

Navigating Your Student's First Semester

The first-year of college is a period of transition as students learn to live on their own, meet new social, academic and personal challenges, and encounter new ideas and new people. While there have been other transitions in your student's life, this one is likely to be unique in that for the first time, you must witness these changes from a distance. Having some idea of the challenges your student will face can help you respond effectively. While no two students will experience first year in quite the same way, the chart below outlines some of the predictable high and low moments for a typical first semester.

<u>Time</u>	<u>Typical Experiences</u>	<u>Possible Responses</u>	<u>What Parents Can Do</u>
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students move into dormitories, say good-bye to families • First meeting of advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement • Fear • Loneliness • Homesickness • Self-doubt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Encourage independence while reassuring your student that you are still part of his/her life • Listen to student's concerns. Don't try to talk them out of loneliness, homesickness, or fear. Rather, let them know you have confidence in them. Remind them that these are normal feelings that are experienced by many students. • Encourage your student to view this time of life as an opportunity for discovery and growth. • Inquire about specific events, i.e.: "How was the book discussion?" "How have you set up your room?"
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend classes, receive syllabi, meet professors and classmates • Begin campus job • Class add/drop period • Begin to establish relationship with roommate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed by academic expectations • Difficulty learning to live with someone's habits. • Homesickness • Worry about growing apart from family and old friends • Enjoying new independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Stay in touch – send your student an email or text to let them know you are thinking of them. • Show genuine interest in student's experiences. • Encourage your student to get to know a variety of people • Encourage communication with roommates • Avoid feeding fears • Encourage student to stay on campus for first few weekends
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Settling into class/work routine • Dormitory socials • Exploring opportunities for campus involvement • Developing time management habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions about identity—where do I fit in here? • Homesickness • Becoming more familiar with campus • Enjoying classes, excited by new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Inquire about course content, show interest in what they're learning • Encourage involvement on campus
Weeks 3 & 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First papers, tests due • Developing study habits, forming study groups • Trying to keep up social activities, work and meet academic demands • May be neglecting sleep, health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress • Fatigue • Less homesick • Feeling a part of campus • Life and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Show interest – ask about how classes are going • Send small care package—healthy snacks, herbal tea, or a small surprise

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Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First papers and tests returned—reality check on academic performance • Sickness following lack of sleep, poor health habits and stress • Roommate tension may grow as stress increases and initial courtesy wears off 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappointment with academic performance • Frustration—I always got A’s in high school • Anger at professors • Self-doubt • Missing home and past life, especially if sick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Avoid feeding negative feelings of inadequacy or anger. • Communicate high expectations as well as realistic perspective on college grades. Remind student (and yourself) that college is more demanding than high school. • Engage student in reflection about academic performance—i.e. “What do you think you did wrong?” “What can you do differently to do better on the next paper or test?” • Encourage student to seek help from professor or schedule a tutoring appointment • If student is sick, encourage them to get help in the Health Center
Weeks 6 - 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-term exams • Mid-semester grades issued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excitement about going home for break • Stress • Difficulty managing social and academic demands • Sadness at parting from First Year Workshop classmates and instructor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Discuss mid-semester grades with student. Listen. Encourage the student to seek help from professors in courses that are challenging. Remind them that it is not too late to make changes. • Encourage student to talk to their advisor about mid-semester grades
Weeks 9 - 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisement and pre-registration • Thinking about declaring/changing major • May be running short of money • Final papers, projects assigned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety if still unsure of major • Frustrated if unable to get into desired courses • Stressed with demands of work, school and social life. If student hasn’t developed good time management by now, it shows. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Discuss interests, career goals. Don’t push student to declare a major if they are not ready. Encourage student to visit the Career Center to explore majors and potential careers. • Inquire about courses for next semester. Show interest. • Remind student that Thanksgiving Break is coming up. Include them in planning for the holiday.
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanksgiving Break • Connect with old friends • Sleep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relief • Excitement at seeing old friends • May be reluctant to go back to school after the holiday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Expect student to spend some time with family, but leave enough time for them to visit with high school friends • Do laundry, cook favorite dishes, make them feel special.
Weeks 13 & 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final papers, projects due • Studying late into the night • Relationships can be strained by stress – friends, roommate, significant other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad about returning to school after Thanksgiving Break • Overwhelmed by all that needs to be done in the next two weeks • Excited about social activities • Fatigue and stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Help student maintain perspective and realistic expectations • Discuss family Christmas plans • Another good time for a care package—gift card to a local restaurant, coffee shop, or a fun local experience
Week 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Exams • Packing to go home • Christmas shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety about first college finals • Fatigue and stress • Excited to be going home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen and ask open ended questions • Let student know you’re proud of him or her for having a successful first semester • Establish ground rules for Christmas break. Include them in discussion of family holiday plans.