



*What can a parent do to help their son or daughter adjust to the University? Here are a few tips that may help.*

## **Listen**

Although students will interact daily with many faculty, advisors, friends and acquaintances, when facing situations that are difficult, don't be surprised if they turn to you for support and encouragement. When, and if this happens, it is important to remember that one of the most effective tools you have at your disposal is your ability to listen carefully to what they are saying.

Communication studies show that non-judgmental listening is one of the most important interventions a parent can make. When listening, however, take care to avoid rushing in with quick-minded solutions. Imposed solutions are frequently resisted with responses such as, "I already tried that" or "Yeah, but you just don't understand." Instead, after you're convinced you understand their situation, ask them what solutions they have considered. You may be surprised to discover that they are much closer to resolving the matter than you may have realized.

## **Stay informed**

Staying informed about what is happening on campus can be a rewarding experience for parents and at the same time make them important resources. Knowing that mid-term examinations are about to begin or that an important exam will be returned in the near future, for example, can help parents understand why students may be acting edgy. There are many resources on campus that can assist you in this regard including the University's [online campus calendar](#), the campus newspaper's [online edition](#) and numerous other sites that may be found on the [UW home page](#).

## **Stay in touch**

Even though your son or daughter is totally immersed in their college experience, it doesn't mean that their family is any less important to them. Indeed, many students report needing their family's support more than ever. Getting news from you, other family members and old friends serves to tell them that they are still an important part of the

family and community from which they come. Nothing communicates this more effectively than an email from home or a copy of a hometown newspaper. When chocolate chip cookies are part of the deal, the message is even stronger.

## **Expect change**

Most college students change significantly in their first few years at the University. The pace of change may be rapid and evidence itself on a first visit home or evolve slowly over an entire college career. Regardless of the form it takes for your son or daughter, it is inevitable. It may be reflected in preferences for clothing, changes in academic major, or assertive new positions taken on political and social issues. Strong preferences on one visit home may be replaced by equally strong, but very different preferences the next visit.

In the life of a college student, these changes are normal. Although it may be taxing at times, showing patience throughout the process may have a surprisingly positive affect on your long-term relationship with him or her. While your student is going through changes at school, it can be difficult for them to accept changes in their home life. You might wait a quarter or two before you turn your son or daughter's bedroom into a walk-in closet or guest room. Before making major changes discuss them with your student during one of their visits home.

## **Don't panic when they panic**

It is not unusual to receive a late night phone call from a college student in a state of panic. The subject and circumstances may vary widely from the *discovery* they are struggling doing college level work, to the *conclusion* that they are disliked by everyone. At these times it is especially important to remember that once they have expressed all their fears and apprehensions, they will feel better. You may not, but they will. Being especially encouraging and supportive at these times will go a long way to help them see that their problem may be more manageable than they thought.

## **Consult with University professionals when you're not sure what to do**

University professionals are located at every juncture of a student's life to assist with issues that interfere with their academic and personal development. Those same services can be accessed by parents and family members for consultation about how to deal with special problem that may concern your son or daughter.

When accessing these services, however, it is important to remember that [Federal Law](#) prevents the institution from providing confidential information about students unless the students themselves have authorized it. Only information that is "public information" can be shared, e.g., [directory information](#).

## **Campus visits**

Although some students may be reluctant to admit it, most very much appreciate visits from home, especially if they include dining out and/or shopping for a few necessities. Showing parents around the campus can be an important way for many students to bring two of their important worlds together. Whereas many may enjoy drop-in visits, most prefer visits that are planned. Since deciding what to do during your visit may take a little planning, e.g., consulting with an older student experienced in these matters, a little lead time is usually appreciated. (Note: planned visits do not guarantee that you will find tidy rooms!)

## **Visits home**

Because your son or daughter has been living independently, he or she may view some of the house rules that were in place during high school as unrealistic. It is important to discuss their feelings about this so that a common understanding can be reached, preferably before they arrive home.

For those returning home for their first visit, catching up with high school friends can be a major time commitment that may interfere with a parent's plans for "family time." Try not to personalize these choices by keeping a sense of humor about the process. It will make the time you DO have with them more positive and memorable.

## **Trust them**

The college experience represents the first opportunity for most students to try out newly-gained independence. Because many situations are new to first-year students, expect them to make a few mistakes. When they do, it is important to keep in mind that few of the mistakes they make will be irrevocable or disastrous. And, many of them will be surprisingly similar to the mistakes made by most other college students.

One thing is certain, however, your son or daughter will learn from the mistakes he or she makes and will be much more skilled and confident in dealing with similar situations in the future. Trusting them when they need it most will go a long way towards assuring this.

## **Other information parents should know**

Most 18- and 19-year-olds who enter college for the first time are faced with several important developmental challenges separate from those posed by their academic coursework. To the degree these challenges are mastered determines in large part how quickly they will adjust to the university environment. They include: learning to live with others (for many it is the first time they have shared a space with someone other than a family member); making decisions regarding self-regulation (e.g., whether and/or how

much to eat, sleep, drink, study, etc.); and making preliminary decisions about what they are going to do with the rest of their life (selecting a major or a career option).

Although most students quickly master these challenges, a few have difficulty with one or several of them. Fortunately, the college environment as a whole is geared to help students gain mastery over them. If you notice that your son or daughter is having an especially difficult time with one or more of these issues, you may want to encourage them to seek out the services of one of the institution's advisors or counselors.

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