

The ABC's of Parenting Your College Student

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Actions speak louder than words - Use this time with your adult children as an opportunity to model your best behavior. They learn by watching you what it means to be an adult and act responsibly.

Budgeting - Talk openly and honestly about your financial expectations of your children as they enter adulthood. Having a sense of what credit card debt and balancing a checkbook means will help them manage their finances in college.

Communication and Acceptance - Your children will likely experience college in a way that differs from your experience and expectations. Keep communication open so you can hear their concerns, issues, and choices rather than forcing them to be secretive and take additional risks.

Don't be afraid to discuss difficult subjects with your college children. While this is the time for them to develop opinions and make choices of their own, they still need a sounding board they trust.

Encouragement - Find ways to encourage success for your student. Ask them to discuss what went well, what new interests they are developing, what new experiences they've enjoyed.

Freedom - Your college child will be experiencing a sense of freedom that will possibly clash with parental expectations when they return home. Discuss freedom in relation to the level of responsibility and trust engendered by their personal choices and behaviors.

Go to programs aimed at educating parents about the university campus in general and student support services in particular.

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Humor - We all need lightness and laughter to get through the bad days and make the good ones better. Find ways to show affection and caring via emails, cards, packages etc. If they are still living at home, they might be more open to hugs than when in high school

Initiate adult-to-adult conversations and experiences. Treating your college bound student as a valued, capable adult person helps create a sense of personal worth and ability.

Justice - Be fair even though you may have more power in the situation. Try to withhold judgment, allowing your young adults to take responsibility for their decisions, actions, and consequences. Make decisions in the fairest way possible.

Knowledge - There are many books, classes and radio shows on the topic of parenting. Check one out from the library if you feel stuck.

Learn - about what they are learning. Take an interest in papers they write or projects they get involved in. Ask questions about it, not just have they done their homework.

Money management - Encourage your children to learn about the long-term consequences of use credit and resulting debt. This might include financial aid debt and the benefits and costs of employment while going to school as well as use of credit cards.

New experiences - Consider your children going to college as a new beginning for you. They will explore their values and learn to set new limits for themselves. This is a good time for parents to explore the possibilities for the next phase of their lives.

Openness - Be as open as you can with your college student about the trials, tribulations and changes of your life. This shares with them your coping skills and models vulnerability and healthy ways to manage stress.

Parent - continue to be your young adult's parent. Even adult children who are anxious to be independent always need support and encouragement. Provide help in meaningful ways that encourage a sense of independence.

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Questions - Ask them. Don't be shy. They don't have to answer but may want to talk about issues such as alcohol, drugs, relationships and sex.

Relationships and Sexual changes - Knowing about their developmental changes and the confusion that arises from conflicting social and parental messages may help you be less judgmental. Realize how much has changed since you were their age.

Suggestions - As they move through university life they will respond far better to suggestions than demands.

Trust - Indicate your belief in your university student and their ability to make good decisions.

Unconditional Love - There will be times that you don't like what your children are doing but the power of unconditional love is magic, and their young adult behaviors don't have to ruin your relationship with them.

Value - your time with your young adult. They have begun moving out into the world.

Warning signs - Learn the warning signs of depression, drug and alcohol abuse and other behaviors that might be detrimental to your student's health and well-being. Help them to learn how to access services that the college offers to assist them.

eXasperation - doesn't do anyone any good. When you feel exasperated see if you can remove yourself from the situation and find another way to approach it. Remember this is the time for your children to discover that they are not carbon copies of their parents and what that means.

Yes - has power just as "no" does. Learn to find ways to support their choices. Encourage your adult child's attempts to set personal their own thoughtful values.

ZZZ - Sleep! It's important to all of us to get through the stresses and strains of our full days. Encourage your young adult to get enough sleep for physical and emotional health.