



## **Making the Transition to College**

The jump to college can be stressful. Leaving for college marks a major transition in most students' lives: leaving high school; for many, leaving home; freeing yourself from parental control; and leaving old friends, activities, and ways of being. Arriving at college signifies equally significant changes: exploring a new place, becoming independent, making new friends, learning new things, making your own decisions, and establishing your own priorities.

Amidst all the excitement, many students overlook the stress involved in making so many big transitions in such a brief period of time. In anticipation of these changes, it can be helpful to think through as many of the particulars as you can in advance. The more prepared you are for college, the more ready you will be to confront new pressures with a minimum of stress, frustration, or depression.

### **The Transition Brings Change and Challenges for the College Student**

#### **Classes are challenging**

Courses are at a higher level than high-school classes and the material is presented at a faster pace. Plus, professors are likely to assign more reading, writing, and problem sets than you may not be used to. The harder work is something all first-year college students contend with, so don't think having to struggle to keep up is somehow a failing on your part. In order to give yourself an opportunity to adjust gradually to the new academic demands, choose a course load that includes some classes that will be harder for you and others that will be less intense. Spend the first few semesters refining your study and time management skills as well as learning about the various resources on campus that can help you be more successful.

#### **Fitting in**

It can be intimidating to leave the security of family and friends. When going to college, students often must leave, or give up, one group (of family and friends), then accommodate and learn about a new group. It can be stressful adjusting to new social norms, learning a new set of behaviors, and adopting a particular identity and group affiliation. On the one hand the opportunities can be exhilarating, but on the other hand it can be lonely and stressful. Feeling like you belong is important and it may take some time before the social connections click and feel right.

#### **Balancing socializing and working**

College offers an assortment of opportunities for advancement and distraction -- there are so many potential friends, parties, courses, things to do, places to go. Not knowing what direction is best and not wanting to miss out on anything, students might try to be included in everything and end up overloading themselves. Finding a balance that is comfortable and leads to success is important and may take some time.

### **Increased independence and responsibility**

Coming to college means no more curfews, no more concerned questions from parents about whether you've done your homework or where you were until 2 a.m. This may sound like the definition of freedom, but freedom itself can be stressful.

You are responsible for managing your time in college. If you cut classes and don't do assignments, no one will nag you. You may wish they had if it comes time for the test and you don't know the material

You may not have the same day-to-day support system as you did in high school. For example, how will you manage your money and debt, especially when credit card companies are bombarding you with offers? Who is around to make sure you're not getting sick or run down? Factors like stress, late-night parties, and generally pushing yourself too hard can take a toll.

### **Knowing when help is needed**

College is full of resources -- professors, tutors, counselors, and often resident advisers. In college it is up to you to initiate getting help. The good news is that once you do adjust to college life, it opens new doors to all sorts of learning -- and living.

Students may doubt their ability to handle the course work and may be bothered by new and unexpected feelings, precipitating a downward spiral. There is also an increased risk of certain disorders in the late adolescent and young adult years (e.g. depression, bipolar disorder, and eating disorder). Students may find themselves seeking out a mental health professional for the first time. The right help at the right time can prevent problems from snowballing. Students who do reach out for support often feel much better for having done so.

Try not to ignore a problem. Both academic and emotional challenges are most successfully managed early when small.

## **Suggestions for parents**

### **Foster a balance of separateness and connectedness in your relationship.**

**Expect ups and downs.** One minute college students are too busy to talk, and the next they call in tears. This back and forth is natural and expected, students and parents usually become more comfortable and confident in the students' being able to ask for the support they need before hitting crisis level, as well handling situations without parental involvement. It is helpful for the parent to give your daughter or son the space she/he needs, while reinforcing the message that you'll be available, if asked.

**Stay connected.** Little things do count. There can be some truth to "absence makes the heart grow fonder" but parents may worry that "out of sight means out of mind." So parents and students need to determine ways to stay involved in each other's lives and remember to say and do the little things that remind someone of their love. Cards sent home, care packages sent to school, pictures of events that were missed, and e-mail do provide a way to stay connected and involved.

## **Need Additional Help?**

The University of Idaho **Counseling & Testing Center** offers counseling for Coeur d'Alene based students. For more information about how to schedule an appointment, call the **Counseling & Testing Center** at **208-885-6716** [www.uidaho.edu/ctc](http://www.uidaho.edu/ctc)