

First Semester Guide for **College Parents**





The high school class of 2023 is heading to their next adventure: college!

Starting college isn't just a big deal for students — it's a big deal for parents, too. Whether your student is attending school nearby or across the country, you need to figure out how to provide guidance in a whole new way.

The support you give will take many forms. Maybe you want to help them learn to manage their own expenses, or they may need advice about time management.

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Or maybe you want to be sure to stay connected as your student adjusts to the college workload and navigates a new environment, friendships and activities.

In this guide, we share tips on how to provide emotional support to your student from the sidelines, like scheduling weekly check-ins, learning to step back and let your student problem solve, and creating a thoughtful care package.

You'll also learn how to sort through financial issues like creating a list of monthly expenses, deciding on an allowance, and helping your student find an on- or off-campus job.

Last, we share thoughts about how you can talk to your student about important issues and social pressures in college — and why you need to. These conversations aren't always easy, but they're worth it.

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Here's your complete guide to surviving and thriving during your new college student's first semester.

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Emotional Support for Your Student

As your first-year student makes the shift to college and creates a new life on campus, your role as parent will change. Even if they're living at home, this is a new phase in your relationship!

Instead of being hands-on in your student's day-to-day life, you'll be coaching from the sidelines (and possibly from a distance).

That doesn't mean your student doesn't need your love and support. They may

be more independent than ever, but they will still look to you for help as they encounter new challenges.

Here are 5 ways to provide emotional support as your student navigates their first year of college and beyond.





1 Stay connected with check-ins.

Whether you like to text, talk or FaceTime, try to stay connected while still giving them space to explore their new life and environment on their own.

They're encountering new viewpoints and perspectives that may challenge their own belief systems. When you talk, make a practice of listening without judging.

Understand that changes in interests, behavior, dress, eating and **sleeping habits**, and relationships with family members are all to be expected during the college years.

However, if you suspect that some of these changes may be signs of bigger problems (alcohol or drug abuse, **academic struggles**,

depression, etc.), refer your student to **counseling services** at the student health center.

Do some research on the college website so you're familiar with available resources, and trust your instincts.

Find our best, student-approved tips for keeping in touch with your busy college kid.

GET TIPS

2 Let your student solve problems.

When your student calls home with an issue, it can be tempting to go into super-parent mode and immediately intervene.

But giving your student time to solve their own problems helps them build their problem-solving muscles for the future. It will also lead to them learning how to utilize on-campus and community resources as they become more rooted at school.

Colleges have many resources to help students cope with a wide variety of challenges. From academic advisors to residence life staff and more, your student's school is packed with programs and professionals who are there to offer guidance and assistance.

Be sure to voice your love and support, but also express confidence in their ability to deal with what's going on, and wait for them to work things out on their own. Step in if your student seems to have hit a wall and exhausted their own solutions.





3 Remember that settling in takes time.

It's only on social media that new college students are HAPPY ALL THE TIME and having SO MUCH FUN! The reality: It takes weeks and sometimes months for students to make real friends and begin to feel at home on campus.

Even students who couldn't wait to leave for college will be **homesick** at some point. The feelings usually pass, so even though your heart will break a bit, give your student a chance to work through these feelings on their own.

Encourage your student to put themselves out there as much as possible. Student clubs, teams and cultural groups are a great way to meet people while also having fun. RAs plan events to build a **sense of**

community in the dorm and will always be happy to hang out with a first-year student who's looking for someone to talk to.

You might share a story about a time when you went outside your comfort zone and invited a potential new friend for lunch or to take a walk. If they connect with someone in one of their classes, they could suggest grabbing a coffee or studying together.

Finally, also remember that it's common for students to vent to their parents. We often hear the worst stories, and then they hang up the phone feeling better while we're weighted down with worry. Take their complaints and concerns seriously but keep things in perspective.

4 Parting words can be a lasting gift.

Before you drive away and leave your student to spend their first night in the residence hall, make sure to offer some words of support.

They're taking a huge leap into a new chapter of their life. Something as simple as, "I love you," "I'm always here for you" or "I really believe in you" can be a lifeline for them to hold onto.

If you find yourself struggling to express yourself aloud, write your thoughts down and **leave the letter on your student's desk or pillow**. Or mail a letter as soon as you get home.

Chances are, your student will remember your words whenever they're feeling scared, overwhelmed or stressed.

Will your student live at home or commute to campus?

[LEARN MORE](#)





5 Put together a care package.

Nothing will lift your student's spirits after a long day of studying like a care package from home.

Include home-baked cookies, a gift card to a local coffee shop or food delivery service, a **cozy hat** or pair of **warm socks**, and a heartfelt note.

A great way to create a unique care package and have fun while you're at it is to get together with other college parents for a **care package party**. Remember to stay safe – hold your gathering outdoors while the weather is still nice!

[Click here for more ideas.](#)

They are also sure to appreciate:

- A new **phone charger** or earbuds
- **Sewing kit**
- **Health and wellness supplies**
- **Stationery and stamps**
- **Microwaveable quick meals**



Financial Support for Your Student

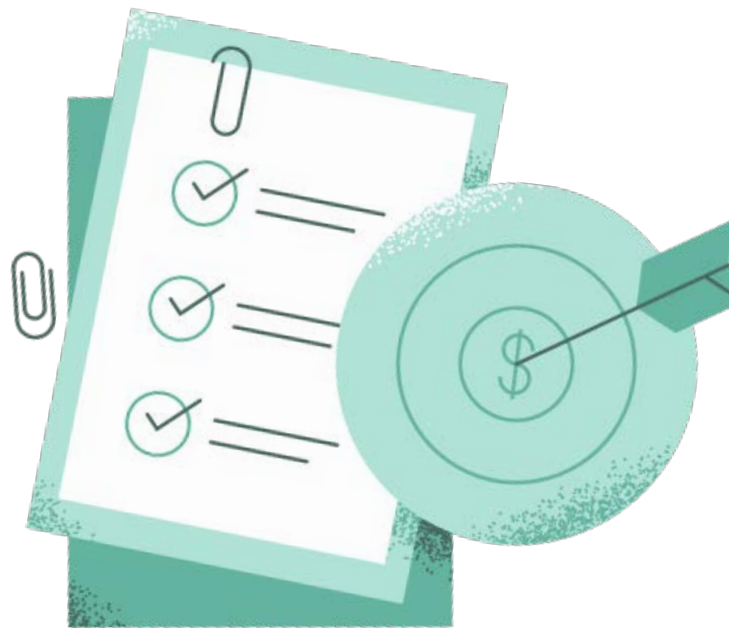
The first year of college is the perfect time to help your student learn how to make and stick to a budget.

Before they leave home, or as early in the fall term as possible, talk to your student about typical budget items, which may include:

- Cell phone bill*
- Dorm furniture and decor*
- Residential meal plan*
- Laundry money*
- Going out to eat and groceries*
- Monthly/annual subscriptions (Netflix, Spotify, Apple Music, Chegg, Amazon Prime Student, etc.)*
- Travel (local bus pass, tickets home)*
- Clothing*
- Electronics (smartphone or laptop, chargers, monitors)*
- School supplies*
- Personal items (toiletries)*
- Greek life or team/club dues*
- Car-related expenses (insurance, parking pass, gas, maintenance)*
- Bike and accessories*

Sit down together (or video chat) and list all their typical monthly expenses along with other potential expenses that may come up during this first year of college.

Decide which of these expenses your student will be responsible for and which you will cover or help pay for so there is mutual understanding as your student kicks off the fall term.



Find more budget tips plus CollegiateParent's printable student budget worksheet.

LEARN MORE

Student Allowance

Some college parents choose to give their students a monthly allowance to help pay for certain expenses, and to help their student maintain some savings.

There are a few approaches you can take to help your student manage their allowance and so that both of you can track their spending.

One strategy is to create a student checking account that's linked to your own account.

You can set up an automatic transfer of a set amount to your student's account each month.

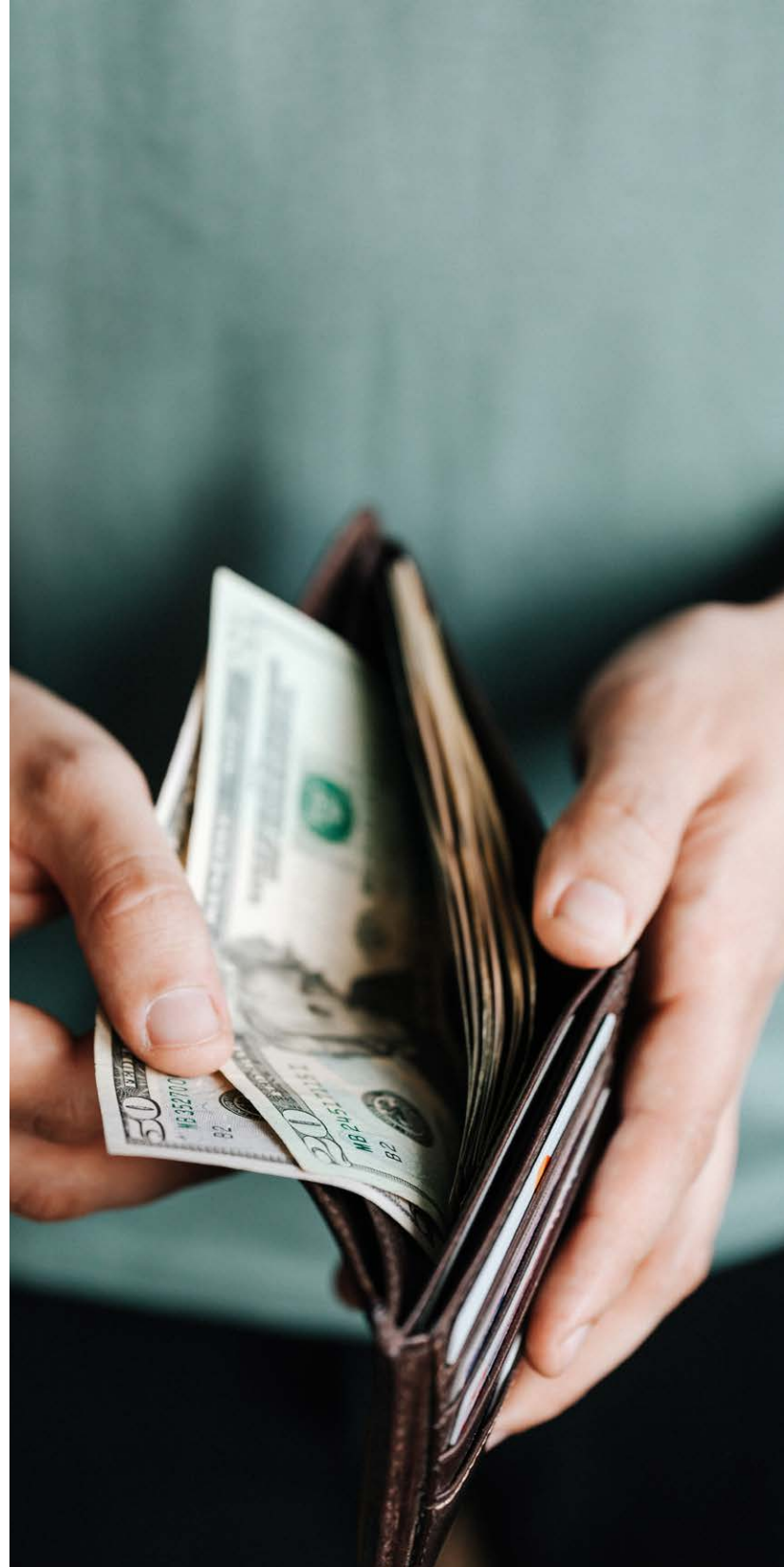
Then when they use their ATM card, you can see everything your student is spending money on.

You can work together to see where they may be overspending, like on clothes or fast food. This can help you guide your student to make smart purchases, and to recognize their own spending habits.

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After the first year an allowance may no longer be necessary for students making good money through summer employment.

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Extra Spending Money

You may decide that your college student should be responsible for earning and saving money for "extra" expenses like entertainment, eating out, new clothes, etc.

Maybe you'll agree to pay for textbooks the first year but your student will be expected to pay for their books moving forward.

In the same way, you might buy new clothes before your student's first semester at college but they'll be responsible for new clothing after this (except maybe a few special items like an interview suit, a nice dress or a winter coat).

Spending money variables to consider:

- *Social life: Mostly on or off campus? Will they rush a fraternity or sorority?*
- *Weekends and breaks: How often will they come home? Do they have plans to leave campus for day trips, or on breaks?*
- *Location: The cost of everything tends to be higher at an urban campus (though internet shopping can be an equalizer).*



Working During the School Year

Depending on how busy they are with extracurricular activities and how hard their courses are, your student may feel ready to pick up an on- or off-campus job during their first year at school. A job can help them pay for extra expenses, save money and make new friends.

Some parents prefer their students prioritize studying and wait until the second half of the first year or sophomore year to [get a campus job](#).

On-campus jobs

Your student may qualify for [Federal Work-Study](#) as part of their [financial aid](#) package. For students without work-study, there are still many on-campus employment opportunities.

Some of the departments that hire students include: admissions, alumni/development, housing and residential life, food services, museums and theatres, buildings and grounds, etc.

Off-campus jobs

Off-campus jobs are a great way for your student to get involved in the broader community beyond the boundaries of campus.

From waiting tables to working at a gym or in retail, your student can meet local people from different generations and make social and professional connections while they make money.





Unexpected Costs

Unexpected expenses can always arise. A new phone or laptop, car repair or a medical bill — you can't anticipate everything.

Make a game plan with your student so you're ready when these unexpected and larger expenses come up.

- *Will these things come out of your students' savings?*
- *Will you split the bill down the middle with them?*
- *Will you pay for them in full and set up a payment plan for your student to pay you back over time?*

Lastly, be sure to revisit your student's financial needs and the intensity of their schedule (increased academic pressure, more hours dedicated to sports, etc.) each term or year.

Talking About Health, Academics, and More – Tips for Important Conversations

Having conversations about life away from home, the college landscape and how to handle “what if” situations can be empowering for both you and your student.

By broaching these sometimes sensitive topics, you can hear your student's concerns, fears and hopes. And maybe they'll even glean a few words of wisdom from the person who loves them most — you.

These important topics should be revisited during the college years as your student continues to grow, learn and change.

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The tips on the next few pages will help you:

- *Discuss academic expectations and time management*
 - *Talk about alcohol, substances, and safety*
 - *Talk about sexual health and consent*
 - *Believe in yourself and your student*
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Discuss academic expectations and time management.

Your college student has been tasked with a huge new challenge: independent time management.

They're now responsible for when and what they eat, when and how much they sleep and exercise, how often they do laundry, and how many hours they spend socializing vs. studying.

Speaking of studying, be prepared for them to struggle as they **transition from high school to college academics**. Help them set goals for this first semester, but de-emphasize the importance of grades so they're not demoralized by a low grade or two but rather motivated to figure out what works and what doesn't.

There will certainly be a learning curve! You can be a sounding board for your student as they reflect on their experiences and challenges with time management, and offer advice when they ask for it.

Here's a resource for discussing time management skills.

[LEARN MORE](#)





Talk about alcohol, substances, and safety.

Research shows that as a parent, your opinions can have a strong influence on your student's decisions about using drugs and alcohol.

According to **Prevention Action Alliance**, "students whose parents shared messages encouraging the avoidance of alcohol and the adoption of healthy alternatives were less likely to use alcohol and experience negative consequences from alcohol."

Hopefully you've been having these conversations for years, but **keep talking about** the consequences of underage drinking with your first-year student, and about how alcohol affects their brain and behavior. Remind them to use the buddy system at parties — they'll be helping their friends stay safe, too.

Keep an open line of communication with your student about **other substances they might encounter** or experiment with, including nicotine which is a growing problem for teens and young adults due to the popularity of vaping.

As parents, safety on campus is one of our biggest concerns. Students share the responsibility for keeping themselves and their community safe.

There are a few things your student can do to be proactive about personal safety:

- *Always lock their dorm room and secure their valuables*
- *Sign up for campus emergency alerts*
- *Be an active bystander in social situations (for example, if they will participate in fraternity activities that might constitute hazing)*

Talk about sexual health and consent.

Sexual health impacts emotional and physical health, and health is the foundation of well-being.

Although not all college students are sexually active, a large number are — many for the first time.

Talking to your student about contraception, emotional and sexual intimacy, and attitudes about sex in general can help your student think about their own values and attitudes about sex.

Students of all gender identities share the responsibility for preventing sexual assault on campus. And that's important, as **sexual violence on college campuses** is a pervasive issue.

What is your student's understanding of consent? What kinds of situations might require that your student stand up as an active bystander?

“Consent is an ongoing process of discussing boundaries and what you're comfortable with.”

– RAINN.ORG

The word “ongoing” is important. When it comes to sexual activity, consent needs to be communicated clearly along the way of any encounter. Consenting to go to someone's room, or to kiss, doesn't mean consent for anything further. And consent can't be given by a person who's intoxicated or incapacitated by drugs or alcohol.

Not sure how to start the conversation? Here are additional resources for talking with your young adult about sexual health and consent.

[LEARN MORE](#)



Believe in yourself and your student.

One of the most important things to do before and after any conversation with your student is to trust that **you've done a good job.**

No parent is perfect — we all misspeak, say things we don't mean, or have trouble saying the things we wish we could.

You may not get to every topic on your mind and in your heart. But sometimes one

conversation will lead to another, whether it's right away or days or weeks later.

Despite the occasional fumbling, the important thing is that you're trying.

Even if your student doesn't feel like talking about something right now, they'll get the message that you're there for them when they're ready to reach out.



The first year of college presents new challenges for every student. Academic, emotional and physical stressors can be enhanced by change.

Moving away from home, taking classes that are much more demanding than high school, more independence, and feeling like a small speck in a sea of new students can be a lot to handle all at once.

But at the end of the day, your student will figure it out. They will make mistakes, and be the wiser for it.

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CollegiateParent™

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