Stage Three: Initial Adjustment

As the year goes on, your child will begin to develop a routine. They will become familiar with campus life and new academic and social environments. Their calls home may be full of excitement. They may call less. Ideally, they are adjusting well to their new life. It is important to keep the lines of communication open.

If your child is living on campus in a residence hall or dorm, it is completely normal for conflict to develop between roommates. Your child may be sharing a room with someone who is quite different from themselves. Most students are able to work things out when they discuss issues directly with one another or with a Resident Advisor. In a college or university, a Resident Advisor is a student who is responsible for supervising and assisting other, typically younger, students who live in the same residence hall or dorm.

If your child is a commuter, they may feel like they don't fit in with the campus community or know the campus and its resources as well as their peers. Commuters must balance their responsibilities at home and at school. It is important that they build relationships with their instructors and classmates. They can depend on outside support systems and are also able to access the school's academic and social services.

During this time, students tend to reassess their time- management strategies. They will explore majors or careers. They will make plans with their academic advisors. Some students will begin to plan to move off campus for next fall.

Conversation Starters

- Have you filled out the FAFSA or WASFA for the next school year?
- What do you like about your new classes?
- Are you doing anything different with your study habits this semester?
- Have you decided what you are doing for spring break?
- Tell me about your close friends on campus.
- Have you decided where to live next year?

Advice for Families

Families may feel some anxiety about their child's grades. Ask what changes might need to occur to ensure academic success. Ask if they have looked at academic support services that their school provides.

Stage Four: Homesickness or Loss of Confidence

With final exams finished, many students return home for winter break, and there may be concerns about how they will adjust to routines at home. For many, winter break is an opportunity to catch up on sleep and reconnect with friends they haven't seen in months. They will also begin to receive their grades and experience joy, disappointment, or relief.

Homesickness often occurs right after a vacation. Your child may become a bit insecure and have some misgivings about their new environment. Students often wonder if they belong at college or if college is really all it is supposed to be. Homesickness is normal. As with any major transition period, students will have their ups and downs. Many students feel homesick at one time or another during their first year. Here are some suggestions for ways you can be supportive:

- Reassure your child that this is NORMAL.
- Continue to listen with an open mind and be reassuring.
- Encourage them to attend events and join organizations.
- The health center on campus is an excellent, confidential resource for students who are homesick or are experiencing anxiety and depression.
- If your child lives in a dorm, encourage them to talk their Resident Advisor.

Stage Five: Acceptance and Integration

Students finally feel a part of the college community. They begin to think of it as home. Most students feel more confident with their time-management skills and experience less stress with their exams. They will also be enrolling in classes for the fall and considering options for the summer. Some students will have mixed feelings about leaving for the summer, and others will decide to stay to take classes and/or pursue summer work opportunities.

If your child will live at home for the summer, life will be different than when they were in high school. Misunderstandings and conflicts can arise. Your child will be comfortable with and used to independence, especially coming and going without checking in with anybody. You also may think you know your student's interests and identity, but you could find that he or she has made some major changes without discussing those changes with you. Communication and respect is key.

Conversation Starters

- What courses are you taking next year? Are you starting to narrow in on a possible major?
- What are you looking forward to about your living arrangements for next year?
- How do you think you have changed this year?
- What do you wish you had done differently in your first year of college?
- I am so proud of everything you have learned and accomplished this year!

Advice for Families

As your student begins to make housing decisions for next year, talk about all of the factors to consider. Pay special attention to what type of living environment will help your student be most successful academically.

A FAMILY GUIDE:

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

CONNECT WITH US

- https://gearup.wa.gov
- https://wsac.wa.gov/12th-year-campaign
- https://wsac.wa.gov/college-bound

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The first year of college is a time of transition for everyone. Students may experience these common challenges:

Financial. School and college life can be expensive. Students need to understand how to budget their finances and avoid credit card debt.

Independence. As young adults, they are now more accountable for their actions. Students have to balance school, work, a social life, sleep, and their budget. They will have more freedom, and with that comes increased responsibility.

Social. When students begin a new school, they must reestablish their social world. This may mean making new friends, learning how to live with roommates, and navigating a new environment.

Time Management. Students are expected to do more coursework outside the classroom than they did in high school. Typically, students should plan for at least two hours of studying for every one hour in class.

Academic. College will be different and more challenging than high school. Some students may be caught off guard by the difference.

Tips for Success:

- **Attend Class.** Attendance is an important factor in academic success. Unlike high school, no one is going to remind students to come to school, call when they are absent, or intervene when the absences are excessive.
- **Office Hours.** Instructors have office hours during which students can meet one on one with their professors. Office hours are for students to get help, get their questions answered, and learn more about what the professor expects.
- **Get Involved on Campus.** Students who are involved in college life are often more motivated and focused. There are intramural sports teams, residential hall activities, student government, and clubs based on extracurricular interests.
- **Campus Calendars, Course Withdrawal.** The academic calendar provides the class registration schedule and includes the withdrawal deadline. Students are able to withdraw from a class at anytime; however, the deadline on the academic calendar determines whether students can expect any money back if they withdraw in the middle of a term.

The first year in five stages.

The transition from high school to college is an important milestone. Many students, whether they live on-campus or commute, experience a wide range of emotions during their first year in college. These emotions are normal and often occur in five stages. There is no set timetable. Some students go through all of these stages before the end of their first quarter or semester, while others take longer to adjust.

Families often want to protect them from problems they may encounter. Families can help by being a source of encouragement.

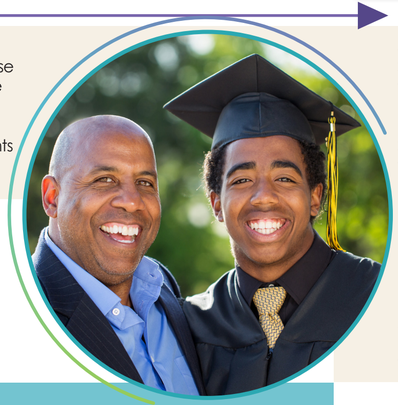
Honeymoon Period → Culture Shock → Initial Adjustment → Homesickness or Loss of Confidence → Acceptance & Integration

Stage One: The Honeymoon Period

Many students experience anxiety, anticipation, and an initial sense of freedom when they begin school. Homesickness and the desire for frequent contact with family are common. Students may also be getting to know roommates, making new friends on campus, and finding their way around. This tends to be a time when students incur many expenses for items such as textbooks, school supplies, and room decorations/furnishings.

Advice for Families

- Due to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), an institution cannot discuss with parents any student's information without permission from the student. If you expect to see your child's grades, you will need to discuss this with your child.
- You and your child may have conflicting emotions when your child begins school. Discomfort is part of transition.
- Listen with an open mind and be supportive.
- Encourage your child to ask for help when needed, attend campus welcome activities, and meet new friends.
- Express your confidence that your student will be able to successfully navigate this new environment.
- Serve as a coach instead of a problem solver.
- Talk about how often you will communicate by phone, letter, e-mail, or text message.
- Discuss the frequency of visits home and family visits to campus.
- Talk about expectations regarding academics, major choice, and careers.
- Encourage your child to set their own academic goals. Be aware that the college learning environment is very different from high school. Students may not immediately earn the same grades as they did previously.
- Discuss payment, spending, and employment options.



Conversation Starters

- What are you most looking forward to about attending this school?
- What are you most nervous about?
- What plans do you have for saying goodbye and staying connected to friends who are staying home or going to other schools?
- What plans do you have to stay in touch?
- How and how frequently should we communicate?
- How often do you want to come home?
- What is your roommate like?
- Which classes seem most interesting to you?
- Have you found a good place to study?
- What events have you attended?
- Are your finances as you had planned?
- Do you plan to get a credit card? Do you understand interest rates and how that can affect your credit history?

Stage Two: Culture Shock

Students begin to grasp the realities of adjusting to college. They are beginning to get feedback on their progress. Some will experience shock at the workload, grades on first exams, or time management problems.

Students may feel out of place and anxious. They may be dealing with the following items for the first time:

- Sharing a room with strangers.
- Budgeting time and money.
- Finding support and being a self-advocate.
- Managing a commute from home to school.
- Navigating a new community.
- Managing challenging course work and a job.

Just when you think that your child has successfully adjusted to college, you might get a Stage Two phone call, text, or email. This phase will pass. It is helpful to listen and be supportive. Remind your student that this feeling is very typical. There are resources on campus to help them. They just need to ask.

Advice for Families

- Reassure your child that they can succeed in this environment. Talk about study skills and time management, and refer to campus resources.
- Ask about study time, workload, and involvement in campus organizations/activities.
- Encourage your student to approach his or her instructors for help and consult with an academic advisor when selecting next semester's classes.
- Help your student stay connected to activities at home. Acknowledge that your student may be sad about missing family birthdays, holidays, and community events.
- Discuss plans for upcoming events, such as a trip home for Thanksgiving. Break periods are approaching quickly—how will this change things in your home?
- Send care packages with notes from home, practical items, or treats to share with roommates and friends.

Conversation Starters

- How are you managing the workload?
- What is your study schedule?
- What courses are you thinking of taking next quarter or semester?
- Are you thinking about joining any groups or clubs or activities? Which ones? Why?
- Have you met with any of your professors or teaching assistants?
- Have you accessed any student support services on campus, like the tutoring center or writing center?
- What can you do differently on your next exam/paper to do better?
- What resources does your school offer to help you with that challenge?
- How are you managing your money?