Tips for parents of new students - 10 things to keep in mind when your child starts college

1. They miss you.
Whether or not they choose to admit it, your student will most likely experience at least some homesickness. It will happen at some point, whether they are from a different state or from the Columbia area. The common view of new college students is that they are all celebrating their newfound freedom. But even if they don’t come right out and tell you, they most likely miss you. Homesickness usually hits new college students the hardest right after the wave of orientation and welcome back activities quiets down, and new students have more time on their own to reflect and think about all the changes they are now facing. Don’t ask them outright if they are homesick; however, you should be open to them when they begin to express their homesickness.

2. Keep in contact with your student, even if they don’t always write or call back.
Write and call your student often. Even though they are starting a new chapter in their lives, students still love to hear from home. Be sure to send them updates about family and friends, interesting stories from your local paper, news about their old school, family pictures, holiday cards, etc. Invite other members of the family, such as grandparents and aunts and uncles to keep in touch with your student as well. You can also try using some more convenient ways to keep in touch. Text messages, e-mails, and instant messages are an excellent way for students to stay connected to their families.

3. Ask them questions.
New students will sometimes be a bit resentful of parent interference with their new freedom and lifestyle. However, that doesn’t mean that they don’t want to know that you care about what they’re up to, or that they don’t want you to know what has been happening in their lives. Ask them open-ended questions, and listen to their answers with an open mind. Make sure they know that they can share anything with you, but that you won’t try to solve all of their problems for them. When you ask them about their classes, be sure to ask what they’re learning about, who their favorite professors are, and show your interest in their learning, and don’t just focus on what their grades are.

4. Visit them, but not too often.
Make sure you never show up for a visit unannounced. Always let your student know if you are going to stop by, that way they will be much more receptive to a visit. Your student will enjoy showing you their campus and their living space, and they will be grateful for your interest in their new environment. Family Day and Homecoming Weekend is a great time for your first visit; this way your student will have plenty of time to get adjusted to their new life at school, as well as a chance to clean their room in preparation for your visit.

5. Trust them.
Gaining independence is a difficult process for new students, one that involves a lot of trust and support from parents. Although it may be incredibly difficult, you need to trust in the decisions your child makes. You may have advice to offer from your own experiences when you were their age, and that advice may help them, but it may also create additional stress for them. Allow them to make their own decisions, and be patient with them.
6. Expect change, and help them when they need it.
Your student will change, whether it happens quickly or gradually. Although it will be a challenge for you as well as your student, it is normal, and you have to be patient with them. Sometimes your student might want to take on the world and all the issues they face without any help, and other times they might want you to help make everything better. Give your student plenty of space to grow and change. Be sure to support them when they are facing difficult choices and challenges, and show them that you trust them. This will help them to grow, and it will encourage their independence.

7. Send them mail.
All students love getting mail in their campus mailbox. Whether it is a quick note, a card, or a care package, your student will be glad to get mail, and to know that you are thinking of them, especially during the stressful times, such as midterms and finals. It can brighten a student's day when they go to their mailbox and find greeting cards, snack foods, gift cards, pictures, and other items waiting for them. Ask your student for their mailbox number, and start sending them mail at the following address:

Student’s Name
Columbia College Mailbox # (insert number here)
1001 Rogers Street
Columbia, MO 65216

8. They’re going to be nervous at first, it’s ok.
In the beginning, you will often get phone calls where your student isn’t very talkative, and gives one-word answers to all your questions. Other times your student might release all of their anxiety and frustrations about school, life, and friends. Be patient, listen with an open mind and an open heart, and be sure to withhold any judgment. This can be easier said than done, but don’t forget that you can guide your student to some of the resources offered on the Columbia College campus that can help them with their problems, such as the offices in Campus Life and tutoring services; you can even encourage them to join one of the many clubs and organizations on campus.

9. Be sure not to add any extra stress to their lives at the end of the semester.
The end of the semester is unquestionably the most stressful part of the school year for your student, with papers due and finals taking place. In many classes, a high percentage of the course grade is earned in the last month or two of the semester. Because of this, make sure not to distract your student with vacation plans, family events and celebrations, or questions about money or what they are going to major in. November-December and April-May are crucial times for your student, be sure to respect them.

10. Sign up for the parent newsletter.
In the Loop - I don’t know anything about it.