



WHEN YOUR CHILD GOES TO COLLEGE *THE TRUTH ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH CARE*

The transition to college is challenging for most parents but it may be even more stressful if you're concerned that your child may have mental health needs when they're away from home. Here's some things to think about if you fall into that latter category:

- Your access to information about your child's adjustment to college generally will be limited to what your child chooses to tell you. Unlike high school, where you may have had access to counseling services and teachers, in college your child's confidentiality belongs totally to them. Generally, the school will send you a packet of information prior to the beginning of the first semester that will reiterate the boundaries of your access to grades, visits to the health or counseling center- almost everything that happens on campus. While sometimes hard to accept, these restrictions are reinforced legally so you will probably get really frustrated if you try to circumvent them. So be prepared!
- Just as you should have a conversation with your child before they leave for school about the ways in which you expect they will take care of themselves physically- where to go if they get sick, need a dentist, etc.- it can be helpful to include some discussion about what they can do if they feel emotionally overwhelmed.
- Colleges usually have counseling services available, and these are helpful in crisis situations. Some students, however, are reluctant to use on campus resources because they worry about their privacy, so ask your child ahead of time if they think they would use campus resources for mental health if they were having a hard time emotionally.
- If they express reluctance, do some advance scouting to see what mental health agencies are locally available, and, if it's important to you, whether they accept your medical insurance. There's nothing more stressful in a crisis than trying to find help, and then learning it's financially inaccessible.
- If your child is currently receiving mental health treatment, work with their therapist to set up some type of private counseling before they leave for school. While there will be those counseling services available on campus, they tend to be short-term, crisis focused so you may need to find longer term services somewhere else.
- The pandemic climate has highlighted the effectiveness of virtual therapy sessions so consider having your child continue their current therapy arrangement online. Be aware, however, that finding a private place for a counseling session in a college dorm can be very challenging and can add a degree of frustration to the whole experience.

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