

# Connections

August 2007

Dear Freshmen Parents -

Because you are concerned about your son or daughter making a successful transition to college, and because your support is a critical factor in that transition, we offer this newsletter on what your son or daughter will experience in college and what you can do to help.

## Separation Anxiety

Although most students are excited about starting college, the prospect of leaving behind the comfort and familiarity of high school friends and family members is frightening for some. The challenge of making new friends and creating a new social life can be daunting, particularly for the student who is shy.



### What You Can Do To Help With Separation Anxiety:

- Listen to your son or daughter's concerns and take them seriously. Although separation anxiety does pass, the first few weeks can be intense. Your son or daughter may need a lot of support and reassurance.
- Encourage your son or daughter to get involved in clubs and other activities at school. To find out more about student clubs and activities, they can check the student activities website at <http://www.unca.edu/studentactivities/student-org.html>
- Many UNCA students enjoy volunteering in

the numerous useful community projects in which the college is involved. If volunteering is appealing to your son or daughter, encourage them to visit the Key Center website at <http://www.unca.edu/keycenter/>

- Let them know that they are always welcome at home, but encourage them not to come home every weekend. Help them to focus their attention and energy here at school.
- Encourage them to let others know that they are having a hard time, for example, the Resident Assistant who is assigned to their floor.

If they continue to feel overwhelmed after the first few weeks of school, encourage them to make an appointment at the Counseling Center (251-6517). Generally after just a few sessions, students come to feel more comfortable at college.

<http://www.iona.edu/studentlife/counsel/infoParents.cfm>



### CONTENTS

Adjustments for Everyone	2
The Parent's Perspective	3
The Rhythm of College Life	4
Challenges for Parents	5
Identity Development	7

## Adjustments for Everyone

When a student begins college, the entire family is affected, whether your student is living on campus or commuting from home. A major adjustment is required of your student. Some students make the adjustment to the demands of college life with relative ease. However, the majority of college freshmen experience some uneasy feelings during their first semester on campus. An adjustment is also required of you and other family members. If the student leaves home to live on campus, it changes the dynamics of the family left behind. Parents and siblings must now decide how they will deal with this change. Will your college student keep his or her bedroom or will a sibling take over that room? How often will you see your college student and what kind of communication will you have now? How will you deal with your son or daughter when he or she comes home for Christmas break as a more independent individual?



If your student commutes from home, in what ways will the house rules change for the college student? Will your freshman still have a curfew? Now that time demands on your student may increase, will he/she be expected to have the same household chores and responsibilities? These are not easy issues to face, and your student will not be the only one who experiences this adjustment. It will take real communication and some negotiation to make the adjustment work best for all of you.

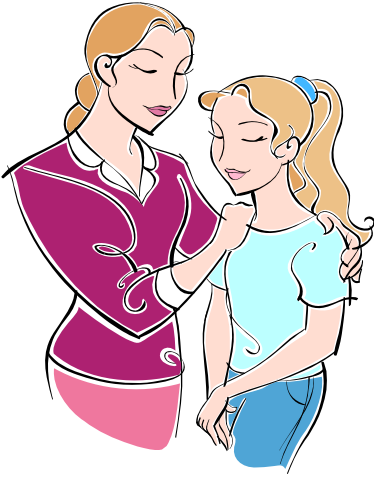
Encourage your student to finish the first semester before making any decision about ceasing his or her education. Sometimes students doubt their own ability to deal with changes effectively and may express a desire to drop out of college. Usually this is a natural reaction to a new environment and a lack of confidence in themselves to handle it. If they stick it out, they often find strength they didn't know they had.

If your student is living on campus, encourage him/her to remain on campus during the weekends as it will help make the adjustment to college life easier and quicker. Whether your student is a residential or commuter student, encourage him/her to become involved in campus activities. Also, remind your student that counseling is available to him/her at no charge in the Weizenblatt Health Center and encourage them to call (251-6517) when they feel like they need someone to help them sort things out.

*I have found the best way to  
give advice to your children is  
to find out what they want and  
then advise them to do it.*

*Harry S. Truman*

# The Parent's Perspective



As a parent, your responsibilities are to your student and to yourself. For yourself, recognize that you will experience your own transition issues as your son or daughter develops their independence at college. You may want to develop support networks with other parents who are experiencing these issues. Consider “what is next?” Think of how you will redefine your relationship with your child now, as a young adult. Remember, too, that everything you will go through is normal; learn to expect the unexpected and that there are no right or wrong decisions, only new experiences.

To help yourself and your student through this early stage, and beyond, try the following:

- Remember to be continually loving, supportive, and caring.
- Steer clear of major controversial discussions.
- Avoid being too enthusiastic or too critical.
- Be selective in carefully choosing reminders of “what to do.”
- Affirm confidence in your student’s potential.
- Listen, listen, listen.
- Send packages often.
- Keep your sense of humor.
- Don’t let it worry you that the same person planning his/her life can’t seem to do his/her laundry. (Expect inconsistencies in their development)
- Praise accomplishments often.
- Consistently communicate with your student (E-mail is a great vehicle!).
- Remember H-O-W (Honesty, Open-mindedness, Willingness) to talk to your student.
- Always forward student mail without reading it.
- Don’t compare your student to siblings, friends, or others.
- Carefully consider whether to visit campus unannounced.
- Accept the choice of major; it rarely determines a career.
- Keep in mind that time management challenges most students.
- Take comfort in knowing that formation of identity, independence, and intimacy are as much a part of college as algebra and literature.
- Nurture spirit -- it supports persistence.
- College is expensive -- work cooperatively on reasonable budgets.
- Most importantly: *Always trust your student.*



*Hatch, Cathie and Richard H. Mullendore. Helping Your First-Year College Student Succeed: A Guide for Parents. National Orientation Directors Association, 2000.*

[http://warren.ucsd.edu/parents/parent\\_support/](http://warren.ucsd.edu/parents/parent_support/)

## ... Just like Clockwork: the Rhythm of College Life

Certain times in the academic year tend to be universally challenging to students. Parents who understand the ups and downs of the first college year are better able to help their students negotiate the challenges of transition to college. Here are some of the typical adjustment issues faced throughout the first year:

### September

- Excitement
- Testing new-found freedom
- Frequent calls and visits home
- Homesickness and loneliness
- First test grades returned
- Anxiety about roommates, professors, classes, new environment

### October

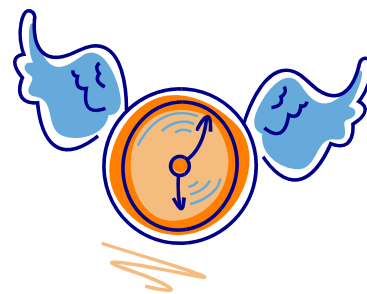
- Roommate problems begin to arise
- Student questions: "Do I fit in here?"
- First set of midterm exams
- Love relationships from home remain strong
- Consequences of decision-making experienced

### November

- Roommate challenges become more clear
- Many exams and papers due before Thanksgiving
- Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for Thanksgiving (see article at [http://www.unca.edu/counselcenter/Pages/thanksgiving\\_turning\\_point.htm](http://www.unca.edu/counselcenter/Pages/thanksgiving_turning_point.htm))
- First series of campus-wide illnesses (cold, flu, strep, etc.)

### December

- Anxiety over preparations for finals
- Excitement and/or anxiety regarding going home for holidays
- Sadness about leaving new friendships and/or love relationships
- Roommate challenges continue



### January

- "Fresh Start" mentality sets in with new semester
- Satisfaction and/or disappointment with fall semester grades
- Homesickness
- Loneliness for love relationship back home
- Relief being away from home and back at school

### February

- Feelings of claustrophobia and depression set in with winter
- Change of weather affects motivation. Early morning classes become harder to attend.
- Potential increase in alcohol and other substance abuse
- Challenges with love relationship back home
- Valentine's Day brings out loneliness, isolation.

### March

- Anxiety regarding finding roommate(s) for next year
- Excitement or disappointment regarding Spring Break plans
- Final exam stress
- Concern over summer employment
- Concern over winter weight gain

### April

- Excitement with arrival of spring
- Concern over declaring major and career options

### May

- Burn out and low motivation
- Uncertainty of summer plans
- End of semester pressure
- Final exam anxiety
- Apprehension about returning home for summer
- Sadness over leaving new friendships and/or love relationships at school
- Realization of how college influences life deci-

*Continued on page 5*

In addition to these more predictable stressors, students may experience the following concerns throughout the academic year.

- Missing family birthday and holiday celebrations
- Missing participation in family traditions
- Wanting involvement with family maintained, but expecting their desire for complete freedom to be respected

*Adapted from Hatch, Cathie and Richard H. Mullendore. Helping Your First-Year College Student Succeed: A Guide for Parents. National Orientation Directors Association, 2000*

[http://warren.ucsd.edu/parents/parent\\_support/](http://warren.ucsd.edu/parents/parent_support/)

## Recommended Reading

Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years. Karen Levin Coburn and Lawrence Treeger.



Don't Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years. Helen E. Johnson, et al.

When Your Kid Goes to College: A Parent's Survival Guide. Carol Barkin.

Empty Nest, Full Heart: The Journey from Home to College. Andrea Van Steenhouse and Johanna Parker.

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## Challenges for parents

### Feeling a void

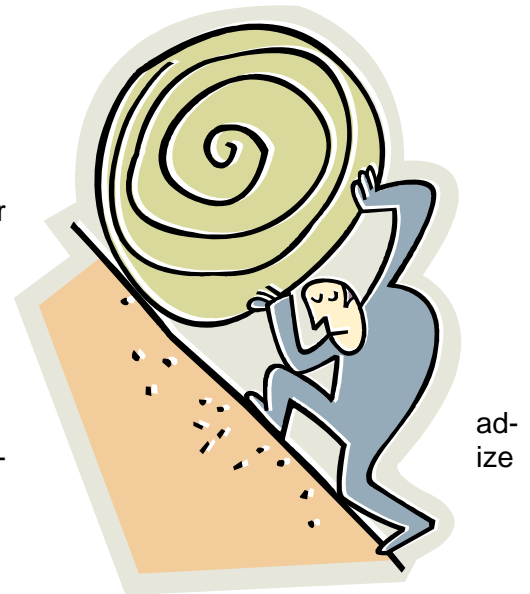
Feelings of emptiness characterize this stage of separation—there is vacant time and cleaned-out rooms. Parents may feel unprepared or uncomfortable without their role as primary caretaker and protector. Parenting is a tough business and a double-edged sword; successful parenting requires devoting one's life to a totally dependent being to ensure a safe, independent departure into the world—leaving parents behind. Joy may be mixed with longing as the young adult takes flight from home base.

### Feeling left out

Adjusting to being on the outside can be difficult when parents are no longer needed in the same ways. Even though students may have been somewhat independent while still under their care, supervision, and roof, once in college parents are less privy to every aspect of their child's life; they no longer know the details of their son's or daughter's whereabouts and are not able to pass judgment on all their friends.

### Relinquishing control

It is necessary to give up some parental control. Whether it's giving vice about selecting courses or drinking, parents have to come to realize that young adults must make their own decisions. Relationships grow and change as children grow and change.

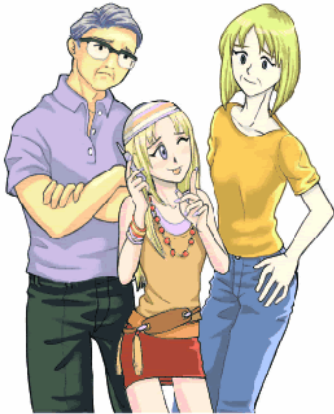


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## What parents can do

- Redirect time and energy previously focused on the child. Taking stock of personal interests and assets will reveal areas of life that may have been neglected. It can be time to develop, re-awaken, and pursue old and new hobbies, leisure activities, and careers.
- As they play a new role in their child's life, parents must readjust their identity as parents, but the relationship may become more peer-like. Accepting that adult children want more privacy in certain areas of their lives is part of this process. If there are other children still at home, the entire family structure will change.
- Ideally, discussions about values, which have occurred throughout the child's life, serve as a foundation. Before the send-off however, it is useful to re-discuss specific issues, since college students are usually confronted with situations involving sex, drugs, and alcohol as well as tough academic and interpersonal issues. Without moralizing or criticizing, even young adults benefit from hearing their parents' views on these issues.

- Address individual needs. Parents should investigate and inquire about available resources. Arranging for necessary services for students with a learning disability, mental illness, or physical condition should be done preventively. College staff are specially trained to work with students of this age and these specialists should be identified prior to arrival.



- In the event of a crisis, it is preferable to support the student's own coping and problem-solving abilities rather than to rush in as savior, however difficult it is to hear cries of distress. Crises described from afar often sound worse than they are and can often change dramatically in the course of a few minutes or days. Parents, however, know their child best and must assess when their child needs their more direct help.
- Guide rather than pressure. Communicating educational goals and expectations should be done in a manner respectful of the student's own style and interests. College students need to pursue their own passions. Although parental input can be useful, children should not be

expected to live out their parents' dreams. Focusing on "my daughter, the doctor" or "my son, the lawyer" is unproductive. Parents must allow for the candlestick maker to emerge if that's what is best. College should be a time of self-discovery even if the process is marked by some fits and starts.

- Plan ahead. In addition to all the details of hauling stuff off to campus and buying just the right desk lamp, deciding about such things as checking accounts, phone cards, and spending money before hitting the road is useful.
- Determine appropriate expectations and guidelines and be explicit. Parents should anticipate future events and discuss issues such as curfews, financial contributions and roommate arrangements with romantic partners directly with the young adult. If parents expect or want a weekly phone call, they must say so. If parents and students want to spend a particular holiday together, they should plan ahead.
- Allow for mistakes. Parents must encourage and accept the child's ability to make independent decisions. Both the college student and the parents must realize mistakes will be made along the way - it's called life experience. Learning from mistakes is another type of learning.

<http://www.aboutourkids.org/aboutour/articles/transitions.html#impact>

# Identity Development

During late adolescence, individuals are engaged in the process of forming their own personal identities. This process includes becoming separate persons within the family with regard to creating their own value systems, spiritual beliefs, tastes in clothing, music and friends and making other personal choices. When adolescents make choices that run counter to the values, beliefs and preferences of their parents, this sometimes causes conflict within the family. Yet, this process of carving out their own separate identity is a normal and critical part of their life long growth and development. Developing a healthy identity also involves building self-esteem and a sense of personal competence.

## What You Can Do To Help With Identity Development:

- Be tolerant of lifestyle choices your son or daughter makes so long as they are not clearly self-destructive.
- Keep criticism to a minimum. Your child needs and craves your approval and acceptance now more than ever, even if he or she seems not to. Be aware that negative words from you are taken very much to heart and that excessive criticism damages self-esteem.
- Allow your son or daughter to make mistakes. To err is part of the growing process. Let your child know that you do not consider mistakes to be disastrous and that you have made mistakes too.
- Give your son or daughter as much freedom as possible, even if that makes you a bit uneasy. We all want to protect our children, but that is not always in their best interest. Going out with friends, staying out late at night, making choices and experiencing their natural consequences are all part of the process of growing up.
- Give your son or daughter “permission” to separate from you. Holding on and trying to protect them from life will not help them to become responsible adults or to develop their own sense of competence.



## **Career Decisions**

Your son or daughter may feel pressured to know what they want to major in and what their career path will be as soon as they get here. However, they need time at college to explore different subjects and to be exposed to many career possibilities in order to make a good decision. Making a premature decision about a major or about a career can end up being more costly in the long run.

## What You Can Do To Help With Career Decisions:

- Be patient, and encourage your son or daughter to take their time, as well. Choosing a major and a career path is a process that occurs over time.
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- Encourage your son or daughter to take a wide variety of courses and to get involved in college activities.
- Make your son or daughter aware of the Career Development Center (251-6515), which can be of assistance to them throughout their time at UNCA.
- Let your son or daughter know that their professors are excellent sources of career information, as well as potential mentors.

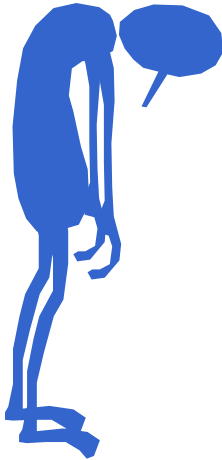
## **More Serious Problems**

The issues discussed above are all part of the normal developmental process of becoming an adult and making the transition to college life. Below is a list of issues that merit your concern, and for which a referral to the Counseling Center (251-6517) or to another mental health agency of your choice would be warranted:

- A history of eating disorders or your suspicion that your son or daughter currently has an eating disorder.

*continued on page 8*

- A history of drug or alcohol abuse or your suspicion that your son or daughter is currently abusing drugs or alcohol.
- A history of depression, a prior suicide attempt or a history of other emotional problems; your suspicion that your son or daughter is currently depressed.
- Involvement in an unhealthy romantic relationship, characterized by a great deal of fighting, conflict, control, distrust and unhappiness. Needless to say, any sign of violence would certainly identify a relationship as being unhealthy.



- Your son or daughter is having a great deal of difficulty recovering from the break-up of a romantic relationship or is threatening to harm themselves as a result of the break-up of a relationship.
- Your son or daughter has a history of problems with conduct, accepting limits, violence or aggression. Starting college and the stress that may come with this transition can reactivate problems of this nature.
- Significant losses that your son or daughter has experienced, such as the divorce of parents, the loss of a parent, another relative, or a friend through death; a critically ill family member.
- Any other trauma experienced by your son or daughter that is, by definition, out of the ordinary, such as a major illness, major surgery, involvement in an automobile accident, witnessing or being the victim of abuse or of a crime.

What You Can Do To Help With Serious Problems:

- Be supportive of your son or daughter.
- Get your son or daughter the professional help they need. People can't just "snap out of" serious problems or get better by talking it out with friends or family.
- Be patient. Serious problems can be worked through, but it takes time.
- Let a professional person at UNCA know that you are worried about your son or daughter, and let us assist you in getting them appropriate help and guidance.

UNCA Counseling Center.....	828-251-6517
Career Development Center.....	828-251-6515
Office of Student Affairs .....	828-251-6474
Office of Student Retention.....	914-633-2270
Student Health Services.....	828-251-6520
Alcohol and Substance Abuse Counselor.....	828-251-6517



*There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One is roots; the other, wings.*

*--Hodding Carter*

*This newsletter is created by the University of North Carolina-Asheville Counseling Center. For more information, please contact Maggi Saucier@msaucier@unca.edu.*

