



# Family Transitions

## Family Transitions

Entering college is a life transition that will bring both you and your student joy and stress. Even the best high school student finds that adjustments are required for college success. Of course, the transition is not just a concern for the new college student; as changes affect parents and other family members also

While it is important for adolescents to continue developing autonomy, parents who are paying all or a portion of the bills may wish to have a say in important decisions.

The time to agree on your child's new and changing

responsibilities is before the student leaves for college. (It is cheaper and easier to talk now than long distance later!)



It is equally as important to review these decisions after your student has some real experience on campus. This is a time for growth and change; allow for that in your agreements.

## Questions to ask yourself

What are you most excited about in the transition your family is going through?

How will you "let go" of your son/daughter while still letting them know you care about them?

What are you most anxious about in the transition your family will be experiencing?

What do you think your son/daughter's experience will be in college and how, and in what ways can you best support them?

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# DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

## Developing Autonomy

- A resentment of advice that may be perceived as an attempt to “control”.
- A new independence in making decisions without first consulting parents.
- A “testing” of values by engaging in behaviors that might not be acceptable to parents.
- Financial difficulties resulting from attempts to handling money independently.
- Weight gain or loss due to inappropriate eating habits.
- A drop in grades (as compared to high school) due to the difficulty of classes and poor study habits.
- A change in daily personal schedule due to new independence and time management.
- More assertiveness or aggression in expressing personal opinions with parents.
- A change in religious practices, including church attendance and acceptance of beliefs.
- An unwillingness to discuss activities and relationships.
- Highs and lows in emotional reactions.
- A change in style of dress.

Behaviors will vary from student to student, but generally parents may expect some of the following changes for first-year students.

## Developing Purpose

- Several changes of mind regarding college majors and career goals.
- A resentment of core curriculum courses.
- A resistance to establish definite plans and structure in life-style.
- Unwillingness to answer questions parents ask about school, activities, etc.
- Activities unrelated to studies.
- A fear of disappointing parents and not meeting college standards.

## Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships

- A more accepting attitude toward those with different values and or those of different cultural backgrounds.
- Effort to affiliate with a group—including clubs, athletic teams or religious organizations.
- Complaints about roommate and/or boyfriend/ girlfriend.
- Expression of doubt related to relationships and confidence in personality and appearance.
- Changes in types of commitments in relationships.
- A preference for spending time with friends rather than family.
- A desire to discuss new friends without criticism from parents.
- Social activity occurring 24 hours a day.
- A change, sometimes a loss, of interest in high school friends.



## DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF PARENTS OF FIRST-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

- Tolerate uncertainty and change.
- Trust your student with his or her decision-making.
- Become an active listener/clarifier/coach.
- Be willing to exist in the “Oh? – Zone Layer”  
The “Oh? – Zone Layer” is that place where parents go to respond to frantic phone calls from desperate first-year students. For example: When your student calls hysterically crying about her roommate that she can’t stand, you say: “Oh? That sounds like a difficult situation. What do YOU think is the best way to handle that?”
- Do not do anything for your student that s/he can do for her or himself.
- Come to terms with your student’s strengths AND limitations.
- Expect stress and real ups-and-downs. College years are stressful and demanding, so don’t just paint them as “the best years of your life.”
- Acknowledge that you are also in transition and moving into a new phase of your life. You are facing parallel issues to those of your student – identity, independence and intimacy.
- Remember your student is the CEO of his or her college experience (not you). Your student owns their college experience and it’s outcome and is responsible for those passages with that experience.
- Encourage your student to follow his or her own dreams and to grow and become successfully independent. Allow your student to pursue pathways which may be different from what you had in mind.
- Learn to let go. Letting go doesn’t mean un-involvement. It means trusting your child to make thoughtful decisions. It means caring, active listening, on-going communications, giving appropriate feedback, clarifying, and supporting. It allows your child to move into independent adulthood.



*“Parents owe their children two things: roots and wings.”*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

### Books:

**Letting Go: A Parents’ Guide to Understanding the College Years, Sixth Edition.**  
Karen Levin Coburn, Madge Lawrence Treeger (2009)

**You’re On Your Own (But I’m Here If You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child During the College Years.**  
Marjorie Savage (2009)

**What to Expect When Your Child Leaves for College: A Complete Guide for Parents Only.**  
Mary Spohn (2008)

**Your Baby Freshman is Off to College: A Month-by-Month Guide to the First Year.**  
Laurie L. Hazard, Stephanie K. Carter (2016)

### Online:

**Albion College Academic Catalog**  
<https://www.albion.edu/academics/academic-catalogs>

**Albion College Student Handbook**  
<http://www.albion.edu/handbook>

**College Parents of America**  
<http://www.collegeparents.org>

## THE FIRST YEAR IN COLLEGE: PRESSURE POINTS

It is important to keep in mind that for new college students the first year is full of discovery, inspiration, good times, and demanding academic expectations. As a consequence of these circumstances, new students can find themselves in frequent situations of disappointment, insecurity, and indecision.

Students continually need to individually evaluate their abilities and potential to meet college standards. They also need to be aware of the consistent and prescribed times when academic experiences will challenge their abilities, talents,

and skills.

The summer before the first year of college your student may feel excited and anxious to get away



from home. S/he may also be scared to death. Don't worry; most students have the ability to adjust – they all just do so in different degrees.

Once on campus, your student will see that fellow students are in the

same situation and there is a certain security in being surrounded by others with similar feelings and motivations.

The purpose of the following questions and issues is to provide guidelines so that you and your student can identify specific issues during the first semester when overwhelming academic challenges are consistently predicted to occur. In knowing this, students can better plan to meet expectations, and you as a parent will know when to be supportive of your student as s/he goes through these experiences.

## GENERAL QUESTIONS AND ADJUSTMENT ISSUES THAT POTENTIALLY CAN CAUSE

### Social and Personal Issues

1. Why am I here?
2. Is this where I need to be at this point in my life?
3. Establishing a new peer group.
4. Having a roommate and sharing a room.
5. Experiencing loneliness.
6. Making decisions.
7. Solving problems.
8. Can I meet all of my commitments?
9. Adapting to general campus geography and weather.
10. Where is my self-confidence?
11. Becoming involved with activities.
12. Do I procrastinate?
13. Can I handle conflicts?

14. Coping and managing academic and social stress.
15. Can I budget my expenses?
16. Meeting new and diverse students.
17. Getting used to the food.
18. Do I like this community?
19. What organizations should I join?
20. Can I manage school, activities and a job?
21. Getting financial awards, scholarships and keeping them.
22. Staying healthy.
23. Managing homesickness.
24. Who should I date and when?
25. Managing their social life.
26. What is so great about all this freedom?
27. Making Friends.

### Academic and Goal-setting Issues

1. Why do I need to set goals?
2. Establishing goals by the week, month, semester, and year.
3. Establishing and maintaining a time-management system.
4. What major should I pursue?
5. Changing majors.
6. Developing consistent study habits.
7. Achieving academic goals.
8. Developing a good association with my faculty advisor.
9. Consistent / effective communication with professors
10. Seeking and getting support from home and services on campus.
11. What are my best talents and abilities?
12. Developing interests and talents.
13. Can I budget my expenses?

## PARENTING A COLLEGE STUDENT THROUGH THE FIRST YEAR

Your student, along with two million others, is about to enter an exciting and also frightening period full of joy, excitement, confusion, pain, discovery, and disappointment. And, like it or not, you're entering this period with your son or daughter. You'll experience the same happiness and defeats as they do – second hand – but just as vividly or achingly.

The guidelines below may help you make it through your student's first year with a minimal loss of sanity and a maximum strengthening of your new relationship. The following suggestions are:

- Purposely subjective;
- Written by a recently graduated student;
- Based mostly on careful observation of mistakes and/or breakthrough made by her parents and those of her friends.

### Rule # 1 Don't Ask Them If They're Homesick

The power of association can be a dangerous thing. (A friend once told me, "The idea of being homesick didn't even occur to me, with all the new things that were going on, until my mom called one of the first weekends and asked, 'Are you homesick?' then it hit me") The first few days/weeks of school are activity-packed and friend-jammed, and the challenge of meeting new people and adjusting to new situations takes a majority of a first-year student's time and concentration. So, unless a well-meaning parent reminds them of it, they'll probably be safe to escape the loneliness and frustration of homesickness. And, even if they don't tell you during those first few weeks, they do miss you.



### Rule # 2 Write (Even if they don't write back)

Although first-year students are typically eager to experience all the 'away-from-home' independence they can in those first few weeks, most are still anxious for family ties and the security those ties bring. This surge of independence may be misinterpreted by sensitive parents as rejection, but most first year students (although 99% won't ever admit it) would give anything for some news from home and family, however mundane it may seem to you. There's nothing more depressing than a week of empty mailboxes...hint: care packages are always welcomed. (Warning: Don't expect a reply to every letter you write. The "you-write-one, they-write-one" sequence isn't always followed by college students, so get set for some unanswered correspondence.)

### Rule # 3 Ask Questions (But Not Too Many)

College first-year students are "cool" (or so they think) and have a tendency to resent interference with their new-found lifestyle, although most still desire the security of knowing someone is still interested in them. Parental curiosity can be obnoxious and alienating or relief-giving and supporting depending on the attitudes of the parents involved.

### Rule # 4 Accept Change (But Not Too Much)

Your student will change (drastically within the first months, slowly over four years or somewhere in between that pace). It's natural and inevitable, and it can be inspiring and beautiful. Remember that your student will be basically the same person you sent away to school, aside from interest changes and personality revisions. Don't expect too much, too soon. Maturation is not an instantaneous or overnight process, and you might well discover your student returning home with some of the habits and hang-ups, however unsophisticated, that you thought s/he had "grown out of". Be patient.

### Rule # 5 Don't Worry (Too Much) About Troubled Phone Calls, Text Messages or Letters

Parenting can be a thankless job, especially during the college years. It's a lot of give and take. Often when trouble becomes too much for a student to handle (a flunked test, ended relationship, a shrunken t-shirt all in one day) the safest place to turn, write or dial is home.

# THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE PROGRAM AT ALBION COLLEGE

## MISSION

A liberal arts education is central to the mission of Albion College. This four-year journey begins with a First-Year Experience (FYE), a pivotal moment in the transition from high school to college life. The

First-Year Seminar is the cornerstone of the First-Year Experience. This seminar is distinguished by its small class size, ensuring close personal attention.



Students also begin a four-year process of academic and career planning which incorporates an interdisciplinary liberal arts foundation with at least one major field of study, allowing students to develop skills necessary for lifelong learning and lives of fulfillment and promise.

## IMPACT ON STUDENTS

1. The First-Year Experience will enable all students to make a smooth and positive transition into college and experience a successful first year by developing their academic skills, refining their capacity for self-assessment and continuous growth, and supporting their integration into the campus and wider Albion community.
2. The First-Year Experience will empower all students to communicate effectively, think critically, establish effective study habits, design an undergraduate learning strategy, choose a major and minor(s), and initiate a career development plan to guide them towards graduate/professional school or a career.
3. The First-Year Experience, through its first-year seminar, will initiate students into the liberal arts tradition and the rigors of academic excellence in a challenging and collaborative learning community.
4. The First-Year Experience will establish habits of mind and patterns of decision-making that will ensure achieving optimal success throughout an Albion student's four years and lay the foundation for a fulfilling life.

## PROGRAMS

- Albion—O: Fall Orientation in August
- Common Reading Experience
- The First-Year Seminar: Liberal Arts 101
- Peer Mentoring Programs
- Academic and General Advising

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR YOU AND YOUR STUDENT

Topics below are great discussion topics between new students and parents. Setting clear expectations is helpful for all parties involved.

### AUTOMOBILE ISSUES:

- Will I have a car on campus? (which car?)
- Who pays for gas? Insurance? Repairs?
- Should repairs be made with or without parental advice?

### MONEY:

- Will I have a pre-set allowance?
- Will money be sent on a regular basis or only on request?
- Will I have a family or personal credit card and what can I use it for? Who pays for it?
- If I join a club, fraternity or sorority, will you help with my fees and dues?
- Will I have a local bank account?

### CONNECTIONS TO HOME:

**Due to the ever changing environment this fall, connecting with home might look a little different then in years past. It is still good to have those conversations related to expectations for connecting with home for this year and in future years.**

- In what way will be stay connected? Phone calls, text messages, video chats, etc?
- How often do you expect me to call home?
- What will happen to my bedroom (new use)?
- Will things left behind be put in storage or moved?
- Must I call in advance of a trip home for the weekend?
- Who pays my cell phone bill? Data Usage? Limitations?

### ACADEMIC PLANNING:

- How do you expect to be involved in my selection of a major or courses?
- With the assistance of my academic advisor, can I drop a class, change my schedule, etc. on my own?
- What (seriously) do you expect my grades to be at the end of the first semester?

### VISITS TO CAMPUS:

**Due to the ever changing environment this fall, visiting campus might look a little different then in years past. Please keep in touch with your student and updated on campus procedures for coming to campus to visit your student.**



**Write (even if they don't write back)**



## MID-SEMESTER CHECK-IN

### Relationships are changing

Relationships change over the college years. Change will occur in just the first few weeks of the year, and by mid-October it will be time to review expectations made in the summer. Connecting with your students and having conversations about how the semester is going is important and might allow you and your student to determine areas that may need attention before they grow larger.

1. Review expectations made in the summer, and renew or change. (There will be a need to review these over the winter break, and again before summer vacation).

2. When asking about grades, remember that college grading is different than high school grading. Perhaps the following questions would be appropriate:

- What classes do you like best? What makes that class good for you?
- What class is hardest for you? How are you dealing with that?
- Have you talked with any of your professors outside of class time? How is that going?

- Do they have free tutoring for that class? (...FYI, the answer is “yes”!)

- What is your professor’s name? (Engaged students will know this.)

3. College is more than just classes and books. Be sure to ask about clubs, organizations, sports, cultural events, movies, socials, and other out-of-class activities.

4. Now is the time to think ahead to expectations for family time over the winter break. What are the expectations?



During these unusual and ever changing times, checking in with your student throughout the semester is a great way to make sure they are doing well and staying on track.

