

Communicating with the College: Why, How and When?

WHY?

As a parent, you want the absolute best for your student, and because of this you probably struggle with when to intervene and when to steer clear of challenging situations that arise in his life. This struggle does not end when he goes to college, and recent research actually suggests parental involvement in a college student's day-to-day activities is increasing. It has become so common that Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of *Millennials Go to College*, have given this new parenting style a name—"helicopter parenting"—to signify "hovering" over a student's life.

HOW?

How can you be a partner with the college in supporting your student's personal growth and development without hovering? Below are some common college student experiences that parents can easily be pulled into, with suggestions on how to empower your student to handle each situation himself.

1. Roommate Conflict

Your son has complained to you for weeks that his roommate is messy, stays up late and interrupts his studying and sleep.

- First, encourage him to talk with his roommate about his observations, concerns and possible solutions. You can even role-play this conversation with him to help him get comfortable.
- If that doesn't work, suggest he talk with his Resident Assistant to help mediate a roommate meeting or provide strategies for conflict resolution.
- What Not to Do: Call the roommate's parents, call the Director of Residence Life, or call the President of the College – more gets done when your student goes through the proper channels.



2. Grade Conflict

Your daughter feels that a professor is grading her unfairly.

Times that contacting the college is the best course of action:

- Death of a family member
- Concern that student may harm self or others
- Alleged hazing or harassment
- If the college requests your involvement

- First, help her identify why she believes the grading is unfair. Faculty members have open office hours, so encourage her to schedule a meeting after class or stop in to share her concerns with the professor.
 - If that doesn't work, suggest she meet with her academic advisor to discuss the situation and see what other options are available to address her concern.
 - What Not to Do: Call the faculty member, call the Academic Dean, or call the Academic Advisor.
- ### 3. Minor Conduct Violation
- Your student has been found guilty of a behavioral conduct violation.
- First, breathe! Then discuss the violation, the choices made, and the consequences of his inappropriate behavior.
 - Second, advise and support him as he goes through the campus judicial process, and help him reflect on what he has learned from the experience, and how his behavior will change in the future.
 - What Not to Do: Call a lawyer, call the Dean of Students, or attend the judicial hearing.

WHEN?

There certainly are times that contacting the college directly is appropriate and necessary.

However, when possible, try to limit your contact with the college during times of crisis to seeking suggestions on how your daughter can further help herself. Challenging situations are a part of the learning process. When parents limit their involvement to suggestions and advice, students gain confidence, self-responsibility, and a skill-base that will last them a lifetime.