Making the Most of a College's Family Weekend



Wondering how your teenager is adjusting to life on campus? A university or college's family weekend can be a great opportunity for you to experience this new stage of your child's life and move past some of your empty nest worries. Use these five tips to make the most of this time together.

1. Plan ahead.

Hopefully family weekend has been on your radar ever since you helped your student move in. Local hotel rooms and restaurant reservations could fill up fast, so plan your stay and your itinerary as far ahead of time as you can. And while you want to have some time to explore campus – and if you're an alum, indulge in some nostalgia – popular events will sell out fast. Get tickets in advance for things like football games, performances, or tours, especially if younger brothers and

sisters are part of your group.

2. Empty out the closets.

Family weekends often coincide with the real start of fall. Pack up all those warm clothes and boots that your student said they didn’t need six weeks ago. You could also bring along any personal items that are taking up extra space in your garage and let your student make the grown-up decisions: keep them here in your dorm, donate them, or throw them away.

3. Go shopping.

If you’re feeling charitable, offer to help your student pick up some essentials, such as groceries or any dorm room necessities. This might also be a good opportunity to – gently – remind your child of the plan you’ve agreed on when it comes to paying for tuition and expenses, and ask if they’ve looked for a job on campus.

4. Let your student lead.

Family weekends are an opportunity for your student to be the grown-up and show you what their life at school is like. Take time to meet their new friends, eat lunch at their favorite hangouts, attend open houses hosted by their favorite professors and student organizations, and see the sights. Not every activity will be tops on your to-do list but seeing your child at home in their element could help ease some of your separation anxiety and see college life through their eyes.

5. Don’t overstay your welcome.

Even if your family is having a great time together, your student still has friends to see, work to do, and classes to study for. Though you may not be used to it, say goodbye on your child’s terms and try not to disrupt their schedule too much. Take advantage of some time apart to see more of campus or the larger city. Go for a run around the lake. Visit a

museum or schedule a special dinner with your spouse. When you are together, try to resist any obtrusive parenting urges, such as cleaning up, commenting on the wardrobe, or rearranging the furniture. If your child isn't displaying any erratic behavior or obvious warning signs that they are struggling to adjust to this transition, be happy that they're happy.

And when you're heading home and the tears have dried, be proud as well. You have raised a young adult who's hopefully on a path toward sufficiency, academic success, and gainful employment. That's no small accomplishment – which is why we've had Paying for College on your Personal Pathway for such a long time!

So, now that you've seen your college plan in action, what's next? Would you like to review any upcoming life transitions affecting your other children? Have you been eying that empty bedroom and thinking about a remodel? Or do you want to get your college student and the rest of your family together for a big summer vacation next year? We're always on call to review your financial plan and help you prepare for life's biggest moments.

This article was prepared for Aaron Larson's use.

Preparing to Send Kids to College



Between the student debt crisis, COVID-19 lockdowns, and post-pandemic changes to the workplace, it’s never been more important for students to make the most of their college experience. And if you’re a parent who’s preparing to foot the bill and hoping to turn that extra bedroom into a hobby room, it’s important that you set clear expectations for what your child needs to accomplish before graduation.

Here are three discussion points that can help you, your spouse, and your child establish some ground rules so that all of you get more value from the next four years.

1. Academic expectations.

C’s may very well earn degrees, as the old saying goes. But while your child is no longer competing for a spot in college, that doesn’t mean they should start slacking in the classroom. Middling academic performance could jeopardize a scholarship your child earned. It could also make it more difficult to secure spots in selective classes and programs later in college – particularly if a post-graduate degree is part of

the plan. Moreover, if your A student is suddenly struggling to get by, that could be a sign that he or she isn't taking classes seriously or is dealing with mental health issues that you should address as a family.

Beyond engaging in their classwork to learn, students should use college to sharpen skills that will help them succeed in the workforce: time management, collaboration, perseverance, focus, and curiosity. Push your child to do more than get by and they'll learn how to push themselves toward greatness.

2. Financial expectations.

In addition to building good work habits, college is also an opportunity to teach your child good money habits. Even if you can afford to pay for tuition, room, and board, you might have your child contribute to total costs as well. Having some skin in the game might motivate your child to put in that extra effort to excel.

Of course, the costs of college don't stop once the tuition and housing bills get paid. What is your child's plan for covering basic living expenses? Have a conversation about part-time work, setting a monthly budget, the importance of saving and investing early, and using debt responsibly. This last point is especially important as many credit card companies barrage freshman with enticing introductory offers including fine print they may not understand. It's likely your student will have enough debt to worry about when they start working without adding a high-interest credit card bill into the mix.

3. Networking expectations.

For motivated students who want to build a glide path from the classroom to a good job, the resources at a college or university are almost endless. High achievers who demonstrate a commitment to hard work can form invaluable relationships with professors, administrators, counselors, alumni, and other

mentors. Many schools have strong connections to local companies, community organizations, technical certification programs, and government offices.

Joining student organizations can help students connect with their peers and start addressing issues both on campus and in the broader community. And all these contacts and experiences can be resources when it’s time to start applying to graduate school or looking for a first job. Talk to your child about how they plan to make these important connections and start cultivating their first professional network.

Ultimately, college will be what your student makes of it. Once you’ve set your expectations, you’ll have to give your child some space to find their best way to meet those expectations and prepare themselves for adult life.

We can’t help with homework, but if you’d like to set up an appointment before move-in day, we’d be happy to sit down with you and your child to help him or her get started on the path to long-term financial success.

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