

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR STUDENT



UNIVERSITY OF MAINE



QUICK TIPS

YOUR BELOVED STUDENT IS OFF TO COLLEGE. BUT HOW DOES THAT IMPACT YOUR RELATIONSHIP? PERHAPS YOU CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR ABOUT THEIR NEW FRIENDS, PERSPECTIVES, AND IDEAS- OR MAYBE YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT WHAT THESE NEW CHANGES MAY BRING. HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE NAVIGATING THIS TRANSITIONAL TIME IN YOUR PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP.

- SHOW INTEREST. WHICH CLASSES IS YOUR STUDENT EXCITED ABOUT FOR NEXT SEMESTER? WHAT ARE YOUR STUDENT'S NEW FRIENDS LIKE? TRY TO REFRAIN FROM JUDGING OR PUSHING ADVICE IF THEY DON'T ASK FOR IT. THIS CAN BE DIFFICULT WHEN YOU HAVE A LIFETIME OF EXPERIENCE TO SHARE AND WISH TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD AGAINST MISTAKES. HOWEVER, COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE STARTING TO TAKE THE REINS OF THEIR OWN LIVES AND HAVING UNWANTED ADVICE PUSHED ON THEM (EX. DON'T MAJOR IN THAT, MAJOR IN THIS!) CAN BE CONFUSING AND NOT HELPFUL IN BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN THEIR DECISION-MAKING ABILITIES.
- YOU CAN HAVE THOSE TOUGH CONVERSATIONS. IT CAN BE HARD TO DISCUSS TYPICALLY TABOO TOPICS SUCH AS SUBSTANCE USE AND SEXUAL ACTIVITY, BUT IT'S BETTER TO FACE THE AWKWARDNESS THAN TO SWEEP YOUR CONCERNS (AND YOU BET YOUR STUDENT HAS CONCERNS, TOO!) UNDER THE RUG. AN OPEN DIALOGUE ABOUT SAFETY, HEALTHY RISKS, AND EXPECTATIONS CAN PUT BOTH OF YOUR MINDS AT EASE BECAUSE YOU WILL KNOW WHERE YOU EACH STAND ON THESE TOPICS AND WHAT TO DO/EXPECT IN THE FUTURE IF CONCERNS ARISE.
- WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOUR STUDENT COMES HOME. SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS ABOUT HOME BEHAVIOR AND ENGAGE YOUR CHILD IN THE RULE-SETTING PROCESS. EXPECT THAT YOUR STUDENT WILL WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY SO STRIKING THAT BALANCE TOGETHER IS KEY! YOUR STUDENT WILL ALSO HAVE BEEN LIVING INDEPENDENTLY FOR A COUPLE OF MONTHS, SO GOING BACK TO THE SAME RULES (CURFEW, CHORES, ETC.) OF HIGH SCHOOL MIGHT BE A TOUGH ADJUSTMENT. NEGOTIATE TOGETHER WHAT FEELS FAIR FOR YOU AND THEM.
- KEEP THEM UP TO DATE. TALK WITH YOUR STUDENT ABOUT ANY CHANGES IN THE HOUSE OR HOUSEHOLD. IT CAN BE DISCONCERTING TO MOVE BACK HOME ONLY TO FIND THAT YOUR ROOM IS NOW A GYM OR THAT THE FAMILY DOG HAS BEEN GIVEN AWAY. RETURNING HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME AFTER A BIG CHANGE SUCH AS A DIVORCE OR DEATH IN THE FAMILY CAN BE AN ESPECIALLY DIFFICULT ADJUSTMENT.
- TRY TO KEEP AN OPEN MIND. COLLEGE STUDENTS MAY RETURN HOME SPOUTING NEW IDEAS ABOUT RELIGION OR POLITICS THAT DON'T JIVE WITH YOUR BELIEFS. LEARNING TO SORT THROUGH DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW AND THINK FOR ONE'S SELF IS A NORMAL PART OF BECOMING AN ADULT: ENCOURAGE OPEN CONVERSATIONS AND TRY NOT TO LECTURE OR SHUT THE DOOR ON COMMUNICATION.
- KEEP SOME TRADITIONS. SOME STUDENTS WILL BE LONGING FOR OLD FAMILY TRADITIONS EVEN FROM WAY BACK IN THEIR CHILDHOOD. SO DON'T ASSUME THAT THEY ARE "TOO ADULT" NOW FOR ALL THE CHILDHOOD RITUALS. ON THE OTHER HAND, TIME BRINGS CHANGE TO FAMILIES. ALTHOUGH SOME ASPECTS OF THESE TRADITIONS MAY HAVE TO BE ALTERED, THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT NEW, EQUALLY MEANINGFUL TRADITIONS CAN'T BE STARTED.
- DON'T TURN A BLIND EYE. IF YOU NOTICE BEHAVIORS THAT CONCERN YOU (FALLING GRADES, DEPRESSED MOOD AND WITHDRAWAL FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS, ANXIETY AROUND RETURNING TO SCHOOL, INCREASED SUBSTANCE USE) SAY SOMETHING. TALK TO YOUR STUDENT ABOUT YOUR CONCERNS AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK HELP. THE COUNSELING CENTER (207-581-1392) IS A GREAT RESOURCE AND OFFERS FREE COUNSELING FOR STUDENTS AND FREE PHONE CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS.

