Transitions

The one thing we can all be sure of is that the only constant is change. Whether you are preparing to send your child off for their first time or sending them back returning students, your relationship with them will continue to evolve throughout their college years. Moving on to college does not mean they are leaving you behind but it does represent a significant step towards adulthood. Whether the student lives at home or goes away to attend college, the move represents an emotional separation for both parents and child.

Your love, counsel and wisdom will continue to be needed and as your role as parent continually changes and your child grows and develops, you and your child will develop a new adult relationship.

Everything Is Changing

The excitement you felt just a few months ago as your child graduated from high school has probably faded and you may notice a little more chaos as the day to drop them off at college draws near. You may notice your child coming home late, failing to show up for family events, or reminding you that in a few months you won’t know what they are doing. One minute you may feel like you can’t wait to take them to college, the next you think about how much you are going to miss them. Every family picnic may bring a wave of sadness when you think “this could be the last picnic we have together.” Meanwhile your child is focusing on preparing for college and spending the last few weeks before college with their friends. Their pulling away is part of the maturing process. They are putting effort into reinforcing the friendships they are leaving and expanding their boundaries. Home does not have the same excitement as being out in the world.

During these last few weeks your son or daughter isn’t really sure what they want from you. They are resentful if you still treat them like a child yet feel abandoned if you leave them alone to make their own decisions. This point between childhood and adulthood can cause your child to be aloof or angry and when the day comes to head to campus, you may notice that your talkative child becomes silent, your quiet child chatters nervously, and arguments come up over trivial things. You can’t always help the anxiety but here are some tips to help the process go a bit smoother:

• Don’t try to plan the “last family weekend” on the way to taking your child to college. Everyone will be too worried and excited for that to be enjoyable.

• Avoid arguments by choosing to not remind your daughter that she brought too much or suggesting to your son which drawer would be best for his underwear.

• When your child shows signs of irritation, it might be a good time for the rest of the family to take a break. A tour of something on campus or a visit to a local tourist attraction will offer some time for your child to start to adjust.

• It is hard for students to consider this a family day so don’t be offended if they decline that one last meal out with you. Even if you plan on staying in town a few more days most students will not have the time to spend with you or would miss opportunities to meet other students.

• No matter how long you stay around, saying goodbye never gets easier. Your child will be appreciative if you avoid a sentimental goodbye in front of their new roommates. Remember most sentiments can be summed up in a few words like “I love you” or “I am proud of you.”
As you journey home celebrate your own accomplishments in parenting and feel confident that you have given your child the tools they need to be successful. Your relationship is not over, it is just changing.

**Been There, Done That**

So, you have already been through the freshman drop off, their first year, you survived them being home for the summer, and now you are preparing to send them back. You may feel like things are going smoother than they did a year ago or you may still be struggling trying to figure out how to relate to your child. As you and your college student continue to learn to communicate effectively, it is important to remember that the transition to adulthood takes time. Many 18-21 year olds say that they feel like an adult in some ways but not in others. It is usually not until they are in their mid 20s that they feel like an adult. As they go between childhood and adulthood it can be difficult to know how involved to be in your student’s life. The hands-off approach can be as problematic as hovering. Academic stress, bad roommates, broken hearts, and abusive relationships are among the things can cause constant worry and anxiety for college students. Parents should always encourage independence, but the more serious the issue, the message to "let go" is not always practical. The art of parenting a budding adult is to strike the right balance between intervening thoughtfully during true crises and standing aside during mild difficulties so that they can work through their dilemmas and thereby develop their own competencies.

Remember to trust your child’s judgment and have confidence in the staff at the University of Rochester. A fully trained, professional staff of caring student services personnel is here and prepared to deal with all the typical problems as well as any emergency that may arise. There are situations where it may be necessary for you to call the University. If you are concerned and feel your child is in danger or needs help with a serious problem always trust your instincts and intervene.

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