

How to emotionally and physically prepare your child for college

With six months to launch, now is an essential time to reinforce critical problem solving skills, study and learning habits, and social skills.

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Take a moment to congratulate yourself. Seriously, you've spent the past few months (OK, 17 years, give or take) helping your child prepare for college. You suggested some tweaks on that college essay, prodded them to study, and watched them dot and cross the digital i's and t's on those applications. That's a huge accomplishment, but while the applications are in, the work is just beginning. The next few months are a critical time for you and your child to get ready for college.

"Attending college is one of the most exciting, life-changing adventures, with many amazing opportunities and challenges," Tracy Y. Espy, Ph. D. and President of Mitchell College, said. "Parents and caregivers are critical partners in preparing high school students for their first year of college."

For many, entering college marks an important step towards becoming an adult. You've already gone through the application process with your child, so now's the time to continue (or start, if you haven't) having conversations about the other parts of college. This should include everything from deciding on which college to go to and the finances that go along with that decision to talking about classes and what activities they're thinking of getting involved in, to reviewing the basics of laundry or balanced meals and more.

To ease the anxiety that some students may experience over choosing which of their accepted colleges to attend or over beginning their first year of college, students should try to connect with their college of choice physically.

"Attend virtual and in-person campus events whenever possible," said Connecticut College's Dean of First-Year Students, Emily Morash. "At Conn, we host spring



“Camel Days” for our admitted students and it’s a great opportunity for students to meet current students, faculty and staff, ask questions, and start to make connections.”

In addition to attending admitted students day, teens can ask about visiting classes, talk with academic advisors, current students, and professors about the school or going to a sporting event at the college.

“Help identify the things that made your student successful in high school,” said Morash. “If having a busy co-curricular schedule was important to their success, talk to your student about how they are going to get involved in clubs when they get to campus. If your student had a 504 or IEP plan for a learning difference, then help them get registered with their college’s accessibility services office for accommodations so they have everything in place before the first semester.”

As senior year ends and the lazy days of summer begin, it’s essential to continue reinforcing your child’s critical problem-solving skills, study and learning habits and social skills.

“Now is the time to encourage and support your high school senior, by letting him or her independently find resolutions to his or her own problems and issues that may occur during the senior year,” said Espy. “There will be many times during college where problem solving ability will be crucial, and students will benefit from these opportunities to practice these skills before arriving to college. Parents should listen first, and then ask their child what he or she feels they need help or support with.”

According to multiple studies, practiced coping skills, established study and learning habits, a sense of



life cycles

social-emotional well-being, self-motivation, and good relationships with family are some of the characteristics that assist in the success of first-year students in college.

Espy suggests that students practice self-care or learn to do so. They can consider learning meditation or relaxation techniques and make time to journal or exercise.

“They should find things to do that spark joy and fun,” said Espy.

Before your student heads off to school, talk through expectations about communication with each other: will you check-in daily, a few times per week, weekly? Establish those plans beforehand but be flexible as students’ needs and wants will change.

When students arrive on campus, there will, of course, be a period of adjustment. When you chat

with your kid away at school, Morash suggests asking questions about who they are eating meals with and if they’ve gone to their professor’s office hours? Espy adds, asking who their friends are? Who are they connecting with? What activities are they involved in? How do they like the food? What stresses them out? Remember, you’re listening to problems and helping them sort themselves out. You’re not solving their problems for them. But while it’s normal for students to go through an adjustment period if your student has acute changes in behaviors, lacks motivation, consistently fails to complete tasks or goes through a period of extreme weight loss, those are some signs your student isn’t adjusting well and may need some additional help from you and the school’s mental health services.



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TRACY Y. ESPY



Finally, remember you'll be going through a period of adjustment too when your student heads off to school.

“Parents may feel a sense of grief and even feel sad that their child has left for college, even if it is a positive step in their life,” said Katie Ziskind, licensed marriage and family therapist and owner of Wisdom Within Counseling. “Parents can take part in positive self-care, schedule times to remain connected even when across the miles, Send care packages in the mail with your child’s favorite snacks, fun goodies for the whole dorm to share, or even crafts for hobbies.”

And don't forget to have some fun with your college-bound kid before school. Plan some day trips, watch some movies about college and reminisce (but not too much) about your own college days. It's time for all of you to get excited. ☺



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