

HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE TRANSITION -- TIPS FOR PARENTS

- **Pre-College planning.** *Early in high school, then before college enrollment--* develop separate plans with your student which include academic, social and financial goals, expectations and consequences.
Later in high school – develop a plan for college selection. All three plans promote student ownership and responsibility, and are great predictors for college success. Your high school counselor or advisor can help.
- **Identify main college issues and discuss coping strategies.** Do both in advance.
- **Check-in day.** Get your student settled in his/her room, then leave! This is tough for everyone, but do it.
- **The freshman adjustment (it's all part of growing up).** Parents need to understand that many college students do not get along with their roommate, get good grades, know what they want to major in, have activity-filled days, or make lots of friends. Parents who accept these perceived setbacks as opportunities for the student to grow, can provide support and encouragement when it is needed most.
- **Do not ask them if they are homesick.** The power of suggestion can be dangerous. The idea of being homesick often does not occur until someone suggests it. The first few weeks of school are full of activities and friends. The challenge of meeting new people and adjusting to new situations takes most of a freshman's time and concentration. So, unless they are reminded of it (by a well-meaning parent), they may be able to escape the loneliness and frustration of homesickness. Even if they do not tell you during those first few weeks, they do miss you. It is vital your student identify campus resources which can help him/her successfully cope with the myriad of difficult issues confronted by freshmen. You can help identify these resources before the college year begins.
- **Write or email (even if they do not write or email you back).** Although freshmen are typically eager to experience all the away-from-home independence they can in those first weeks, most are still anxious for family ties and the security those ties bring. This surge of independence may be misinterpreted as rejection by sensitive parents, but most freshmen want news from home and family. There is nothing more depressing than an empty mailbox. Warning – do not expect a reply to every letter or email.
- **Listen carefully before talking. Ask questions (but not too many).** Many college freshmen are “cool” (or so they think) and may resent interference with their newfound lifestyle, but most desire the security of knowing you are still interested in them. Parental curiosity may add more stress than relief, depending on the attitudes of the persons involved. “I have a right to know” questions with ulterior motives, or “the nag” should be avoided. Honest inquiries, however, and other “between friends” communication and discussion will do much to further the parent-student relationship.
- **Do not worry (too much) about emotional phone calls, letters or emails.** Parenting can be a thankless job, especially during the college years. It is a lot of give and little take. Often when troubles become too much for a freshman to handle (a flunked test, end of a relationship, etc.), the student often feels the only place to turn is family. Unfortunately, this is often the only time that an urge to communicate is felt so strongly, so you rarely get to hear about the good things. Be patient with the nothing-is-going-right-I-hate-this-place attitude. You are providing a valuable service as an advisor, sympathetic ear or punching bag.
- **Visit (but not too often).** Visits by parents (especially those that include dinner, shopping, etc..) are another part of first-year events that freshmen are reluctant to admit liking, but do appreciate greatly. These visits give the student a chance to share his growing world and allows the parents to become familiar with their student's new activities, commitments and friends.
- **Take time to discuss finances.** Most college students are still financially dependent on parents to some degree. Discuss your family's financial situation with your student from high school through college. He/she needs to know how much money will be available and how much fiscal responsibility he/she has.
- **Prepare for their return.** When the school year ends and your student returns home for vacation, plan to sit down and discuss the rules of living at home. Parents need to respect the individuality their children have worked so hard to achieve, and students need to know there still are rules and courtesies to be observed.
- **Trust them.** Finding oneself is difficult enough without feeling that the people whose opinions you respect most are second guessing you. One of the most important things a parent can do is give your student your trust.