

Adjusting to your 'staying at home' college student



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In my previous articles in this series, I discussed the adjustments that parents need to make when their teen leaves for college, which includes the need to recognize that younger siblings are also having struggles. In this article, I am focusing on how parents can help their family's adjustment when their teen attends college locally and lives at home.

During my senior year of high school I applied and was accepted to a school several hours away. Late in the year, I was badly injured in a car accident, and my plans fell apart. I remained at home for a year and attended the local community college. It was the right decision, but I was devastated, as I was **READY** to leave home, be free of my parents, and do whatever first year college students do when left to make their own decisions.

Like me, countless high school graduates contin-

ue living at home after high school, rather than go away for school. Be it for financial, medical, or any of many other reasons, community colleges are often the best option for recent graduates.

In spite of this, it's important to anticipate that many of the same difficulties that arise when your teen leaves for college will exist, and your family will go through an adjustment period. Rather than risk unnecessary conflict, it's best to be proactive and have a frank conversation, in which you both share your concerns, hopes and expectations and listen to your teen's responses.

A good starting point is to help your teen make plans and set goals for this year and beyond. Much that you'd hope that he or she would transfer to U.C. Berkeley, it's crucial to recognize that your teen is an adult and needs to make decisions on his or her own. Thus your job is to guide and support him or her in whatever the goals may be (within reason,) rather

er than trying to force your agenda.

On a practical level, it's crucial to discuss changes in your teen's schedule and the impact they will have on the family. With night classes, study groups and social outings, it makes sense that your teen will be coming and going pretty frequently. Although your teen shouldn't have the same flexibility as he or she would have if living in the dorms, it makes sense to extend or discontinue curfew. At the same time, you shouldn't have to tiptoe around the house, as you get ready for work, just because your teen wants to sleep until noon.

Another topic is household responsibilities. Even though much of your teen's time will be spent outside the house, it's important that he or she be an active member of the family. If, for example, your teen has always fed the dog and taken out the trash, the responsibilities shouldn't change, just because college has begun. And if you feel

strongly about the family having dinner together on Sunday nights, it's realistic to insist that this continue.

It's also crucial to discuss finances. As much as community colleges are much more affordable than universities, it's important to recognize that your teen's expenses will increase significantly. Regardless of your expectations regarding financial contributions, it's important to discuss the issue honestly. Your teen is now an adult, and this is the perfect opportunity to educate him or her on adult responsibilities.

Ultimately, your teen's graduation and move into college, regardless of the location of his or her school, will be a period of great transition, and challenges are inevitable. In order to minimize the difficulties and shorten the adjustment period, frank conversations are important. If both you and your teen are able to speak openly and listen to the other, this period will be as easy as possible.

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