The Challenges Ahead

When students come to campus, they’ll face an array of good times as well as plentiful challenges. Luckily, campus is full of folks who are here to help, while encouraging your student to accept responsibility for his actions at the same time. These challenges may include:

- **Acclimating to Academics.** College classes are different. Professors will expect independent work, showing up for class and academic dedication.

- **Figuring Out the Social Scene.** Getting to know others, finding a sense of belonging, doing things on weekends that feel right instead of just going along with the crowd… there are many social nuances that your student will be navigating.

- **Living with Others.** Compromise, letting go of pre-established expectations and learning to communicate effectively will help students establish the necessary rhythms to live with others.

- **Being Smart with Free Time.** When to study, when to eat, when to sleep and when to hang out with others – these are all decisions in students’ hands now as they parcel out their free time.

- **Navigating Campus.** Learning a new place takes awhile, as students determine where they can eat, how to get to their lab, what services the learning center provides and more.

- **Forming Their Identity.** As students experience new freedoms, people and responsibilities, they’ll also be exploring their own identity: who they are and who they hope to become. This can be one of the biggest – and most worthwhile – challenges of all!

Some information adapted from Skidmore College, [http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean-students/parent.cfm](http://cms.skidmore.edu/dean-students/parent.cfm).

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Help Your Student Face Challenges

- Listen well without imposing your own thoughts right away
- Ask what she has done to address an issue so far
- Encourage him to take action on his own
- Talk through scenarios to help her feel more comfortable
- Ask open-ended questions that require answers beyond “yes or no”
- Let him know that you love and support him – that can go a very long way!
Active Listening to Improve Mutual Understanding

Active listening is a skill that you and your student will find quite handy as you navigate the next steps of your relationship this fall. According to the Conflict Research Consortium at the University of Colorado, active listening is “a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding.”

Some key elements include:

- **Give Your Full Attention.** Keep your eyes and focus on the person speaking to you.
- **Be in the Moment.** Don’t start developing your response while your student is still finishing her thoughts.
- **Limit Advice.** Sometimes people just need to process things to figure it out on their own, while you listen affirmingly.
- **Be Encouraging.** Don’t agree or disagree, use neutral language and show an interest in what your student is saying.
- **Clarify What You’re Hearing.** This helps your student know you are correctly interpreting his thought process, plus it’ll help you gather more information.
- **Reflect Back Feelings.** Show your student that you understand how she feels, even if you don’t agree. Hearing her feelings expressed by someone else will help her better evaluate their impact.
- **Validate Your Student.** Demonstrate how you value his issues and feelings, and show appreciation for his actions with a simple, “I’m really proud of your effort to…”
- **Don’t Interrupt.** Interruptions make it about you rather than the person you’re supposed to be listening to!
- **Summarize the Conversation.** Restate major ideas and themes expressed, including feelings, to pull everything together. Then you can ask, “What do you want to do next?”

It may take a while to get into the rhythm of communicating with your college student at this new stage of your relationship. Active listening is one of the keys to success. Here’s to a year of good listening and communication!

Barriers to Effective Listening

Think about the following common barriers. Do any of them get in the way of a better connection with your student?

- **Mind Reading:** Paying little attention to words, and instead imagining meaning
- **Comparing:** Thinking about who is better, smarter, funnier, etc.
- **Rehearsing:** Focusing your attention on what you will say next, rather than on what is being said
- **Filtering:** Listening to some things, but not others
- **Judging:** Prejudging before you hear what someone has to say
- **Dreaming:** Half-listening and drifting into your own thoughts
- **Identifying:** Relating everything you hear back to your own experience
- **Advising:** Hearing only a few sentences and then giving advice
- **Sparring:** Arguing and debating every point
- **Being Right:** Going to any length to avoid being wrong
- **Derailing:** Suddenly changing the subject
Cars on Campus
Making the Decision

Having a car on campus is very important to some students, while others don’t see the need. Everyone’s family circumstances differ. If you are exploring the possibility of your student having a car on campus, consider the following pros and cons:

**Pros**
- Increases student’s ability to get to an off-campus job or internship
- Student is able to travel home more frequently and easily
- Going into town to buy supplies or groceries is less of a hassle
- Student can get away from campus to study or take a break
- Opportunities to get involved in the community become more accessible

**Cons**
- Students with cars are often pressured by students who don’t have cars to drive them places or loan out their car
- The availability of parking
- Cost of gas remains high
- Student may travel home too frequently and lose out on campus experiences
- Costs associated with car upkeep, including oil changes and maintenance, can eat into student’s meager funds
- College students are often considered “higher risk” drivers, therefore insurance rates may increase and strict regulations may be placed on them as drivers

If the possibility exists for your student to have a car on campus, consider this pro and con list carefully. Many, many students go through their college years without a car on campus. So much is accessible by walking or public transportation. Not having access to a car can help them learn to solve problems creatively in ways they never would have otherwise.

“I’m Leaving for School in a Few Short Weeks!”
—Related Issues

It’s likely hitting your student now… she’s heading to college in a few weeks. With that revelation will likely come some excitement – and some anxiety – regarding topics such as:
- Will people like me?
- Will I find friends as good as the ones I have here at home?
- How can I reinvent myself?
- Will I be able to handle college academics?
- How will I find my way around campus?
- Who will I turn to if I’m struggling?
- Will I still be as connected to my family and friends?
- What if I don’t get along with my roommate?
- Will people make fun of how I talk/dress/act?
- What’s it going to be like sharing a bathroom with other students?
- How will I fit all my stuff into that campus room?
- How will I get involved?
- Will my diversity make me a target?
- Will I find a place to belong here?

Help your student address these concerns. And, if you’re not sure about an answer, we’re here on campus to help both you and your student!
25 Campus Safety Tips

Safety is a number one concern on campus. Here are 25 tips to help students keep themselves – and their community – safe…

1. Make it tough for someone to take you by surprise – don’t wear ear buds or headphones when walking, running or studying alone.
2. Head toward crowds, lights and buildings if you’re being followed.
3. Don’t walk alone, especially after dark. Call the campus escort system or walk with friends. Stay on populated, well-lit paths.
4. If someone is stalking you, report it immediately so action may be taken to keep you safe.
5. Don’t engage an unknown caller in conversation or give away any personal details. Keep track of when calls are made and what is said. Save voicemail messages, too. Turn everything over to staff members who can help.
6. Report a lost room key/card to the appropriate staff immediately! Someone can use it to gain entrance to your room, apartment or car to hurt you, your roommate or your belongings.
7. Always lock your door, especially when you’re inside sleeping or when you go out.
8. Don’t let strangers into your room. Look through a peephole, ask for ID or meet them in the hallway.
9. Don’t post notes on your memo board, Facebook wall or voicemail, saying where you are or providing personal info.
10. Don’t keep valuables or cash in plain sight. And don’t have too many valuables or too much cash there with you in the first place!
11. Don’t give our your room key/card.
12. Install a safety lock or tracker on your laptop.
13. Don’t leave your bag unattended. Use a locker or carry it around with you at all times.
14. Keep your blinds pulled at night and when you’re out so potential thieves can’t see what’s “available” to them.
15. If there’s a campus engraving program, register your big-ticket items like laptops, TVs, DVRs, bikes and more.
16. Have your car key in hand, ready to put in the lock, as you’re walking toward your car.
17. Look in the back seat before entering the car to make sure no one is hiding back there.
18. Always keep your car locked, whether you’re in it or not.
19. Try not to sit in your car in the parking lot, talking on the phone. If you do, lock the doors so no one can take you by surprise.
20. If you have to work in an isolated lab, practice room or study lounge, tell someone or ask someone to come with you.
21. Don’t be alone with someone you just met.
22. Clearly communicate your intentions – say “No” and mean it.
23. Keep a level head. Alcohol or other drugs compromise your safety by lowering inhibitions and clouding your judgment.
24. If you go somewhere with friends, make sure that everyone is accounted for before leaving.
25. Trust your gut – your instincts say a lot.