

COPING WELL WITH THE COLLEGE TRANSITION

By Christopher Anderson, LMHC

For many young people moving onto a college campus is often the biggest, most dramatic change experienced in life so far. This is absolutely true. The transition to semi-independent living requires students to exercise skills and make decisions that they are not accustomed to making without direct guidance from parents or guardians. The move itself can be intimidating as students often times are put into completely unfamiliar territory. But the college experience also comes with a wide variety of exciting opportunities and experiences. To help make the transition to college smoother and less challenging, consider following these suggestions.

1. Arrange 1 additional campus visit, if possible, prior to your official August arrival to familiarize yourself with the campus, especially the freshman dormitories, student services, and the location of the academic departments where you will be taking most of your first year classes. Spend time walking the campus, learning the “routes” and studying the map of campus provided to you by the admissions office. If you decide to arrange for a tour of campus during this additional visit, at least take part of the time to explore on your own so you can memorize the layout of campus.
2. Use social media to connect with teams or student groups on campus prior to your arrival. Consider contacting club advisors, coaches, team captains, and/or student leaders of these groups and express your interest in being involved. This will immediately help you establish some contacts and friends before you even arrive.
3. Critical for maintaining faith in the college years is to be connected to a healthy, and Bible-centered college group. If you’re unsure of what is available on or off campus consider contacting your school’s university ministries office or do some research online with respect local houses of worship in your school’s city. Most enjoy having college students as part of their congregations and are ready to help support students from out of the area.
4. Most schools have an orientation team whose specialty is the difficult adjustment time. Check your college’s website for who to contact. Also, get to know your floor’s resident advisor (RA) or your building’s resident director (RD) as soon as you arrive. They have also been trained to help with this critical transition period.
5. If you find that you’re having a difficult time with the transition and you’re experiencing homesickness, don’t hesitate to let someone know. You may also contact your college’s counseling center or health center for support. Call home and talk to parents, guardians, other family members or friends. But don’t do this too much; give yourself time to adjust and make new friends.
6. Keep your activities balanced. You’ll be required to attend many events during orientation week when you arrive on campus. But you are not required to attend everything that’s happening on campus. Take advantage of your free times to rest and relax, or just informally get to know people on your floor.
7. Don’t believe the lie that everyone drinks, experiments with drugs, or engages in risky sexual behaviors on campus. Believe it or not, there’s a large number of students, even on non-faith-based campuses who don’t want to live that lifestyle (which can be dangerous, or at least very unhealthy) but who also want to have fun. If you’re not sure how to connect with others who want to have a good time, yet avoid the dangerous risks of excessive partying, please talk to campus ministries, or Residence Life. They’ll help you find others that think the way you do.
8. (This one is big...) Don’t believe that you must have your entire life planned out in the first semester or two (or three... or four...). The truth is, most people change majors and often go on to grad school in a totally different direction. Now you may be one of the few people who know exactly what you want... i.e. med school, law school, etc... but you actually are in the minority. It’s ok to be undecided at this stage. **DON’T STRESS OVER IT.** It’s fine. There are plenty of people on campus who can assist you in making career decisions in due time. At this point, just enjoy the newness and excitement of college life!

BEFORE YOUR CHILD ARRIVES ON CAMPUS: Tips for Parents and Students

By Christopher Anderson, LMHC

Just getting ready to leave for college can be an overwhelming and exhausting experience for both students and parents. Here are some “don’t forgets” to address prior to your arrival on campus to help make the process a little easier. Use this as a checklist:

1. **DON’T FORGET** to get a copy of your immunization records to your college health services office. Check your high school diploma folder to see if your school nurse from high school put a copy in there. This is becoming an increasingly popular practice since all school nurses know that graduating seniors must submit copies of their immunization records to colleges, often prior to arrival. You can also check with your primary care physician for a copy of your immunization record. Check with your school’s website to see exactly what immunizations are required. Most (if not all) states require measles, mumps, and rubella vaccinations and either a meningitis immunization or a waiver indicating that you are refusing the meningitis vaccine. Some people have strong religious convictions regarding immunizations or are unable to have them due to medical reasons. Religious and medical exemptions are allowed. Check with your school’s health center on how to submit the appropriate exemption documentation if you are going to go this route. But remember: If you opt-out of vaccinations and there was an outbreak on or near campus, you may be asked to leave campus (not attend classes, no extracurricular activities) until the outbreak has cleared. Additionally, check with your college’s health services center for any additional health evaluation forms that are required.
2. **DON’T FORGET** to consider health insurance options. Most schools offer a student health insurance plan that has providers in-network locally. Many of these plans offer very good and very affordable coverage. If you are planning on keeping a student on a parent’s or guardian’s plan, it is very important that you call the insurance company or find out if they have providers in the area where your child will be going to school. It may be a better option to purchase the student plan.
3. **DON’T FORGET** to talk to your child’s doctor or primary care provider if he or she is taking prescription medication. Many rural campuses are in underserved areas with respect to physicians and it may not be easy to find a provider that will suit the special medical needs of your child. This is especially true for students who may have psychiatric needs, as psychiatric providers in rural areas are stretched thin. Discuss the option of appointments with your child’s psychiatric provider on breaks during the semester, between semesters, and during the summer as a way of maintaining this relationship. Larger schools in populated areas often have psychiatrists on staff or contracted. But smaller, rural schools often don’t have this luxury.
4. **DON’T FORGET** to talk to your college’s health services center if your child has diabetes or other conditions that may require disposal of sharps medical waste. Some campuses provide sharps disposal containers to students either free of charge or a small fee.
5. **DON’T FORGET** to look into purchasing a small lock-box for your child if they are taking medications that have the potential for being abused and falling into the wrong hands. Your school’s health center may also have recommendations for this specific to their campus protocols.
6. **DON’T FORGET** to complete any online education required by your school with respect to drug and alcohol use as well as sexual assault prevention. Many schools use programs such as AlcoholEDU or MyStudentBody.com to teach students about the dangers of substance abuse and casual sexual behavior patterns. Often these education modules must be completed prior to arrival on campus. Also, these are often from a secular view point. As parents/guardians, make sure your child knows what you want for them with respect to following God’s word when it comes to substances and casual sexual activity.