Supporting Your Student While They Are in School

Many parents wonder how they can support their adult children while they are away from home. Here are some ideas about how to interact with your adult child while they are away.

- **Be clear.** Be specific with your expectations with them as they start college. This includes topics such as alcohol and drug use, sexuality, budgeting and finances, and academics. These conversations should be ongoing and ideally start before they move away.

- **Be aware.** Remember that being away from home might be the biggest change in your child’s life so far, and they are dealing with a lot of stressors too. This is not the time to be overly strict or demanding.

- **Be supportive.** Ask questions about their lives, and listen without judgment. Judging, lecturing, and prying will only cause your child to shut down.

- **Be careful.** Do not romanticize your experience in college, especially if it relates to alcohol or drug use. Doing so might encourage them to use drugs and alcohol or to engage in risky behaviors.

- **Be flexible.** Expect your daughter or son to change. Developmentally, the college years are times of changing viewpoints, eating, lifestyle, friendships, and dress. Allow your child to ‘try on’ new ways of being.

- **Be culturally inclusive.** Your child might be living in a community that is unfamiliar to you or different from your family’s community. Universities are often diverse places, which include people from a variety of races, cultures, religions, beliefs, and attitudes. Be aware of your biases and attitudes toward certain groups.

- **Be curious.** Know the warning signs of problems that might be occurring. Be willing to talk with your child if you suspect that she or he is experiencing mental illness.
  - APA’s pamphlet on Warning Signs of Major Mental Illness
  - Naropa University Counseling Center

- **Be informed.** Educate yourself on the warning signs of suicide. Visit these links for more information.
  - National Prevention Lifeline
  - The Jed Foundation. The Jed Foundation works nationally to reduce the rate of suicide and the prevalence of emotional distress among college and university students.

- **Be a parent.** Even though they are away, you are still your child’s parent, and you have great influence on her/him. Empower your child to make sound judgments when it comes to sex, drugs, alcohol, safety, and health. Let her know what your values and beliefs are on these topics. Ask him about his values. While you cannot control your child, you can help guide them as they make decisions.

- **Be realistic.** Some parents tell their children that “These are the best years of your life”. This might be true for some. In reality, however, these are years of indecision, insecurities, disappointments, and mistakes. They are also full of discovery, inspiration, good times, and exciting people. Support your child as they experience the highs and lows of the college experience.

- **Be open.** While it might have been your dream to be a poet, your child has her/his own dreams and hopes. Allow your child to be who she is. Allow time for her to explore her interests.

- **Be trusting.** Your child is experiencing an important time of self-discovery, which presents many challenges. Part of that is a bit of trial and error. Trust that your child will find what’s best for her or him.
Self-Care Strategies for Parents

- Make sure you are getting enough rest, eating well-balanced meals, and doing some moderate exercise regularly. If you are having trouble with any of these, consider seeing a counselor to help you get back on track.
- Consider pursuing a new interest. What is something that you have always wanted to do?
- Look into classes and/or groups that are being offered in your community. Some community centers offer dance classes, yoga, photography, or other introductory lessons.
- Yoga can be rewarding on many levels. There is a plethora of instructional books, CDs, and DVDs that can help you get started with a yoga practice. Contrary to what you might have heard, you do not have to be limber in order to practice yoga!
- Have fun! Set aside time for yourself for pure fun. Sometimes play is solitary and sometimes it’s with others. A mixture of both is best. Everyone has a different way of playing. Consider what might bring more joy to your life.
- Mindfulness and meditation are great ways to take care of ourselves. They benefit the mind and body, and have been found to reduce stress and improve sleep.

Books

For parents with a student in college:

- "Almost Grown: Launching Your Child from High School to College," by Patricia Pasick
- "Don’t Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years," by Helen Johnson
- "Letting Go: A Parent’s Guide to Understanding the College Years," by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Teeger
- "The Launching Years: Strategies for Parenting from Senior Year to College Life," by Laura Kastner and Jennifer Wyatt

- "You’re On Your Own, But I’m Here if You Need Me: Mentoring Your Child During the College Years," by Marjorie Savage
- "When Your Kid Goes to College: A Parent’s Survival Guide," by Carol Barkin

On mindfulness and meditation:

- "Full Catastrophe Living," by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- "Wherever You Go, There You Are," by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- "Peace is Every Step," by Thich Nhat Hanh
- "After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path," by Jack Kornfield
- "Ordinary Magic: Everyday Life as Spiritual Path," by John Welwood

Websites

Most of the following websites offer online courses or talks about cultivating mindfulness.

- UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Center
- Dharma Seed
- Mind & Life Institute
- The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Reach Out

At Naropa, the intention is that both the parents and family from home, and the Snow Lion “family” can work together to support students through their studies. Please feel free to contact the Housing Office if you have any questions or concerns by contacting housing@naropa.edu or 303-447-3846.