

Transitioning from High School to College

Spring is finally here and graduation is right around the corner. This is a very exciting time for youth as they achieve this major milestone. Many are looking forward to going on to college and starting a new chapter of their lives. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2015, 69.2% of high school graduates enrolled in college immediately following high school. Though this is an exciting time, transitioning to college can be challenging and overwhelming. From 2009-2015, only 59% of students completed a bachelor's degree at the same college where they started in a 6-year period. Parents are



more important than ever to prepare youth for college and provide support throughout the transition.

College often marks the beginning of the transition from childhood to adulthood. Going to college may mean moving away from home for the first time. Whether students choose to live on campus or off campus, students are faced with new responsibilities and opportunities. It is now up to the student to make sure their basic needs are met. They will also have opportunities to meet new people, join new clubs or participate in new activities. The opportunities can be

exhilarating and also daunting for some. There are also significant pressures related to social situations and academics. As their new social life grows so does the likelihood they will be exposed to alcohol, drugs and sex. Students will likely be faced with many choices that will challenge their values and beliefs throughout their college experience that can shape who they become in adulthood. Furthermore, there is pressure to succeed academically and choose a career path. The increase in responsibilities and abundant pressures can cause significant stress and increase risk of mental health disorders.

A survey by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors found that 70% of directors reported an increase in psychological problems on campus over the past year (2012). Their top concerns are anxiety (41.6%), depression (36.4%) and relationships (35.8%). This makes sense considering 75% of individuals with an anxiety disorders experience symptoms before 22 years of age (National Institute of Mental Health). Additionally, suicide is still the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 15-34 (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention).

There are numerous resources available for students on and off campus to help students manage stress and develop strategies to cope with a mental health disorder. There are preventative strategies that can be used as well. The first step is helping youth identify when they are struggling and encourage them to seek help. Second, youth need to be educated on what resources are available. Parents also need to be aware of the warning signs and resources available.

Know the warning signs:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/depression-symptoms-and-warning-signs.htm>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>

Tips for parents to help prepare youth for college:

- Help youth develop life skills, like how to eat well, set a sleep schedule or use a laundry machine
- Provide strategies on how to cope with stress
- Educate yourself and your child on the resources available on campus (i.e., health clinic, student services)
- If your child already has a mental health diagnosis or health condition, help make arrangements for the services they need
- Discuss values and beliefs to help them prepare for social pressures they may face
- Encourage youth to join a club or organization on campus
- Provide listening ear to discuss any fears or concerns they may have
- Determine times to talk on the phone or visit in person throughout first semester
- Be understanding of mistakes and give them space to find solutions to problems

References:

<http://www.apa.org/advocacy/higher-education/mental-health/index.aspx>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-transition-college/201708/essential-parenting-tasks-healthy-college-transition>

<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40>