

The Move to College

College means changes for both the parent and the child

The move away from home to college is a significant milestone in both the college student's life and yours as a parent. This transition is easier for some than it is for others. This article is intended to give you some information that will help you understand what your college student is going through and how you can help. Each college student is different, and there is no step-by-step guide to solving conflicts or understanding your college student. However, the best way to approach any situation with your college student is open, honest communication.

What kinds of students are at the University of Minnesota?

Approximately 8,000 freshmen come to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities each year with over 80% in the top half of their high school class. They represent families from all over the state, country and world. The current student population consists of mostly millennial generation students (children born during or after 1982). These students inherently gravitate toward group activity, identify with parents' values and feel close to parents, are starting to spend more time doing homework and housework and less time watching TV, believe "it's cool to be smart," and are fascinated by new technology. Millennial students traditionally also approach problems in a trial-and-error fashion versus a more procedural approach.

What does college bring for my student?

College brings a milestone in the student's life. It is considered a symbolic end of childhood. College brings independence and new life experiences. This independence also brings autonomy from parental rules and restrictions. As students begin their journey through college, they are confronted with a mix of old and new situations. Students will be placed in a new social environment where they must make new friends and build new relationships. Academically, students will be faced with tougher classes, relaxed class schedules, and decisions about the future. Socially, students will undoubtedly be confronted with alcohol, drugs, and sex. College is a time for self-discovery and exploration. This is a point in life where students start to cement their values and develop their own points of view.

Is what I'm feeling normal?

Parents can be faced with an overabundance of physical and emotional changes as they send children off to college. They may feel anything from joy to a sense of separation. Parents have to cope with both a physical and emotional emptiness. This also marks a significant change in the relationship between you and your child. Many parents struggle with the concept that they are no longer the primary caretaker or protector. While students may be financially dependent on their parents, the parent can no longer monitor every aspect of their lives. Parents also have to deal with the relinquishing of

some parental control. Relationships between a parent and child must change. Parents will always be needed in a child's life, however, with the move to college, relationships begin to gravitate more towards an adult-to-adult relationship rather than a parent-to-child relationship. This relationship may become more peer-like in nature.

What can I do before my child leaves?

There are several things a parent can do before his or her student leaves for college. First and foremost, parents should have discussions about specific situations that may arise during college. While moral values and expectations have been discussed though the student's life, it is always helpful to review. Students will benefit from hearing your expectations again; and it will help them reaffirm that they are making the right decision when they are faced with a specific situation. Discussions should include, but are not limited to, academic expectations, sex, rooming arrangements with romantic partners, drugs, alcohol, interpersonal issues, and types of friends they will have. Along with moral discussions, parents should discuss more logistical issues, such as financial contributions to their education. Students should have some financial contribution to their education. This can be anything from spending money to covering some or all of the tuition costs. Other logistical concerns may be credit cards, checking accounts, phone cards, calls and visits home, upcoming events, and medical/legal arrangements. Another thing parents can do before their child arrives at school is assist the child with special arrangements that need to be made. Services are available for learning disabilities, mental illness, and/or physical disabilities. Arrangements can be made through Disability Services (<http://ds.umn.edu/>).

What can I do during the school year? What resources are out there?

Communication with your student is the most important thing a parent can do from a distance. While most parents don't communicate on a daily basis with their student, it is important to have regular contact with them. Phone calls, emails, letters/packages will better help you understand how your student is doing. Parents are encouraged to visit their students at college. This is an excellent opportunity to meet their friends, and see their living conditions. Most students don't admit to liking visits from their parents, however, most do (especially when it is followed by quick shopping trips or dinner out). One caution about visits is make sure your student is given sufficient time to develop their own identity and friendships. Also, surprise visits are rarely appreciated.

Supporting your child's ability to problem solve and develop coping skills is essential in the first year of college. At some point, a child must take control of his or her life and learn how to navigate the "system." However, parents definitively can point them in the right direction. Here are some places that your student can go to get help from the University of Minnesota.

Orientation & First-Year Programs (<http://www.ofvp.umn.edu/>)

The role of Orientation & First-Year Programs is to provide you with a seamless transition while connecting you to opportunities designed to engage you as a member of the University community.

Center for Writing (<http://writing.umn.edu/sws/>)

Student Writing Support provides free writing instruction for all University of Minnesota students --graduate and undergraduate -- at all stages of the writing process. In [collaborative consultations](#), we help students develop productive writing habits and revision strategies.

Boynton Health Services (<http://www.bhs.umn.edu/>)

Free to all students, Boynton Health Services offers a wide range of medical, counseling and education services. Students are encouraged to use the counseling services to help avoid depression and anxiety.

Student Activities Office (<http://www.sao.umn.edu/>)

The Kirby Student Center is host to over 600 student clubs and organizations. These student groups cover a wide range of interests and activities. This is a great way for a student to get involved in a university.



Often the cries of distress heard from a student can sound worse than they actually are. Situations can change within a few minutes or a few days. Supporting a student through advice and helpful guidance is preferable than rushing in as the problem solver. However, parents know their child best and must assess their child's needs.

Is my college student healthy?

Many parents worry about their child's health and well-being. The Mayo Clinic offers an excellent [article](#) about what physical and mental issues college students face. Boynton Health services offers counseling services, medical exams, STD screenings and other medical care to all students. Students should be educated about the benefits of a healthy life style. Students also should be educated about the dangers of alcohol and drug use, particularly binge drinking and alcohol poisoning. Many students suffer from lack of sleep, poor eating habits, and lack of exercise. University of Minnesota's Department

of Recreational Sports (<http://www.recsports.umn.edu/>) offers excellent opportunities for students to become physically active. Ideally, the best thing a parent can do is provide a steady, loving home base for students to return to. Mistakes will be made and students have to learn life lessons the hard way. Life experience has to be lived; it can't be taught. Some parents become more invested in their child's education than their child. Many students won't step up and take charge until the parent takes a step back. Remember, this is a change for both of you, and you are going through it together.

References:

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