

Keeping Communication Open

Now is a good time to role model adult communication skills with your college student. Rather than speaking with authority, it is better to listen and ask questions. This sets the tone of interest in their opinions and ideas, and a respect for their growth as an individual and adult. Your openness will also invite them to keep you informed and involved in their life.

When your student offers an opinion that reflects a new or different value system, try some of these:

- Why does that appeal to you?
- Tell me why you feel that way.
- I'd love to hear what you think about that.
- That's very different; what changed your mind?

When it comes to rules at home, perhaps you can negotiate responsibilities rather than assign chores. Curfews may be altered for them to participate on campus if they commute. Curfews on home visits can be tied to consideration and respect for those in bed rather than "because I said so".

If the parent initiates the change in relationship, the student feels less like they must pull away or rebel in this less structured setting. They are more likely to turn to you for advice if they don't fear your reaction to what they have to say.

Some books are available that offer good information to parents about college life, stepping back a little, or understanding the developmental stages of this age group. I've listed some popular books below:

Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years, by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger (1997).

When Your Kid Goes to College: A Parent's Survival Guide, by Carol Barkin (1999).

Chicken Soup for The College Soul, "Transitions" chapter, Health Communications (1999).

The Truth About College: 50 Lessons for Parents Before They Start Writing Checks, by Will Keim (1997).

College of the Overwhelmed, by Richard Kadison, M.D. and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo (2004)