Some students mistakenly believe that they are not subject to city, state, or federal laws when violations occur on campus. Not true. The law's the law. Students who break the law on campus can wind up sharing a city or county jail cell with other lawbreakers. Many students have experienced this, and they find it to be one of the most disagreeable and regrettable experiences of their lives.

Tip: It is a rare student who will read a college's Student Code of Conduct. If you have reason to believe that your student is in violation of college rules or regulations, bring these rules to his/her attention, and share your concerns.

PART III

Academic Success

Success in the classroom is not just about studying. It's also about doing everything it takes to navigate the academic world wisely and efficiently. You can help your student succeed by understanding the importance and the process of academic planning.



Academic Planning

In high school, your student was assigned a school counselor for assistance with course selection and college preparation. In college, it is the Academic Advisor (or Academic Counselor) who provides assistance in course selection and planning.

Unlike the mandatory meetings the high school counselor scheduled with your student, college Academic Advisors won't arrange appointments - it is the student's responsibility. Academic offerings and requirements constantly change and can be very confusing. It is therefore essential that students meet regularly with their Academic Advisor.

Here's how it works. All incoming students are notified that they have been assigned to an Academic Advisor. Although different colleges operate under different models and procedures, there are typically advisors who serve undeclared students (i.e., those who have not designated a major) and departmental advisors who provide advisement for students who have declared a specific major.

Some Academic Advisors are full-time professional advisors who devote 100% of their time to providing academic advice. In other cases, advisement is provided by a professor, instructor, or graduate student.

It is very important that students make regular appointments with their Academic Advisor to ensure that all their academic plans and decisions are sound ones.

Students should meet with an advisor early and often.

Students should schedule an appointment with their Academic Advisor as early in the quarter or semester as possible. Prior to their appointment, students should read the academic requirements listed in their college catalog, review the General Education and major/minor requirements, and determine if any courses they're considering have prerequisite courses.

Students should bring their online degree audit with them to their appointment. This is typically an online analysis that allows students to assess their academic progress and unfulfilled requirements. At many schools it is called DARS – Degree Audit Reporting System.

When students meet with their advisor, they should also bring a list of questions with them. These questions may include:

- What is a reasonable course load? (Students shouldn't schedule too many difficult and time consuming classes in a single semester.)
- When should I be taking required general education courses, courses required for my major, and elective (optional) courses?
- I read my major's published "minimum requirements" for admission, but what are the realistic competitive admission requirements?
- I'm not particularly strong in the area of _____. Are there any particularly difficult courses in that subject that I should take during the summer when I have more time to devote to the topic?
- I'm thinking of taking courses at a two-year college near my home this summer. Will these courses transfer to this college?
- Which courses can I take pass-fail? How many pass-fail courses can I take?
- Can I see a list of minors and the courses required for each minor?
- When do I need to register for next semester's/quarter's courses?
- What's the best way to ensure that I get into my classes?

Students should keep a written record of everything they discuss with their academic advisor. If they are confused or uncertain, they should schedule a return visit. If they question the accuracy of the information they've obtained, they should ask to speak to the Director of Academic Advising or the department chair.