Seven Tips for Soon-To-Be College Parents

1. **Expect the unexpected.**
Your student will vacillate between many emotions. He/she may alternate between wanting to be close and pushing you away. Remember that your student is probably torn between sadness about leaving home and excitement about the adventures ahead. Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger, authors of *Letting Go: A Parents’ Guide to Understanding the College Years*, compares this behavior to that of a two-year-old: your child may run ahead of you, but he/she will still turn around to be reassured that you’re still there.

2. **Encourage independence—but offer support.**
It can be tempting to do too much for your student, especially in the light of his/her upcoming departure. Restrain yourself from handling college arrangements for him/her. If your student has a question about the college, encourage him/her to contact the appropriate office himself/herself. After all, your student will soon need to be responsible for dealing with the college bureaucracy himself/herself. Additionally, parents should support students’ decision-making about the courses they plan to take and the activities they plan to be involved in—rather than make those decisions for them. The balance between offering support and taking over can be difficult to maintain. Students themselves may want your advice sometimes and reject your advice at other times. During this time of changing roles, good communication—and a sense of humor—are essential.

3. **Form an informal support group.**
Other parents of college-bound students can be invaluable. They can reassure you that you’re not alone and give you a “reality check” about your student’s possibly erratic behavior (their students are probably acting in a similar way). You can share ideas for making your student’s last summer home a meaningful one. And after your student leaves for college, you can support each other as your way of life changes.

4. **Help your student say good-bye.**
Encourage your student to spend time with family and friends over the summer. Be there to talk when your student comes home from saying good-bye to a high school friend. Have some family get-togethers.

5. **Make plans for communication.**
Discuss with your student ways to communicate with you while he/she is at college. Many parents enjoy receiving e-mails from their students, and students often prefer this method of communication because it allows them to reach out to you on their timetable. If you’d like a weekly phone call, make that clear to your student. Also, expect the frequency of communication to vary. Some students get swept away by the activities of college life and neglect communication with their family. Others may call every day until they feel more at ease in their new life. It depends on the personality and college experiences of your student.

6. **Plan the big day.**
If possible, give your student some latitude about whether you accompany him/her to the campus. If you accompany your student, be flexible. Talk with your student ahead of time about your plans and expectations. Once on campus, brace yourself for the brush-off. Many first-year students are eager to start their new lives sans parents. Your student may be ready for you to leave before you’re ready to go. On the other hand, some students unexpectedly cling to their parents. Again, it depends on your student’s personality.

7. **Give yourself time.**
Home may seem very different without your student. Give yourself time to adjust to daily life without your student. You may grieve for a time or have a sense of time passing too quickly (or slowly). This is when talking to other parents can be especially helpful. In time, both you and your student will adjust to her being at college—just in time for your student to return for the holidays!