

Sending Your Child to College for the First Time

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This is a transition time for your child. It's a transition time for you, and opening the lens, a transition for the whole family system. With each transition, comes certain tasks, changes, losses, stressors as you all adapt and redefine yourselves and your family, and your relationship to the child you are saying goodbye to. It's a process. A successful transition takes time and patience and the ability to constantly look at the big picture.

What is the big picture?

1. Your child's search for **identity** will intensify now that there is more freedom to choose, make decisions for themselves, think for themselves about **all** of life's issues, and they are encouraged to do this here by professors who will challenge their thinking, beliefs, ways of relating to the world around them. Just living here will challenge these things as well, as they are exposed to people from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds. So **"Who am I apart from my family?"** is the question they are asking both consciously and unconsciously.

What should you do to support this search for identity?

- Be supportive. Be there for them emotionally. Be a good listener. Let them know they are loved and missed.
 - Don't over-react, (like if they come home with their nose pierced or whatever)
 - Give advice when it's asked for.
 - Begin to move from being parent to parent-friend
 - Try to be open minded and flexible
 - Communicate to them how confident you are in their ability to figure all this out and also how excited you are for them in this process of self-discovery. It's a wonderful adventure.
2. Your child will have to be more **independent**. Now it's up to them when they get up, what to eat, when to eat, who their friends will be, when to study, when to sleep, when to party, what to join, whether to drink, whether to have sex, on and on. Guess what, you have no control over all this. This is the reality and the sooner you accept this and deal with it, the better and sooner your child will be able to grow up. I've seen something happen a lot with the kids that come in to talk. Their parent dictates certain things (major, courses, activities etc,) Now the kid can't figure out if what their deciding is what they really want or is it in reaction to their parent's need to control?
 3. *What can you do to support their need for independence?*
 - Don't rush in to fix things for them. Give them the space to figure it out
 - Keep the door to communication open, but let them initiate opening it.

- Don't hold their tuition \$ over their heads as a way to get your way. This will only alienate your child and shut down communication. They will push you away even more.
 - Don't tell them what to do even when they ask you "What should I do, Mom? Help me!!" Tempting isn't it?? (Unless it's a major crisis of some sort, of course.)
 - Trust them to find their way. Have confidence in their ability to figure it all out!!
4. Throughout their college years, men and women experiment with a variety of relationships. They are learning about **intimacy**. They are learning how to manage all kinds of relationships: with roommates, boyfriends and girlfriends, casual dating relationships, friendships.

What can you do as you observe all this going on from a distance?

- Continue to model healthy relationships in your own life
- Trust the process in them. In a lot of ways your job is done. You've laid the foundation already in how you've lived your life and how you have managed your own relationships, what you've taught etc. Now give them the space to do it.
- Again, give advise when it's asked for.
- Don't be judgmental, rigid, close-minded, or intolerant. Hopefully you have been teaching tolerance all along.
- Remember your own struggles in this area when you were that age.

Here are some simple words of advise: Think about the last time you went through a major transition or life change... What did you need from others? ...Do the same for your kids.

CLOSING

We hope you enjoyed the presentation. Otherwise, please be sure to review the information you received in your packets. We invite you to stick around if you have any further questions of us. In the meantime, have a very safe trip home and thank you for trusting your children and entrusting them with us. We think they'll be in excellent hands. Enjoy!

FINITA!