

How to support your student during their college transition

The transition of a student going to college can impact the whole family system. This might be the first significant separation that occurs for families. This change can be, and often times is, stressful. We encourage you to use the information below to facilitate conversations to help you anticipate, plan and manage the change as it comes.

Questions for parents/caregivers to ask their student

- › How can I support you to make decisions for yourself? How do you plan to take actions to address things that need to be done (e.g., calling someone on campus to ask for clarification or correct a problem)?
- › How do you intend to manage your time and energy while at school? How can I support you in balancing self-care, schoolwork, recreation, and other responsibilities? How will we address situations where I see that you are struggling with this aspect of college?
- › How often do we want to check in? What is our preferred form of communication (i.e., text, video call, phone call)? What happens if one of us wants to change this frequency of communication?
- › It is important for me to know that you are safe, we keep in touch, and our conversations are respectful. How will we ensure these things happen? Are there any other values that are important to us that we need to discuss?
- › How can we balance my curiosity about your life with your desire for privacy? How much are you comfortable sharing about your personal/academic/social life with me?
- › How will I know if you need me to do more than offer verbal and emotional support?
- › How will I know if I am being too involved?
- › What is the plan for breaks (e.g., holidays, fall/spring/winter breaks)? What happens if you are unable to make it home? What happens if you want to do something else during that break time?
- › How will we manage any homesickness that that may happen during your time at WCU?
- › How will we communicate about family emergencies? (e.g., hospitalization or a death)

Tasks to do together

- › Celebrate the accomplishment of this milestone!
- › Discuss finances and how you will manage expected and unexpected costs. Discuss the ways financial support may be impacted if academic goals are not reached.
- › Review resources for academic support (wcu.edu/learn/academic-services), counseling services (caps.wcu.edu), and medical services (healthservices.wcu.edu)
- › Discuss the student's medical history, current medications and allergies.
- › Discuss academic goals and expectations you both have for achieving those goals. Discuss what support (both emotional and academic) may be offered if grades are lower than expected.
- › Recognize this transition is going to impact all of you. Talk about the feelings connected with this transition.

Questions for parents/caregivers to consider and discuss with those still in the home

- › How will the remaining members of the family negotiate new patterns with one person out of the house? (e.g., who picks up the responsibilities that person had)?
- › How will communication change between those remaining in the home now that the student is at school?

Questions for parents/caregivers to ask themselves

- › Your student will be starting a brand new life chapter and may not be as available to offer you support during the transition. Who are other sources of support you may turn to when feeling sad, overwhelmed, or frustrated?
- › How will you tend to the emotions that will come up with being separated from your student?

Tasks for parents/caregivers

- › Take comfort in the ways you have supported your student in preparing for this step of their journey!
- › If you attended college, consider the ways in which college today may be similar and different. Use this reflection to inform how you consider your student's experience while also making space for collaborative discussion.
- › Give time to reflect. Journal your thoughts/feelings.
- › Find someone to connect with so you can process your reactions.
- › Invite conversations with your student about what they are learning, rather than just the grades they are earning.



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