

"Answers to many college parenting issues and problems in an easily understood format." —RICHARD M. FLAHERTY, President, College Parents of America

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN

(but I'm here if you need me)



Mentoring
Your Child During
the College Years

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cane instructions,” I heard him say to my son. “There’s a hurricane just off the coast, and it’s supposed to come ashore sometime during the night. If it does, we’ll be knocking on doors to get everyone up and moved into the hallways.”

I had been so confident that we had prepared our son for everything he would need to know for college, but hurricane survival tips had never entered my mind. I stepped up to the desk and said, “We’ve been reading all the information the university was sending us, and there was never any mention of hurricanes. How were we supposed to know about hurricanes? We’re from Minnesota.”

“That’s OK,” the student said. “We know what to do. We’ll take care of him.”

This tall, lanky, straggly-haired kid—who obviously would be blown away by a strong gust of wind—was supposed to protect my son from a hurricane?

As hard as it was to accept, I had to admit that things would happen during the next four years that I had never predicted, and that I could not prepare my son for every contingency. I needed to trust his judgment, and I needed to have confidence in the staff at this university. As they reminded us at parent orientation, fully trained, professional, and caring counselors, advisers, and student services personnel were on duty to deal with not only the typical problems that students experience, but also any emergency situations that may arise.

HOW WILL ALL THIS STUFF FIT INTO A DORM ROOM?

Until now, college was the future—something to look forward to and prepare for. Once students start packing the car, though, the dream becomes reality. A father describes his son, loading boxes into the van, suddenly turning to his parents and saying, “I’m not ready. Sure, I’ve got everything packed, but it’s me—I’m not ready.”

CHAPTER 2

Reality Bites

Establishing New Patterns

The day your student leaves home for college is a pivotal point in the change you are making from your role as primary caretaker and supervisor for your child to the role of proud mentor and supporter. The process is exciting, but it includes a degree of pain.

When we took our oldest son to college, I was confident that we all were ready for this step. I was certain I would be more pleased to see him begin this next stage of his life than sad about his departure.

We turned the journey into a family event. We packed our two vehicles, both loaded to capacity, for a three-day road trip from Minnesota to Houston, Texas. With my husband and me in one car and our two sons in the other, we headed south. We carefully planned meeting points for meals and hotel stops along the route so that we could change drivers and make sure the cars were both running well.

When we arrived in Houston and found the residence hall, we stood by as our son checked in at the front desk. The student worker on duty welcomed him and gave him his room key, a map of the building, and a two-page handout on bright yellow paper, covered with bullet points and bold type. “These are your hurri-

Talkative children become silent as they get closer to their college town. Quiet students chatter nervously. Arguments crop up over minor points. One student remembers the trip from his home in Virginia to college in Arizona as a cross-country argument with his younger sister, who insisted on sitting in the front seat the entire way. A mother recalls driving the width of Pennsylvania in silence following an argument with her daughter. One year, when I was helping move students into a residence hall on move-in day, I watched as a car pulled up to the curb and the freshman in the front seat nervously scanned the scene of people hauling boxes, laundry baskets, and sports equipment across the lawn. He opened his door, walked to the back of the car, and threw up.

Students aren't the only ones who are frightened and emotional. Parents are on edge, and anything that fails to go as planned serves as evidence that the student should return home immediately. The father who finds a line of people waiting for the elevators will be convinced that the dorm is poorly designed—an architectural nightmare. A mother who sees a box elder bug on her daughter's windowsill will capture it in a plastic bag to prove to the hall staff that the room is not habitable. As student services professionals explain, anger and sadness stem from the same underlying feeling: "I want my child back."

Although parents can't prevent their student or themselves from being nervous, they can help make the move-in process less traumatic. The last thing your child wants on move-in day is for the family to make a scene. While you and your husband may think you're being supportive by wearing T-shirts in the school's yellow-and-black colors, your student would much prefer that on this, of all days, you fade into the background in nondescript khaki. Your intentions may be good as you seek out the hall director to have her meet your son and hear about his dust allergies, but your son would rather slip anonymously into his room.

Mothers and fathers can take heart, however, that their student is already beginning to see them as more desirable parents than some of the alternatives. Although your daughter may seem shockingly embarrassed by you on move-in day, she will also be noticing that her parents are not nearly as bad as the family in the room down the hall.

So what is the recommended plan for move-in day? Do you unload your student's belongings at the curb and drive away? Do you plan to spend the weekend making certain that your child finds his classes and meets at least one new friend?

The first recommendation is to take the most direct route to campus. Many parents, especially fathers, like to think that the one thing they can do for their child on this last "family weekend" is to plan a nice, leisurely trip to college with a stop along the way for an hour-long hike at a park, a picnic lunch, and maybe a side trip to go to a ball game or to visit the relatives who live nearby. Your student, however, is not in the mood for a vacation. She is worried, excited, and intent upon getting to school. Your efforts to give her a memorable farewell trip will be unappreciated. Save the scenic route for the trip home or for next year.

If you must do something to keep your mind off your child's departure, put your energy into fussing over the car rather than trip planning. Clean out the car; vacuum the trunk; get the oil checked; replace the windshield wipers; put air in the tires. Any maintenance that prevents a breakdown en route to college is a good investment in family harmony. The freshman stuck on the side of the road with her family, in a stuffy car filled with every one of her earthly possessions, waiting for a tow truck, is a sure candidate for emotional meltdown.

Soon enough, your daughter, lugging a cardboard carton topped with her pillow, will walk into the room that will be the center of her life for the next eight and a half months. The focal

point, the bed, will look stark and uninviting. As she drops the box on the floor and tosses her pillow onto the gray-striped, plastic-covered mattress, you will see the mix of excitement and dread on her face.

"I thought it would be bigger," she might say as she looks around. "Two of us are supposed to fit in here? Is that really the only closet?"

By my count, the average college student today brings at least fourteen electrical appliances to school. Multiply that by the number of roommates, and the challenge becomes clear: living in a residence hall is a constant exercise in adaptation, and unpacking is the student's first step in learning to "make do." For parents, move-in day is a pop quiz in the course of relinquishing responsibility for your child. Your son or daughter will not approach the move-in and unpacking as you would. This task, however, belongs to your child, and throughout the process, you must help only if you're asked.

Your student will appreciate assistance carrying things up to the room, and most students accept their mother's offer to make the bed. Depending on the student's own technical ability, the majority are willing to let a parent or sibling help set up the computer. Beyond that, though, students usually prefer to do their own unpacking in their own time. Tempers become short when a parent suggests which drawer the underwear belongs in or where the family photo should be placed.

And this is not the time to remind your daughter that you told her she would never be able to fit everything she brought into her dorm room.

Younger brothers and sisters are intrigued by this new place, envious of their older sibling, and often at least a little discontented by the prospect of leaving their big brother or sister here. A burst of jealousy is common as the younger child demands attention. Steph recalls her twelve-year-old brother insisting that the

first thing she should unpack was her new microwave so that he could make popcorn. To stop his whining, she dug the microwave out of the pile of boxes and let him plug it in. As she turned to arrange her closet, her brother managed to scorch the popcorn, sending out waves of smoke and an offensive odor that lingered not only in her room but also throughout the entire hallway, for the rest of the afternoon.

When your student shows signs of irritation, it's usually best for the rest of the family to take a break. A visit to the college's art gallery, a campus tour, or a two-hour trip to a nearby tourist highlight will give you something to do while your child makes decisions about where things will go. In a few hours, he will have had time to do some unpacking and, with luck, meet a roommate or the neighbor across the hall. Parents are usually relieved when they come back after a break and see that their child is feeling more comfortable and confident.

You can offer to take your child out for a meal or make a run to the store for forgotten items, but let him decide if he wants to go. Some students are not ready to say good-bye yet and will appreciate time with their parents to think through the next steps. Others will refuse any suggestion to get back into the car. Either way, it is hard for students to consider this as a family day.

If you have traveled cross-country to bring your child to school, you may be planning to spend a few days in town before heading back. Your student, however, is not likely to have the time or the inclination to fit your plans into her schedule. What's more, if she arranges her meals and spends her free time with you, she will miss opportunities to meet other students and to start exploring campus, which she needs to do during the first few days at college.

Eventually, you will have to go home. Our residential life director bluntly tells parents, "You can't live here. And I'm sorry, but there is no magical time when leaving gets any easier."

Your child will be grateful if you avoid sentimental farewells in front of the roommates. Most students find this step less embarrassing if they walk their parents to the car to say goodbye. All you need to say can be summed up in a few words: "I'm proud of you—I love you." If you are convinced you won't be able to drive for all the tears, just go a few blocks until you're out of sight and park the car for a while.

On the way home, take some time to celebrate your own success—you have reached a family milestone. Buy a book you've been meaning to read, treat yourself to a bouquet of flowers, stop for that hour-long hike you skipped on the way to campus, or just go home and take a long, hot bath. You deserve some self-indulgence. Within forty-eight hours, though, check back with your student.

Some parents think that the "distance" their student needs when he begins college means they should wait for the child to make the first phone call. They make an effort not to call or write until their student does. Although your child probably does not want you to call every night, and he certainly does not want to hear daily reports about how lonely you are, he does want to know you're thinking about him. One student, Lissa, remembers that her roommate's mother sent short e-mail notes every few days and sent a package of cookies or brownies once a week for the first month. Lissa's own mother always sounded happy to receive a call from her daughter, but she made a point of saying that she would not be an interfering mother and call all the time. One day, though, Lissa told her, "I have to say—I'm beginning to feel a little neglected here! Randi's mom sends cookies all the time, and she says she's willing to adopt me. I'm about ready to take her up on the offer."

No matter how glad they were to see their parents leave on move-in day, very few students object to receiving a letter or package from home every now and then.

THE COMPLAINT DEPARTMENT

College viewbooks and compact disks—the colorful recruiting materials that every school mails out to prospective applicants—capture the idealized image we all have of campus life: golden autumn days with students strolling arm in arm past red-brick buildings; a group of smiling young men and women studying together around a library table; fans decked out in school sweat-shirts at a basketball game; a student gazing into a microscope under the attentive eye of a bearded professor.

While nearly all students will have moments that resonate with those photographs, they will also have bouts of homesickness, impossible homework assignments, and days when absolutely nothing goes right.

The first days at college usually turn out to be a relief for new students. Things are not nearly as bad as they feared—people are pretty nice, the dorm room isn't as cramped as it seemed that first day, and when a problem arises, the student manages to cope. There is an almost unreasonable happiness to be found in plugging in the phone and discovering it actually works. A huge sense of accomplishment comes from figuring out how to use the college ID card to be admitted to the cafeteria.

Before long, though, the joy fades. Fall semester for freshmen is a roller-coaster ride of ups and downs. With the transition to college, nearly every aspect of students' lives changes. Although they come to school expecting new experiences, they often don't take into account the impact of all that they will encounter.

- They will almost never be alone. In a residence hall, they may share a room with two or more people, and they will almost certainly share a bathroom—in some cases with twenty people.
- There's no accounting for what will drive them crazy. Using the shower after someone else, washing dishes in the bath-

room sink, or the lack of two-ply toilet paper may prove to be far more annoying than a roommate's alarm clock or country music from across the hall.

- There is no such thing as a quiet meal. Even if they like the food, the multiple scents, sights, and sounds of a crowded dining hall become oppressive as a three-times-a-day routine.
- Despite all the activity surrounding them, there will be times of loneliness.

When the going gets tough, the tough call home. Parents will hear complaints about roommates, food, homework assignments, and instructors. During the first month or two of school each year, I frequently receive early morning phone calls from exhausted mothers who couldn't get back to sleep after a 1 A.M. conversation with their student.

"She called in the middle of the night, and she was so depressed. I don't know if I should bring her home or tell her to stick it out."

"He hates it there. He doesn't seem to have any friends. Maybe it was a mistake to send him so far away for college."

Parents feel terrible when their child is unhappy. In most cases, however, after your daughter purged all her frustration, she hung up the phone and went to bed feeling much better. Or after your son unloaded all his misery onto you, he saw his neighbor on the way to the vending machine and spent an hour talking about video games. In the meantime, you don't know that your child feels better. He doesn't call you back the next day to say the problem is solved. And if you call the next night but get no answer, you only worry more.

When your student calls to complain, he is not expecting you

to solve the problem. If you offer advice, he will most likely assure you that your solution is unreasonable or impossible. You may suggest that a conversation with the professor will clarify the requirements for an upcoming project, and your student will tell you that it is impossible to talk to this professor—she has office hours only from 8 to 9 A.M., when your son has another class, which he absolutely cannot miss. This instructor would never agree to talk to him outside of her posted office hours. And what's more, not one person in the class has ever been able to talk to this instructor.

Your student is calling you because he needs sympathy. Life is more challenging than ever before, and all this problem solving is hard work. He feels awful, he is recognizing that he probably caused or at least contributed to his problems, and now he must make an effort to fix things. Talking through the issue is part of the review process that allows him to understand how the situation came about. After he has vented his frustration, he will be ready for the next step: figuring out a solution.

By listening, you are providing your student with what he needs. You can't tell him what to do, and it will not help to ask why he let the problem develop, but you can ask some useful questions about moving toward a solution: "What do you think you can do now?" "Do you know of anyone who might be able to help?" "Is there any place you can find some information on this problem?"

He still may argue with your suggestions, but you have done your part: you've given him some possibilities to think about. Your child learns valuable lessons by going through the steps. He learns about the culture and the systems of the college as he finds his way toward a solution. Best of all, he gains confidence that he can make it in this new world.

STARTING OUT STRONG

The opening days of college set the patterns that can mean the difference between success and failure. The routines that students establish during the first weeks tend to last at least through the first semester, sometimes longer. The patterns they form become a part of who they are and how they interact with the campus. Students who spend September weekends partying will probably look for a party every weekend in October and November. The commuters who hurry home after class every day during the first few weeks may never carve out their own niche on campus or form a study group with other students.

College students are usually in class only 15 to 18 hours a week. Compared to a high school schedule, college might seem like a vacation. The expectation, however, is that for every hour a student is in class, another two to three hours should be spent studying. A class schedule of 15 credit hours, then, should translate into a weekly time commitment of 30 to 45 hours outside of class. Students who revel in the free time and postpone writing their papers until the last minute, or who pull all-nighters to cram for their final exams, will not be as successful as they could have been.

It's not only what students are doing, but how they are relating to the campus, in the first few weeks that makes a difference. Too many students turn to their computers for a social life, sacrificing real-life, real-time companionship. Computer games consume hours of free time and turn into obsessions. Students stay up long into the night, communicating with high school friends or chatting with faceless icons in cyberspace, and they fail to meet the people who live across the hall. They even use computers to fight with their roommates. A residence hall adviser in Wisconsin found out that two students on his hall had been feuding for months. The roommates literally did not speak to

one another. They would each sit at their desks on opposite sides of the room and send vitriolic messages back and forth. The hostility—and the silence—in the room was oppressive.

Listen as your child describes campus life during the first few weeks of classes. By the sixth week, students should be talking about course work, accomplishments and challenges, instructors, and new friends. Commuter students should be spending the majority of their day on campus, doing homework, and meeting with their instructors or other students. Residential students should be dedicating blocks of time to studying, not trying to read a few pages in the ten minutes before class. All students should be making connections on campus.

If your child continues to talk exclusively about friends from home, or if the focus of her conversations relates only to the social activities on campus, it's probably time for a serious discussion about educational goals and adjustment to college. At least one class should be challenging enough to talk about; at least one instructor should be engaging enough to merit attention; at least one paper or test should be worth telling you about. Even if your child is mostly just complaining, as long as she's talking about college, she is becoming involved.

COLLEGE CULTURE SHOCK

Freshmen are subjected to every possible warning and tidbit of advice about safety, security, and student success. Residence hall staff talk about fire drills, cooking regulations, night-time security procedures, and alcohol policies. Academic staff lecture on time management, study skills, and the value of setting up study groups. Student affairs staff stop by to talk about getting involved on campus, developing leadership skills, and making smart choices about finances and health.

Meanwhile, there are new words and new traditions that stu-

dents are expected to somehow know—the University of Michigan freshman is confused when his classmate tells him to meet him in the “fish bowl” between classes. At Wake Forest, the student is supposed to know when to show up for “rolling the quad.” And college presents first-year students with challenges far beyond the classroom. The suburban student who goes to school in a big city can't imagine life without a car. The city dweller who goes to a small rural college is surprised to find there is no bus service—so how do you get to a store to buy shampoo? The farm kid from Nebraska is puzzled to see people carrying umbrellas on her California campus. “Do people really use umbrellas?” she wonders. “I thought that was something only the British do, or characters in books.” Where she comes from, if it rains, you stay indoors, drive wherever you're going, or wear a hat.

New information of all kinds is firing in from every direction, and hardly any of it is hitting its mark. First-year students are not looking for advice or wisdom, traditions, or new concepts; they're looking for friends. But friend-making is one of those skills no one ever thought to teach them.

Friendships, in their experience, just happen. If they grew up in a small community, their parents knew the families of all their friends. Neighborhood schools or private schools usually draw students who share similar backgrounds, and most of their friends have been much like themselves. Even those from large city schools with considerable diversity had friends from a limited social circle—people they knew from their neighborhood, church, or “friends of friends.” When they started dating in high school, they already knew something about the person they were going out with, or they at least knew someone who could provide some information.

In college, they don't have family references for the people they're meeting. They have to figure out not only who will be

fun and interesting, but also who will be trustworthy. In their urgency to have a friend or a lover, many students make poor choices and then don't know how to break off a relationship.

Students of color might find themselves feeling particularly isolated. Even at a large university that boasts of its 25 percent minority enrollment, an African-American freshman might be the only nonwhite on his floor of the residence hall; a Hmong student may be the only person of color in the 200-seat lecture hall during psychology class. Most colleges have culture-based student groups to give students of color a place to meet, receive support on campus, and celebrate diversity. Although most students will settle in comfortably in time, initial feelings of difference and separation can be particularly difficult in the first few weeks of college.

Everyone wants to have friends and be accepted. Lonely students seeking companionship are vulnerable to predatory religious groups as well as seemingly innocent campus-sponsored student groups that promise camaraderie but then require proof of commitment. Initiation ceremonies and hazing by athletic teams, social organizations, or even the college band sometimes demand that students perform humiliating acts—even deadly behaviors—all in the name of fun and friendship.

Friendship: True or False?

Most college students develop friendships that last a lifetime. Some will meet their future partners. As students experience the revelations that come with a college education, in the classroom and out, they come to treasure the people who share those moments with them.

The friends they make can be the most positive—or the most damaging—influence of their college years. Students are vulnerable to bad relationships when they are lonely or homesick, when

they have recently broken up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, when they are bored, and when they are struggling academically or financially. The following information, which compares the difference between true and false friends, can be adapted to evaluate social and religious organizations as well.¹

True Friends

- *True friends take time for you and listen to you.* Your thoughts and opinions are important to them, even if they disagree with your ideas. They are not hurtful about expressing differences.
- *True friends encourage relationships with family and other friends.* They are not jealous or possessive. They are interested in meeting your family and friends.
- *When something goes wrong, true friends want to work through the problems with you.* They can explain why they are upset, and they can acknowledge their responsibility in the problem.
- *True friends support your goals and encourage your success.* They believe in you and want you to do well.
- *True friends are people you feel safe with.* They do not ask you to bend the rules, and they respect your values and concerns.
- *True friendships develop and grow over time.* Instant friendships can end as quickly as they begin. Friends take the time to know one another well.

False Friends

- *False friends demand all your attention and are jealous of your other friends.* They question your loyalty to them, and they become anxious or upset if they don't know where you are.
- *For false friends, the relationship is all about them.* They expect you to be there for them, to do what they want, and to devote yourself to them. Your thoughts and opinions are important only if they conform to their ideas.

- *False friends don't think anything is their fault.* When things go wrong, it's your fault or someone else's. They are never wrong, and they are never responsible for problems.
- *False friends become more controlling as time goes by.* You cannot provide enough attention, and you are asked for more and more proof of your devotion.
- *False friends live by their own rules.* They may push the limits of the law, have financial problems, or use drugs and alcohol dangerously. They force you to do things you don't want to do, and they become angry if you challenge them.
- *False friends want too much, too soon.* When you're with them, you feel like things are out of control. If you feel that something is wrong, you're probably right.

As important as it is to be cautious about friendships, parents also should stress that "different" does not equate with "bad." Except for the smallest private schools, most colleges and universities will introduce your student to a world of new ideas, new religions, new cultures. Initially, all the differences can be fascinating. Students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two are receptive to learning, and they are in an environment that supports them as they open their minds to new people and new experiences.

In time, some of the differences may begin to feel like challenges to their own background and beliefs. When students come across ideas that contrast with their family's values, they have to make some decisions: Should they accept or reject these new ideas? And how should they deal with the people who preach them?

The black-and-white, right-or-wrong perspectives that worked for students in the past are countered by shades of gray. They

almost hate to admit that what is wrong in some circumstances might be acceptable in others. Most students learn how to choose what they will accept and make allowances for what they cannot. College students as a whole not only accept diversity, but embrace it. Ideally, they will recognize that they are part of an exciting and energizing community. The fact that they are learning something new every day is proof that they're moving forward with their lives.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT HOME

Just as your child is learning a lot about himself during these first weeks of college, you are learning new things about yourself and the rest of the family.

Thea's parents expected life to be quieter after she left for college, and they knew they would miss her—she was the family storyteller and drama queen. Every night at dinner, she had at least one tale to tell, and she could stretch out a description of her day and all its woes through the entire meal.

What they didn't expect was that their younger daughter would become so difficult after Thea left. At fifteen, she was, they thought, past that challenging adolescent stage. Instead she seemed to have a breakdown at every meal, storming out of the room before they finished eating.

Thea was the lightning rod in her family. As issues arose, she could draw attention away from the problem and toward her. With Thea at college, that tension had nowhere to go. The family was going through a significant adjustment, and her sister's behavior was just one of the results.

Family structures and patterns develop based on *all* members of the household. When one person leaves, it's not just the physical presence, or the humor, or the affection that is missed. It's also the role that that person plays in the family.

Every family develops new patterns when a child leaves home. With only one or two people gathering for dinner, it might seem unnecessary to set the dining room table and have a formal meal. If you're running late, it may be easiest to allow the only child still at home to eat in front of the TV.

Some of the changes will feel like a gift. You don't have to share bathroom time with as many people. The phone interrupts meals less frequently. You get your car back, or at least you don't lie awake every Friday night waiting to hear your daughter come in the front door. The brother or sister still living at home is receiving extra attention; morning schedules are less hectic; if your last child just left home, you and your partner can talk about sex any time, even at the dinner table.

On the other hand, without your children as the center of your relationship, you may find yourself feeling lost and alone. For many seemingly stable families, a child's college years coincide with marriage problems. You may discover that all you have talked about together for the past five years is your kids. The dissonance in the household caused by a child's departure results in one parent's seeking change while the other clings to stability.

It is common to "mourn" for a while when a child leaves home, and it's not entirely coincidental that parents' midlife crises correspond to their children's college years. You might even feel a touch of envy for what your child is experiencing. As you begin to see your responsibilities to your child more in terms of financial obligations, you might begin evaluating your beliefs and values, and perhaps you will decide it's time to do something for yourself. Countless parents look at the school their student is attending and say, "I wish I could go to college. Someone would fix my meals, I could take any classes I want, I would have no responsibility, and I could have intellectual conversations every day. Why do we waste all this on kids?"

You're stuck with your responsibilities, but you can still

expand your mind. This is the best time in your life to take a class at a local college, devote time to a hobby, concentrate on your career, or pamper your partner. As your new life develops, you need to look for ways to adapt to and create new routines. Depending on your outlook, all the changes in your life might feel a bit daring and exciting or somewhat depressing.

On the other hand, you might be oblivious to any particular differences at all until the first time your student comes home for the weekend, expecting everything to be the same, and points out the new routines. "We *always* have pancakes for Saturday breakfast. Why are there cereal boxes on the table?"

When students come home and find life even a little different, they feel unsettled. This is partly because they did not have a voice in the changes and partly because they don't know how these adjustments will affect them. They rarely object to new living room furniture, as long as you save the comfortable old couch for their first apartment. There are limits to what feels like progress and what feels like an attack on their territory. They still don't want you to change their bedroom into your exercise room. Personal space is sacred, at least until your child gets his own apartment.

Students find comfort in returning to the familiar, and they rely on the stability of "family," but they don't really expect everything to remain as it always has been. They'll let you know they are surprised—maybe even disappointed—at any changes. But they adjust. They go back to school and tell their friends, with pride and amusement, that their mother signed up for ski lessons, their father took a first-ever trip to New York City, or Grandpa enrolled in computer classes at the community college.

Mini-Calendar of the First Six Weeks

Move-In Day

A tough day for families. Students are tense, excited, scared. Parents are on edge; if anything goes wrong, they may find themselves reacting more strongly than they would expect. *Advice for parents:* Tell your child you love and trust her, and you have great confidence that she will be fine.

Week 1

Students establish routines as a way to adapt to change. Social acceptance is usually their first priority. Students react strongly to disappointments or problems. This may be the first time they have had to identify problems and find solutions entirely on their own. They will complain, but they usually manage to adjust. Every accomplishment feels like a significant victory. *Advice for parents:* Talk to your child at least once during the first week; enjoy the excitement, and acknowledge the disappointments.

Week 2

Students may go overboard with new freedoms. They figure out that attendance is not taken in classes, and they decide not to go. They realize that they have two hours between their lecture and their lab, and they spend the time with friends in a coffee shop. They see other students decorating their rooms, and they spend a small fortune on posters and pillows. *Advice for parents:* Listen for clues that your child might be making poor decisions. Affirm the good choices and talk about priorities.

Week 3

A mix of comfort and uneasiness confuses students. They have established a routine, and they no longer feel "new." They

become extremely close to friends they have just met. They can't believe they've only known these people a couple of weeks. On the other hand, students are frustrated that there is clearly so much they don't know yet about college. They think that everyone is looking at them and thinking, "Obviously clueless. Must be a freshman." Any mistakes feel like proof they don't belong. *Advice for parents:* Tell your child you believe in her.

Week 4

Students who have not yet gone home begin to want a weekend away from college. The intensity of it all has become exhausting, and they're worn out. They begin to see things from a slightly different perspective—the gregarious, outgoing friend they met the first week of school starts to seem a bit shallow; the quiet, cynical person next door might not be so bad after all; and they get tired of roommates. *Advice for parents:* Listen to complaints, but don't try to fix things. Suggest that rather than come home for the weekend, your child can stay at school and spend some extra time sleeping and studying over the weekend. The standard recommendation is that students should stay at school until Thanksgiving break.

Weeks 5 and 6

Students begin to react to disillusionment. College turns out not to be everything they had imagined, and they have to admit that some of their initial choices were poor. Typically, students either confront their challenges and make improvements, or they confirm their original patterns. Students will continue to cycle through frustration and action throughout the first semester, deciding to drop bad habits or bad friends or concluding, "Since this is what college is, maybe I'm not cut out for college." *Advice for parents:* Talk with your child about the good decisions you have seen him make during the first few weeks of school. Let him know there is still time to make improvements.

QUICK TIPS FOR STUDENTS

- The first day of school, you are *not* the only one who doesn't know what's going on. All freshmen are scared and confused.
- If your parents are irritable on move-in day, that's because they're nervous, too. Your going to college is almost as big a change for them as it is for you.
- The patterns you set in the first week of college are the ones you will tend to follow for a long time. Make sure they're good ones. When you find yourself doing the same thing every day, ask yourself, "Is this a routine I want to continue?"
- Get up, get out, and get involved. Turn off the computer, meet the people across the hall and on the floor above yours. Say hello to the person sitting beside you in every class. Talk to the person next to you as you go through the cafeteria line. Someday, one of those people will say, "I am so glad you came up to me that first time!"
- The way you feel today is not how you'll feel tomorrow. The first weeks of school bring lofty highs and deep lows. You will have days when you're not at all sure you're at the right school, but you'll also have days when you know you are doing just fine. Remember the good days so you can draw on them during the rough times.
- Be willing to rethink your choices. You can drop friends who don't turn out to be what you expected; you can change majors; you can ask forgiveness for doing something stupid. The best part of being a freshman is that for a whole year, you can say, "I'm still trying to figure things out."
- For commuters, setting classes as your top priority is even harder than for students who live in a dorm. Spend your free time on campus, make a space there for yourself, and start to think of college as your "real life."