

Keys Issues in the First Year: Ways to Provide Support

The first year is a time filled with a variety of emotions, for both parents and students. Multiple emotions create numerous internal questions, which are often intermingled with the more immediate, practical questions regarding living and learning on campus. These questions can create a stressful and overwhelming time for first-year students, and their families.

First-Year Issues

Academics

- Quickly learn the difference between high school and college academic work
- Pressure to select a major
- More free time – which can be used for social time or study time
- Selection of courses
- Get to know faculty
- Self-responsibility for keeping up with studies
- Exposure to new ideas, information, and debates

Relationships

- Fear of losing contact with friends and significant others back home
- Wonder what family life is like without her
- Roommate relationship development
- Build quick, safe friendships
- Exposure to people unlike herself

Finances

- Worries of tuition costs
- Consider the need for a job
- Learn how to spend money – wants vs. needs

Self-Awareness

- Exposure to new kinds of groups and interests

- Exploring differences in family values, and exposure to new beliefs and values
- Confidence being challenged
- Explore opportunities and challenges related to social factors such as alcohol/substance use; sexual intimacy; time management; wellness; and spirituality

What Can I Do to Support My Student in the First Year?

- **Join the parents association**—Meet other parents, stay up to speed on campus events and resources, and get involved in volunteer opportunities.
- **Write and call**—Even if she doesn't write or call back. A care-package or letter from home can make her day.
- **Visit**—But not too often and never unannounced! Attend campus-sponsored events for families.
- **Expect the best**—Trust that she is now ready to lead her own life journey. She will make decisions you might not, however sometimes those poor decisions are the best life teachers.
- **Let her solve her problems**—At some point, you will have the urge to “help” by making a call to campus. Before you pick up the phone, think about how you can help her without doing it *for* her. Help by asking her the questions, referring her to resources and helping her learn independence and responsibility in solving her own problems.
- **Share expectations**—Just because she is now a legal adult, doesn't mean you can't share your expectations. She may know them, she may not want to hear them again, but research shows that she is listening and it will influence her future choices.
- **Encourage campus involvement**—There is a fine balance here, as some students are prone to get over-involved, however research has proven that students who get involved on campus have a higher retention rate, are more academically successful, and are more satisfied with their overall college experience.

Provide These General Tips to Your First-Year Student:

- ▲ Attend all classes
- ▲ Get to know professors
- ▲ Make at least two friends in each class
- ▲ Manage time and priorities
- ▲ Get involved in at least one organization
- ▲ Take advantage of campus support and services
- ▲ Keep finances in check

Source: *eCampusTours.com*,
Start Off Your Freshman Year the Right Way,