

a new chapter

How parents fit into their students' lives at college

10 Key Ways to be Supportive

Students are testing the waters and developing their own voice at college, yet they can't do it without your love and support.

1. Ask your student about what he's **LEARNING** instead of always focusing on grades. When he gets to talk about what he's learning, it helps reinforce what he's discovering in class, plus it helps him practically apply his academic learning.
2. Talk about **FRIENDS** at school without grilling her. Ask a few leading questions, like "So, what have you been up to?" or follow up by asking about a friend she mentioned in a previous conversation. Even if you haven't met these friends yet, they are a new "family" she is creating for herself and hold great importance in her life. But don't worry – you're not being replaced! It's a healthy, natural thing for young people to do.
3. Encourage your student to get **INVOLVED**. Research shows that students who engage in campus life feel more satisfied with their experience, often do better academically and are much more likely to stay to finish their degree. Getting involved helps enhance a student's sense of responsibility, a commitment to campus and a sense of *belonging*. Plus, he'll gain great leadership skills that will be helpful in getting a job after college and throughout his life!
4. Discuss **COMING HOME**, if your student lives away at school, before the first occasion arises. There will be a changing dynamic, as she'll be used to having freedom and self-responsibility at school, and may balk at the same rules she used to abide by. Talk about how to handle this, figure out where you're both willing to compromise and enjoy the fact that your visits won't have to be spent fighting over these kinds of details!
5. **LISTEN** when your student is trying to work something out. Don't interrupt with immediate solutions or advice, as figuring things out for himself is a key part of growing into adulthood.
6. By the same token, **DON'T JUMP IN** to solve things for your student when she's struggling. It's certainly fine to listen and talk things through. Yet, when it comes to action, it's really important that your student go to that office to ask questions or visit a professor during office hours to better understand why she received the grade that she did. You can challenge her to take these actions while supporting her every step of the way.
7. **SEND MAIL** when your student will be least expecting it. In the midst of stressful times, tests and a million priorities, he will welcome a piece of mail, letting him know that he's on your mind.
8. Try **NOT TO OVERCOMMUNICATE** with your student via all the various tech tools at your disposal. Emails, texts, Instant Messages, Tweets, Facebook chats, phone calls and more are all welcome! Yet, just because you can use these mediums whenever possible, it doesn't mean you have to always be in touch. It's all part of your student's growth process so she feels comfortable standing on her own feet and making decisions without always checking in.
9. Be ready to **EMBRACE CHANGE** as it comes. Perhaps your student will change political views because of an issue on campus or decide that he wants to explore another spiritual path. Change may also come in the shape of your relationship with your student. He will be developing his own voice and opinions – and you may not always see eye to eye. Yet, if you can step back and see this being part of his development, rather than open defiance, you're bound to engage in some interesting, eye-opening conversations!
10. Let your student know that you **TRUST** her. This will lead to more self-confidence and an ability to stand up for what he believes is right. He'll also be better able to say "no" in certain situations so he can maintain that sense of trust. Nothing will be perfect, yet knowing that folks back home trust and respect his decisions can go a long, long way.