

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

By CollegiateParent



First-year college students face many challenges as they adjust to their new lives. Usually they can take small obstacles and minor failures in stride, but sometimes their struggles are more serious.

If a problem begins to seem overwhelming, students may feel as if they can't "do college." Common problems for new students include:

- Feeling unable to handle the workload
- Health issues
- Financial worries
- Having a job that takes up too much time
- Partying too much
- Homesickness
- Lack of self-confidence ("imposter syndrome")

How can a parent know what's wrong?

If your student confides in you, you are part way to being able to help them find a solution. Even if they don't communicate much, you may notice warning signs: they

call home a lot, or never call; they never want to come home, or come home all the time; once home, your student doesn't want to return to school; you sense that your student isn't going to class. Maybe there are physical changes — a dramatic weight gain or loss, or an appearance of stress and fatigue.

Here's how you can help.

STEP 1: Get to the root of the problem

Your student needs to admit they have a problem and give it a name. Much like peeling back the layers of an onion, though, the immediate problem may not be the real problem.

For example, your student may see a failing midterm grade. But the failing grade may be the result of not attending class, so attendance is the problem. Why isn't your student going to class? Are they working or socializing too much and sleeping through their alarm? Are they having trouble understanding the course material and are afraid they can't do the work? Different answers point to different solutions.

Your job right now is to stay calm and to listen carefully. A simple "Why?" will help your student peel back the layers and dig deeper.

STEP 2: Create an action plan

There are questions you can ask to help your student with this stage of the process.

- Are you interested in fixing the problem and making necessary changes?
- Is this something you can work on by yourself or do you need help?
- Who do you need to talk to? What resources are available on campus? (Consider advisors, R.A.s, coaches, the counseling center, etc.)
- What successes have you had in the past that you can build on?
- Who is your support network?
- What is the best possible outcome for this situation?

Our students don't want to disappoint us. We can encourage them not to give up, and perhaps even tell them about the ways we've learned from our own failures in life. Every mistake they face up to and fix will make them more competent, more mature and more likely to persist to their goal of a college degree.



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