



a newsletter for parents & families



September 2016

Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month...

- A desire to feel connected to campus
- Roommate adjustments
- Exploration and acknowledgement of personal values
- Long distance relationship strain
- Feelings of loneliness and homesickness may increase
- Experimentation with alcohol and other drugs
- Getting acclimated to a new type of academics
- Figuring out how to get organized and manage their time
- Searching for a sense of belonging

Comfort Zone Stretchers

We all like to focus on what we're good at and celebrate our strengths. Yet, college is also about stretching beyond this comfort zone to experience more of what the world has to offer. It's a smart, brave thing for students to challenge themselves this way, from trying a new intramural sport to participating in an event that is largely unknown. It is a key way that they will find new interests as well as potential life, work and personal pathways.

Stretchers for Students

Here are some possible comfort zone stretches that your student might consider...

- Spending time with someone who has very different interests and involvements
- Trying a new food
- Listening to a friend's music
- Attending an info session for a new kind of club
- Learning a new language
- Signing up for a class on a topic that sounds fascinating



- Talking with a professor after class
- Picking a flyer from a campus bulletin board and attending that event
- Asking a classmate to grab coffee
- Roaming the library stacks and choosing something interesting
- Expressing an opinion in a public forum, either verbally or in writing
- Joining a service initiative
- Attending a different worship service
- Taking a different route to classes to see some new scenery
- Discussing a topic that is different, such as art, politics or sports

"I'm continually trying to make choices that put me against my own comfort zone. As long as you're uncomfortable, it means you're growing."

— Actor Ashton Kutcher



7 Ways to Foster Students' Self-Responsibility

Self-responsibility is one of the most important things that students can learn during their time at school. Here are seven ways to foster that sense...

- 1. Help Your Student Make His Own Decisions.** When you say, "Well, what do you think you should do?" during a conversation, you're offering your support but, instead of jumping in with advice, you're helping your student figure out his own answer.
- 2. Trust Your Student.** And let her know that you do. She'll likely feel more confident, supported and able to stand up for what she believes as a result.
- 3. Communicate without Over Communicating.** Check in with each other a few times each week. However, don't feel like you need to touch base every day – there needs to be

some space in between so your student can gain a sense of independence.

- 4. Don't Solve Everything for Him.** The tendency to want to jump in and "take care of things" is natural. Yet, students need to start learning to do these things for themselves. So, try not to fix things – instead, ask questions like "What steps have you taken so far?" to help your student take the lead and take self-responsibility.
- 5. Stay Involved.** Just because your student goes off to college doesn't mean she stops needing your input. Your involvement is essential to her success. Be in-



terested, ask questions without prying too much and listen to what she has to say.

- 6. Let Go a Bit.** You can't know where your student is every hour of the day – nor should you have to keep track of that. Instead of quizzing him about where he's been, ask more general questions like "Have you gone anywhere interesting lately?" or "How have you been spending your free time?" so he can share without feeling put on the spot.
- 7. Keep Her in the Loop.** Even though your student is building a new life at college, it doesn't mean she should be cut off from what's happening back home. Share a balance of news to keep the connection strong – and to make sure your student focuses on people besides herself, too!

In this time of transition, keep the lines of communication open, let mistakes be made and encourage your student to make decisions for himself. It's all part of the process, especially in this important first month!

A Sense of Independence

Students need to express their autonomy and spread their wings when they get to school. This doesn't mean that they've stopped needing you – of course not! What it may mean, though, is that your student needs a chance to:

- Make his own mistakes
- Decide how to confront challenges
- Communicate with others when there's a problem
- Choose how to spend her time
- Take responsibility for his actions
- Struggle a bit
- Learn from experience

Be there to talk things through when your student needs that and to offer support. The actual "doing," though, is primarily up to her. This independence is one of the main ways that she will learn, grow and develop into a strong adult.



Gaining Confidence

When students first come to campus, they may flounder a bit. After all, it's a new scene with new people and the search for belonging will take some time.

In the midst of all this, there are several ways that students can gain and celebrate self-confidence, which can help them make the most of the new opportunities presenting themselves. For instance, they can...

Reach Out to Others. When we're feeling a bit uncertain, sometimes all it takes is looking around, identifying someone else who seems to be going through the same thing, and reaching out. Encourage your student to get outside of herself and focus on someone else's well-being for a moment. That can help both people involved feel *much* better!

Celebrate a Strength. Confidence can come from the feeling that we're good at something. Students can celebrate their strengths and incorporate them into their college life, whether it's

joining an intramural volleyball team or playing with a campus music group.

Focus on What's Going Right. Being outside of our comfort zone can sometimes cause us to focus on what feels like it's going wrong, without giving credit to the many things going right. So, encourage your student to write down two things each night that went well that day, such as choosing a healthy breakfast in the dining hall or answering a question in class. This optimistic viewpoint can help counteract the negative stuff.

Talk It Out. When confidence is flagging, talking things through with a trusted friend, family member or



professional can really help. Sometimes we get so tangled in our own minds that it's hard to feel confident and put things in perspective. Let students know that there are many people on campus who'd be glad to have a conversation with him.

If your student seems to really be having a crisis of confidence, please know that there are multiple people on campus who would be glad to talk with her. Counselors, coaches, campus ministers, residence life staff, peer educators, health and wellness professionals, faculty, staff and others are here, working on a college campus, because they enjoy interacting with students!

FAFSA Filing Date Moved to October 1

The start of the filing date for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has been moved up three months to October 1, which is when the form will be

available. Those seeking college financial aid must file the form every year.

The move was made to align the financial aid process with the

typical college admissions cycle, according to *The New York Times*. Filers used to have to wait until January 1 to file their FAFSAs.

Students can also now complete the forms using tax information from the prior year as a way to benefit from use of the IRS's Data Retrieval Tool, which automatically fills in necessary tax data. It's important to check school- and state-specific financial aid deadlines as you and your student determine when to file your FAFSA.

I already filed a FAFSA form this spring. Should I file it again after Oct. 1?

"Yes, if you're seeking aid for the 2017-18 academic year. Because of the filing date change, students may actually file two separate FAFSA forms this calendar year — one that they already completed, for 2016-17, and a second one, which can be filed starting in October, for the following academic year."

Source: *The New York Times*, 8/10/16

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State-by-State Voting Info for College Students

The upcoming November elections promise to be interesting! And students can be involved in the process, even when they're living away from their home voting district.

In order to get a clear picture of registration deadlines, whether

to register at their home or school address, ID requirements and more, the Campus Vote Project provides state-specific guides for college students. By going to <http://campusvoteproject.org> students can link to their state requirements, all presented in an easy-to-understand format.

Just encourage them to check out the site sooner rather than later, as voter registration and postmark deadlines for absentee ballots are right around the corner. Political engagement is an important thing for students to be exposed to and to participate in. This November's elections are a good place to start!

Questions?

Students may have questions about voting, such as...

- Will voting in my college community impact my federal financial aid?
- Will I lose my scholarship if I register to vote in my college community?
- Does being an in-state or out-of-state student for tuition purposes affect my right to vote?
- Will registering to vote in my college community affect my driver's license or car registration?

The Campus Vote Project addresses these types of question to give students the decision-making information they need.



Family/Parent Weekend Prep

Here are a few things to do to prepare for this upcoming weekend...

Who. Determine if siblings and other relatives will be joining you – and how you'll be getting to campus. If you're driving, will there be room in the car for your college student to hop in when you go places together?

What. Look through the campus listing of all there is to do that weekend. Check with your student to see what he'd like to do during your visit. And express the types of things *you* hope to do when on campus, too, from seeing the spaces where he spends his time to attending mini classes and events.

Where. Find a place to sleep, if you're planning to stay overnight. Plus, make meal reservations in town – it's a busy weekend!

We look forward to having you on campus with us!

Vehicle Space

Ask your student if he'd like you to bring anything he needs to school and/or take anything back – that'll help you plan your vehicle space.

