



How to Prepare for the Transition to College

The transition to college is anticipated by most students and their families with excitement and eagerness. After all, young people who until this point have taken mostly courses they had to take in a high school their parents picked for them are finally choosing for themselves amongst all sorts of options. But with freedom of choice comes anxiety, and even for high school students lucky enough to be admitted early to a college of their choice, the final semester of senior year can be a time of mounting anxiety about the forthcoming changes. Parents, beware that this anxiety frequently causes testiness at home, and don't be shocked if your wonderful child who you think has every reason to be overwhelmingly happy inclines toward moodiness instead as he or she contemplates leaving friends and the family home behind and suddenly has misgivings about the choice of school.

The adjustment to college is an intense emotional experience that inevitably takes time. In a brand new place surrounded by unfamiliar people and academic expectations frequently quite different from those experienced in high school, college freshmen are challenged to find their way essentially on their own. Harlan Cohen, author of "The Naked Roommate and 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into in College," is making a career of guiding teens and their families through the transition. He's now even running a boot camp to teach them tools to get through the process ahead of time:

<https://www.nakedroommatebootcamp.com>.

Cell phones are both a blessing and a curse. A common lament of college deans these days is the number of students they're seeing who act unable or unwilling to work through their own issues without picking up the phone to Mom or Dad, sometimes even while sitting in

the dean's office. Obviously, for these young people to become healthy, functioning adults, they will need to develop greater self-reliance, and a good place to begin doing that is when interacting with deans and other professionals whose job it is to help them navigate their way through college.

On the other hand, it can be difficult for a parent to let go when the child is obviously struggling even though some degree of struggling is more the norm than the exception. According to the Higher Education Research Institute of UCLA, 66% of college students say that at some point they felt homesick or lonely, and 32% report that at least once they "felt so depressed that it was hard to function."

Although these statistics have been fairly constant over the past decade, colleges are increasingly aware of and responsive to them. Counseling facilities have expanded as they are being utilized more frequently, and schools are designing preventive programs for freshmen during Orientation Week and throughout the year.

Harlan Cohen observes that learning to navigate transitions is a life skill, which he calls "getting comfortable with the uncomfortable." It helps, he says, to recognize that the stresses are always "front-loaded," meaning that the individual in transition will not always feel so miserable as at the beginning. Patience is essential, and when students and their families recognize in advance that a transition can be difficult and take time, it is easier for them to be patient.

Next Cohen tells people that they need to identify five people they can count on to be in their corner when times get tough and three places on or off campus where they can feel comfortable. Sure, their parents can be among the five people, but they should also seek out people on campus they can turn to for support, and parents can try to guide them toward finding those people.

The places Cohen is talking about provide a sanctuary where the student is free from the stresses that have been troubling him or her in the classroom, the dorm or elsewhere. Campus clubs and organizations that accept anyone who shows up can serve this function very well. Students are sometimes afraid to get involved in extra-curricular

activities before they have settled in academically, but seeking out such groups early on may actually be the best thing they can do for themselves as they find other people with similar interests and engage in pleasurable, stress-reducing activities.