

Supporting your College Freshman

Because you are concerned about your son or daughter making a successful transition to college, and because your support is a critical factor in that transition, we offer this section on what your son or daughter will experience in college and what you can do to help.

Academic Challenges

Your son or daughter will be expected to take responsibility for his or her own learning process. That means going to class, completing assignments and keeping up with the vast amount of reading are now up to the student, who is considered to be an adult in the academic environment. Although students spend less time in class now than in high school, they are expected to complete far more work outside of the classroom.

Learning how to structure time effectively and manage competing priorities in order to step up to these new challenges will be frightening or even overwhelming for some students.

What You Can Do To Help Academically:

- Know that it is normal for students to feel overwhelmed at the beginning of their college careers.
- Listen to their concerns for however long they need to express them.
- State your confidence in their ability to make it.
- Make sure that your son or daughter is not working too many hours at a job such that they can't get their school work done. Going to college should be the primary focus of your son or daughter's life if they are to be successful.
- Conversely, if your son or daughter is working full-time or close to it, make sure that they are not taking more classes than they can reasonably handle. It is important that you assist your son or daughter in not setting themselves up for academic failure.

Separation Anxiety

Although most students are excited about starting college, the prospect of leaving behind the comfort and familiarity of high school friends and family members is frightening for some. The challenge of making new friends and creating a new social life can be daunting, particularly for the student who is shy.

What You Can Do To Help With Separation Anxiety:

- Listen to your son or daughter's concerns and take them seriously. Although separation anxiety does pass, the first few weeks can be intense. Your son or daughter may need a lot of support and reassurance.
- Encourage your son or daughter to get involved in clubs and other activities at school.
- Many Iona students enjoy volunteering in the numerous useful community projects in which the college is involved.
- Let them know that they are always welcome at home, but encourage them not to come home every weekend. Help them to focus their attention and energy here at school.
- Encourage them to let others know that they are having a hard time, for example, the Resident Assistant who is assigned to their floor.

Identity Development

During late adolescence, individuals are engaged in the process of forming their own personal identities. This process includes becoming separate persons within the family with regard to creating their own value systems, spiritual beliefs, tastes in clothing, music and friends and making other personal choices. When adolescents make choices that run counter to the values, beliefs and preferences of their parents, this sometimes causes conflict within the family. Yet, this process of carving out their own separate identity is a normal and critical part of their life long growth and development. Developing a healthy identity also involves building self-esteem and a sense of personal competence.

What You Can Do To Help With Identity Development:

- Be tolerant of lifestyle choices your son or daughter makes so long as they are not clearly self-destructive.
- Keep criticism to a minimum. Your child needs and craves your approval and acceptance now more than ever, even if he or she seems not to. Be aware that negative words from you are taken very much to heart and that excessive criticism damages self-esteem.
- Allow your son or daughter to make mistakes. To err is part of the growing process. Let your child know that you do not consider mistakes to be disastrous and that you have made mistakes too.
- Give your son or daughter as much freedom as possible, even if that makes you a bit uneasy. We all want to protect our children, but that is not always in their best interest. Going out with friends, staying out late at night, making choices and experiencing their natural consequences are all part of the process of growing up.
- Give your son or daughter "permission" to separate from you. Holding on and trying to protect them from life will not help them to become responsible adults or to develop their own sense of competence.

Career Decisions

Your son or daughter may feel pressured to know what they want to major in and what their career path will be as soon as they get here. However, they need time at college to explore different subjects and to be exposed to many career possibilities in order to make a good decision. Making a premature decision about a major or about a career can end up being more costly in the long run.

What You Can Do To Help With Career Decisions:

- Be patient, and encourage your son or daughter to take their time, as well. Choosing a major and a career path is a process that occurs over time.
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- Encourage your son or daughter to take a wide variety of courses and to get involved in college activities.
- Make your son or daughter aware of [Career Development](#)
- Let your son or daughter know that their professors are excellent sources of career information, as well as potential mentors.

More Serious Problems

The issues discussed above are all part of the normal developmental process of becoming an adult and making the transition to college life. Below is a list of issues that merit your concern, and for which a referral to the Counseling Center or to another mental health agency of your choice would be warranted:

- A history of eating disorders or your suspicion that your son or daughter currently has an eating disorder.
- A history of drug or alcohol abuse or your suspicion that your son or daughter is currently abusing drugs or alcohol.
- A history of depression, a prior suicide attempt or a history of other emotional problems; your suspicion that your son or daughter is currently depressed.
- Involvement in an unhealthy romantic relationship, characterized by a great deal of fighting, conflict, control, distrust and unhappiness. Needless to say, any sign of violence would certainly identify a relationship as being unhealthy.
- Your son or daughter is having a great deal of difficulty recovering from the break-up of a romantic relationship or is threatening to harm themselves as a result of the break-up of a relationship.
- Your son or daughter has a history of problems with conduct, accepting limits, violence or aggression. Starting college and the stress that may come with this transition can reactivate problems of this nature.
- Significant losses that your son or daughter has experienced, such as the divorce of parents, the loss of a parent, another relative, or a friend through death; a critically ill family member.
- Any other trauma experienced by your son or daughter that is, by definition, out of the ordinary, such as a major illness, major surgery, involvement in an automobile accident, witnessing or being the victim of abuse or of a crime, losses sustained as of 9/11.

What You Can Do To Help With Serious Problems:

- Be supportive of your son or daughter.
- Get your son or daughter the professional help they need. People can't just "snap out of" serious problems or get better by talking it out with friends or family.
- Be patient. Serious problems can be worked through, but it takes time.
- Let a professional person at Iona College know that you are worried about your son or daughter, and let us assist you in getting them appropriate help and guidance.

(2010). *Supporting Your College Freshman*. Retrieved August 23, 2010, from IONA web site:
<http://www.iona.edu/studentlife/counsel/infoParents.cfm>

For more information contact careercenter@indianatech.edu

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