

Beginning Post-secondary Education: Tips for Parents/Guardians

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Trust your relationship with your student. You know them best.

SHARED FEELINGS

- What you as a parent/guardian are feeling (excitement, enthusiasm, anxiety) as your student makes the transition to post-secondary education is what they are feeling; but your feelings are those of a mature adult while theirs are ones of a maturing adult – with many life lessons to come as they navigate their way through post-secondary education and life in general.

THE TRANSITION

- Remember that the transition begins in the summer as parents/guardians/students get mentally prepared for the changes that are coming. Parents may notice challenges to established expectations – such as curfews, chores.
- The student is moving to a “new community”; there will be lots for them to learn about the community, and this will take time. Students will do this at their own pace. For example, those who are socially outgoing will likely develop a social network easily; students who are less social will take longer to find a network of friends. Be prepared as those situations unfold.

STUDENT LIFE (ACADEMIC)

- There will be new academic demands and an increased need for self-management and time-management. For example, the pattern of reminders for assignment due dates in high school will not be part of the post-secondary experience. In their first year, students are continuing to develop and refine their capacity to work independently and consistently. The course syllabus is now an important tool for students to use as part of planning for each week and each term.
- The post secondary academic environment is a major change from high school. Your student is now part of a larger student population. As a result, at the beginning of the first year it is not unusual for grades to be lower than the student is accustomed to from high school. This is not a cause for panic (for parents or students) – see the next tip.

KNOWING ABOUT AND USING RESOURCES

- Every post-secondary institution has resources (student services) to support and assist students (with course selection; learning skills such as time-management, test-taking, essay writing, etc.; health, personal counselling). Encourage your student to discover and to use these services – they are there to help students succeed. Most schools will have orientation programs to help with the academic and personal transition to post-secondary education. These can be very valuable in easing the transition, making connections, learning about resources and providing reassurance.

STUDENT LIFE (SOCIAL)

- Well before the first day of school, talk about the realities of being a student – **the benefits**; new friends, new social and learning opportunities, new freedoms, greater independence; and **the challenges**; peer influences, alcohol and drug use, sexual experimentation and relationship issues. The more open this discussion is, the easier it will be for the student to contact you when and if concerns arise.

CHANGE

- You've encouraged and supported your student to pursue their own academic choices. It is not unusual during the first year that a long-held ideas of career choice changes and the student may want to move to a different major or program. Many students follow this pattern: it is not a sign that the student is having a difficulty or "giving up", only that they are making choices about what they see themselves doing in the longer term. (As well, remember that there are resources on campus to help them with these changes).

COMMUNICATION

- Only you and your student will know for sure the best ways to communicate, how often and by which medium. Have a communication plan that you both can live with before the student leaves for school.

COACH AND MODEL PROBLEM-SOLVING

- Encourage your student to be their own advocate and to try to solve their own challenges as much as possible. Model how to be resilient, how to respond effectively when adversity happens. For example, a low grade in a first-semester mid-term may come as a big disappointment and shock to a student who is accustomed to performing near the top of the high school class. Model effective problem-solving by encouraging them to get some more feedback and advice (by talking to the Teaching Assistant or professor), or by speaking to staff in the Student Services area (for assistance with study skills, exam preparation, time-management, essay writing)

What do you want to tell your student as they head off to post-secondary education?

- Is there something special that you'd like them to hear? Is there a piece of wisdom that you found helpful that would you like to tell them? For example, remind them that there is nothing that they can't share with you no matter how difficult they think the topic might be for you to hear.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Every institution has an Office for Students with Disabilities (it may have a different name, such as the Accessibility Office). Students with disabilities should register with the office in order to arrange academic accommodations.

Useful Resource: Transition Resource Guide for Students with Disabilities

<http://www.transitionresourceguide.ca/>

- Developed by the Regional Assessment and Resource Centre (RARC) at Queen's University
- Outlines the services available, the key contact information, and the documentation requirements for each post-secondary institution in Ontario.