

Avoid the Helicopter Parent Trap to Ensure a Successful College Transition for Students

Constructive Balance of Parental Involvement and Support are Paramount to a Successful College Transition

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The transition to college is no longer simply a student adjustment—it's an adjustment for the entire family. According to the Enrollment & Retention Services Division of EducationDynamics, parents can easily avoid the "helicopter parent" trap, maintain a positive relationship with their child and contribute to their child's collegiate success by maintaining the right balance of involvement and support of their child's transition to college.

"Helicopter parents have received a bad rap, but the reality is, some level of parental involvement is necessary for a student's successful transition to college," says Dr. Adam Troy, director of research for the Enrollment & Retention Services Division of EducationDynamics. "The keys to a successful college transition for the entire family include encouraging self-reliance, engaging in intentional communication and embracing change."

To help embrace parents in the process, schools are developing online communities and social networks specifically for parents, such as EducationDynamics' First-Year Retention and Engagement Program (FYRe™). The program helps institutions build an alliance with parents through tailored content and custom surveys, among other tools.

University of Alabama uses EducationDynamics' FYRe Program to engage both students and parents. Dr. Jennifer Jones, assistant professor of higher education administration at the University of Alabama, who has overseen the program, offers a list of 10 considerations parents of college-bound students should keep in mind to maintain a positive relationship with their child and help ensure their child's academic success. This advice consists of the following recommendations:

1. **Give Your Child a Voice:** If your child has a college-centered question or concern, encourage him/her to make the call to the appropriate person. Empowering your child to speak on his or her own behalf builds confidence and fosters independence.
2. **Create Problem Solvers:** Let your child be the principle problem solver when faced with challenges. You can continue to provide guidance, but your child needs to be able to negotiate the challenges of daily life. College is a good time to practice this skill.
3. **Be Clear About Expectations:** Be clear with your child about expectations regarding home visits, phone calls, money matters and academic performance; do not assume you and your child have the same expectations and philosophies. Be clear about what you expect and what will happen if those expectations are not met.
4. **Review Basic Money and Time Management Skills:** Teach your child about time and money management. Place the responsibility on your child to manage his or her bank accounts and payment deadlines. Having to pay a late fee can be an inexpensive lesson with minimal consequences that can teach your child responsibility.
5. **Revisit Touchy Conversations:** Ask questions such as "How are you going to handle it if there is alcohol at a party?" or "What are you going to do if you are having trouble in a class?" Addressing touchy topics in advance will encourage your student to anticipate possible conflicts they may face and consider possible ways to address the conflicts before they occur.
6. **Expect Drama:** When drama ensues, consider the possibility that the situation may not be as bad as it sounds. Instead of calling in the cavalry, listen and empathize. Give your child someone safe to talk to without jumping in to offer solutions that "save the day."
7. **Embrace Change:** Remember that your child's collegiate independence is a credit to you, not a personal affront. The reality is that your child does not need you less—just in a different way.
8. **Recognize Your Transition:** A large majority of "helicopter parent" behavior stems from a lack of recognition that parents are going through their own transition. Recognize that your life is going to be different and you may face difficult days due to the loss of your previous routine. Prepare for the transition; build up your support system and plan activities for yourself.
9. **Know Your Resources:** Find ways to be productively involved in the college community through parent associations or online parent programs provided by your child's school. Colleges do not want to cut you off from your child; they just want you to assume a support role to help ensure your child's success.
10. **Remember the Parent Honor Code:** The parent honor code should be a mantra for any parent of a college-bound teen. "On my honor, I will try to allow my child to be an adult, even if it stinks for me."

"One of the most powerful tools available to universities is the web. Many transitional challenges can be overcome with information, guidance and communication, which a social network can provide," says Dr. Jones. "Traditional communications vehicles such as parent newsletters and e-mail blast campaigns typically result in low participation rates. Whereas parent participation in FYRe regularly exceeds 70 percent and results in higher student retention rates."

For more information about parent communication tools or other EducationDynamics enrollment and retention products, contact Tracy Howe at 201.377.3318 or tracy@educationdynamics.com.