



BalanceWorks® Newsletter

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Adjusting to College Life

Next month countless students will be heading off to college; some will be excitedly returning while others will be nervously anticipating leaving for the first time. Leaving for college is a huge milestone in your child's life; it marks the beginning of their transition into adulthood. Naturally, this change will bring challenges for your child and require a period of adjustment. Therefore, it helps if we, as parents, have some tools to help make their transition as smooth as possible.

Preparing:

Before your child leaves the home there are a few basic skills that they should have to ensure that they can take care of themselves. Make sure you teach them how to:

- Do laundry
- Budget their money
- Write a check and balance a checkbook
- Use credit cards wisely and the concept of interest
- Operate a microwave and toaster
- Brew a pot of coffee
- Assertively communicate their needs

There are also a few items you should be sure to discuss with your child so they are prepared to face a world that will undoubtedly be much different than their home life. Some of these topics may be uncomfortable but discussing them will

help your child make informed decisions. Make sure you talk about:

- The importance of personal safety when away from home.
- Drugs and alcohol will be present and available on campus, so ensure that your child understands that the mixture of drugs, alcohol, and strangers can lead to potentially dangerous situations.
- The fact that cheating has serious consequences. If you are caught, it won't just result in a bad grade, you will most likely be expelled from the school.

The First Semester:

The very first week of school will be filled with activity. There will be countless orientations and meet and greets. Students will be busy finding their classes, the library, the gym and the cafeteria as well as figuring out their meal plans, and setting up various student accounts. During this time period there is a good chance your child will be overwhelmed and exhausted, but still excited. You can help by letting them know that they will settle into a routine soon and college life won't always be so hectic.

Now comes the tricky part. After the first week the adrenaline that accompanies a new experience wears off and reality sets in. The first eight weeks

For more information or support on helping your child adjust to college, contact the work/life experts at **BalanceWorks®** by calling:

1.800.327.2255

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of college are often regarded as the toughest time period as students are trying to adjust to a completely different lifestyle.

Settling In

The most common issue that students face when they begin college is homesickness. Children miss the comfort of their own bed, your home-cooked meals, the constant of being surrounded by people who care for them and everything else that makes them feel like they are home. Expect a lot of phone calls from your new student, some of them teary and defeated, some of them begging you to pick them up for the weekend and some of them telling you that they just don't think this is the right place for them. This is referred to as the "dump call". If your child calls and tells you that they want to come home within the first eight weeks, don't freak out; this is extremely common. Most students make this call at least once during their first semester and most of them end up sticking it out.

As a parent, there are some things you can do to help manage your child's homesickness. First, simply let them vent. What they really want is a safe place to express their feelings, frustrations, and fears. Then be sure to validate their feelings, don't just try to fix everything. For example, if they are complaining about the food, instead of saying "I'm sure there is something there you like" try, "Yes, I bet you miss home cooked meals. I hear cafeteria food isn't that great, but when we dropped you off I noticed there was a really fresh looking salad bar". This approach lets them know that you are hearing them and that you understand where they are coming from, but they will pick up on your upbeat attitude as well.

Also, communicate with them often without suffocating them. In addition to phone calls, you can send them funny emails, comment on their Facebook page and SEND MAIL. Students love getting mail. Some home baked goods or family pictures will help them to feel less disconnected

from home. Of course welcome them home for breaks, but encourage them to stay on campus for weekends. If they come home every weekend they will miss out developing socially on campus. Finally, encourage them to chat with an older sibling, relative, or friend who had/is having a wonderful college experience. They can assure them that when they first started they felt homesick and alone too, but now they view college as one of the best times of their life.

You can also utilize campus resources. If your child is having roommate issues, urge them to contact their Resident Advisor (RA). RAs are trained to mediate these situations. If they are having an especially rough time adjusting, encourage them to visit University Counseling Services on campus. This is a completely confidential and free service for students. Of course there are cases when students do end up leaving school and coming home because campus life is not for everyone, so be sensitive to signs that your child is seriously depressed or spiraling down a path of drug and alcohol abuse. In these cases it may be best to allow them to come home.

Remember homesickness is completely normal when your child first enters college. With support and time your child will adjust to campus life and suddenly you will begin to miss all the phone calls and visits home.

Finally, if you find yourself having a difficult time with your child being out of the home for the first time and away at college, remember that your EAP is available for support.

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