



Parenting *and your* College Student _____

By Anne Hansen

Back-to-school nights for this year are over. Carpools are running, fundraisers are introducing their campaigns and principals and teachers are filling out the first reports of the year. Children and parents are negotiating homework schedules, television shows and bedtimes, as well as curfew hours for the teenagers.



Routine has been established in most homes as reading, math and social studies replace the laid back days of summer. There are many homes, however, where the routine has changed dramatically because a child has gone off to college.

The messy room with the un-made bed and the clothes strewn about is clean and neat. The wet towels that were flung all over the bathroom now hang dry and tidy. The telephone rings less frequently and the computer is available more often.

Trips to the grocery store are not the same. The special food that the now absent college student loved and expected to see in the pantry and in the refrigerator are not put in the shopping cart. There is one less lunch to prepare in the morning and a few less dishes to wash at night.

Parents adjust when a child leaves home for college but it is a bittersweet experience. Pride and tears surface often; pride in a good kid who is off learning to be independent and tears for the very same reason. It is a stage that begins with loving the child, moves to launching them and then ends up being a bit painful because of missing them.

For parents in this situation I promise the tears subside. What does not subside, however, is the parental tendency to worry. Do not listen to those who tell you to leave your child alone so they can learn to be independent. Stay connected, call at least weekly and be aware that even if your son or daughter is in a reputable Catholic university or college, they will require attention and guidance from home. The act of leaving home does not guarantee maturity.

The following words are from a young woman, a college senior at the time they were written. They are taken from an article she wrote for her local newspaper.

Binge drinking, late-night parties and less-than-admirable stunts are not strangers to college campuses. When venturing off to college, many women and men are not prepared for the life challenges that are not listed in the endless brochures and brag sheets about the college of choice.

When leaving for college, I was not the only one who was hoping to gain the knowledge, strength and wisdom I needed to be a whole woman. My parents were also looking forward to witnessing this phenomenal transformation.

Unfortunately, my first few years of college were smothered with hardships and challenges that I am still struggling to overcome today. I was one of those students who thought I could handle the dark side of the uncertain world of college. For two and a half years, I slipped...into a whirlwind that clouded my good judgment.

With a broken heart my mother recalls when she tried to convince the university to help her. These university officials, who were made up of mothers, clergy, grandfathers and educators refused to help my pleading parents. Instead they hid behind the idea that I was an adult and would tell them what was wrong when I was ready.

I was fortunate enough to transfer to a university that encouraged individual excellence and outstanding scholarship.

The exciting four years of college have the potential to shape students into motivated leaders, teach men and women who they really are, and inspire them to make this world a better place. But, when life's roadblocks hinder this growth, parents have to be there for their children.

Yes, universities should be willing to ease the parent's anxieties, but mothers and fathers need to not only talk to their children, but to listen.

Listen to what your child is not saying about this fragile and delicate time in his or her life.

College is an exciting time for both parent and child. It is a time of growth and independence. It is also a time to *ease* the parental controls and concerns not to cut them off completely.

Enjoy the peace and quiet that comes when a child moves out of the home and goes to college. Remember however that your wisdom, experience and guidance are still important to your maturing young adult child.

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