

Alumni Blog- August 2021

Adjusting to College

First year college students usually have expectations about college life long before they leave home. Some students look forward to college, eager to experience a bit more freedom and have many adventures. Others may experience disappointment when their expectations are not met and they begin to feel uncomfortable, unhappy, or insecure in their new environment. Others will know that leaving home will be difficult at times and dread the thought of going to college. No matter what your expectations are, nearly every student encounters some sort of obstacle that they didn't anticipate during the transition to college. Even positive life changes produce stress, and of course, leaving home can lead to feelings of sadness, loneliness and worry. These feelings are normal and a part of the transition of college.

It's not unusual to experience a period of low mood or increased anxiety while adjusting to a major life change, such as starting college. Your role in your family may have to undergo dramatic changes as you shift into a student role, which can cause stress for all family members.



CHANGES TO EXPECT IN THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

Increased Personal Freedom

Many college students welcome the freedom to decide about what they want to do each day. Others may find this freedom strangely difficult. Freshmen who live on campus may maintain daily or frequent contact with family but they make many personal decisions and choices than they did in high school.

Increased Responsibility

With increased personal freedom comes greater responsibility for one's daily life. Students must choose when and how to study, socialize, become involved in activities, budget money, exercise, and make time to eat and sleep. Students have to balance going to class, completing schoolwork, taking care of themselves, and having fun. They schedule classes, buy personal items, make healthcare appointments and ask professors or other staff for help. Students often need to take the initiative to address their responsibilities for the first time in their lives.

Increased Demand for Time Management

Freshmen typically experience changing demands on their time. Days are less routine and predictable. Some freshmen feel they have no time for themselves because of their multiple obligations. Some classes may seem difficult and draining due to the amount of work and studying that will need to be completed. However, other students may find their academic workloads manageable, but they may not feel comfortable relaxing in their free time.

Different Surroundings and Relationships at College

Freshmen adjust to new surroundings and relate to unfamiliar people. Peers may seem very different from family, friends and acquaintances at home. You may hope that your roommate will be close friends and you may be disappointed if they are not. Freshmen who live on campus learn to negotiate conflicts with roommates. Students must also fulfill new expectations from adults at college. For example, a professor typically will not call if a student misses class but will likely grade for attendance. Parents interact less with the university than they did in high school and students must resolve concerns directly with professors, Residence Life, or other authorities.

Changing Relationships with Family and Friends from Home

As students adjust to freedom and responsibility in college, relationships with parents and other significant people change. Freshmen and their parents may fear losing aspects of their relationships with each other. It may be difficult to say goodbye at the end of holiday or semester breaks. It may also be difficult to adjust to curfews, chores or care for younger siblings on visits home. Parents also need to adjust during this period. Their children have become independent in some ways but are still somewhat dependent upon their parents. Many students may leave high school boyfriends or girlfriends when they go to college. One or both partners may struggle with feeling lonely, sad or jealous, especially if one partner seems to be happier and better adjusted than the other. Freshmen may find that their relationships with friends from home are different after time away at school. Some students feel closer to and more appreciative of friends at home and may not stay very connected to them. Others may find they have less in common with friends from home after they've been at school.



TIPS TO HELP ADJUST TO COLLEGE LIFE

Be Open to New Relationships

College life presents opportunities for new relationships. You must be open to forging new relations with teachers, loves, friends, and roommates. One of the things you can do to ensure this happens is by learning impeccable flexibility and communication skills. In addition to this, compromise is a big deal. Not every situation will go your way. You will manage to not only interact but also live among your new clique of friends who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Associate with as many people as possible, embrace different perspectives, and be kind to the opinions of everyone.

Be Energetic

Classes in college demand more from students than high school may have. You need to put in more hours and effort both in and out of the classroom. These demands can take a toll on you so it is best to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Take care of your nutrition by consuming foods that give you energy. Get ample rest, create time for exercises, and socialize. Doing all of these goes miles in giving you a boost for the workload that is associated with college life. Most colleges have wellness centers so be sure to take time to visit.

Do Not Be Afraid to Ask for Help

Teaching assistants and college professors are always available to help you. Every time you need assistance, feel free to step into their office during their office hours and relay your needs. Fortunately, colleges have free tutoring services. It is your prerogative to seek help whenever you are in need. You can seek support via mentoring programs, writing labs, academic advisors and scholarship offices.

Take Care of Yourself

College life can be overwhelming. There is plenty of things that you need to finish within a limited time. The countless things that need to be completed can put you under so much pressure. If not careful, you cannot have enough time for yourself. Exhaustion and always being stressed can result in illness. Don't push yourself to the limit and take designated "me" time. Another aspect of taking care of yourself is about your security. Avoid being in bad company. Remember that breaking the law can take place anywhere within the campus. Try to avoid being in the wrong place, wrong time. It is wise to have the phone number of your college's police or security department. Establish whether your campus has a Safe Ride program for students to carry you late at night. If you are feeling sick, don't hesitate to visit the college's medical department.

Be Open to New Experiences

On finding yourself in a new environment with new people, the secret is to become open-minded. Being open-minded means that you expect change to occur regularly, being open to new people and socialize with them. Education in college involves learning and exploring unfamiliar areas in life. The new areas include meeting people from diverse backgrounds and getting their points of view.

Your Roommate

When it comes to roommates, a common issue that crops up often has to do with organizing and decorating the dorm room. Consult them regarding separating necessities such as micro-fridges, micro-waves, and coffee makers. You do not want to have similar items that will take up the little space in your room. The rule of thumb is to always consult your roommate before making any decision that touches on your room. This will go miles in making sure that you avoid any unnecessary friction between you two.

Connect with Peers

Being in a new environment with new people is overwhelming. However, you are not alone. To overcome loneliness, try and socialize with other students. These students could be in a class with you. Making friends should not worry you. Take time to find students with the same personality and interests as you. To feel more comfortable on campus, join a group. In most colleges, you will find student clubs and societies. These groups engage in different activities including sports. Find an activity that you enjoy doing and join a club offering it. This will be handy in assisting you unwind and intermingle with other students.

Manage Your Time

In college, it is very easy to get carried away by non-academic activities. Most often than not students may forget that they need to study. To avoid getting carried away, manage your time properly. Find out the deadlines for upcoming exams and assignments. Mark the deadlines out in your calendar or set a reminder in your phone. Always find time to study way ahead of an exam.

Financial Freedom

For new students, financial freedom can be exciting or prove to be a challenge. Freshmen can easily get into financial trouble especially if they use credit cards. Credit cards allow you to purchase items and pay for them later. The student may tend to

forget about it until faced with the bill. To avoid getting into financial trouble, use these cards responsibly. It is also wise to not use a credit card if you are not sure how to manage it well.



WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE NOT HAPPY AT COLLEGE

If you are feeling upset and miserable this can be very confusing and scary. Don't freak out! This is what many students feel during the first several weeks of college. You are in a demanding new environment and everything is different. You may feel like you must grow up all at once, which may overwhelm or even depress you. You may feel far away from the people who love and support you. Perhaps you are a student who does not feel homesick but instead feels disappointed in your experiences and personal interactions. If you are distressed you may notice that other students are happy and optimistic. If you are struggling with the transition to college, there are some ways you can help yourself adjust:

Reach out to others in your dorm hall. You are probably not the only one who is sad and upset. Your R.A. can help you figure out how to cope. Upperclassmen may also be eager to share their experiences with you.

Join campus organizations and clubs that appeal to you. Meet and interact with others who share similar interests.

Make an extra effort to take care of yourself. Plan time to rest, eat balanced meals, exercise and avoid the abuse of alcohol or other drugs. Develop a schedule you can manage, and identify a place and time of day to study.

If things are not working out as you planned, adjust your expectations. For example, your roommate may not be your best friend. You may need to initiate conversations about conflict over personal space and living habits.

Recognize that relationships take time to develop. Most of your friendships from home grew stronger over a period of years. Over time, your surroundings will become more familiar.

Seek out resources on campus that can help you both address problems and get academic or personal support. These resources may even connect you with other resources. Explore the organizations and events that the campus offers. You may want to join a fraternity or sorority, or be in a club or play intramural sports.

Keep this in mind: Struggling is not a sign of weakness or failure. In fact, struggling is usually the first phase of developing a new strategy for success and wisdom.

1. Reach out to others. Start conversations and trust the process of forming new friendships.
2. Stay healthy and educated about how to maximize all aspects of your health.
3. Become aware of the many activities and organizations that you can join.
4. Adjust your expectations if things are not working out as you planned. Perhaps, what you planned wasn't going to offer as much as what is actually happening!
5. Make use of the services and resources to keep you on track academically. Avoid the common mistake of avoiding help just to prove you don't need help. At this phase in your life, not using available resources is likely to prove much more costly than simply needing assistance from time to time.

6. Connect with the team of support in your residence halls.

7. Get support from a counselor.