

Maximize Your First-Year College Student's Experience From Home

September is a time that families are usually getting excited and anxious about sending their recently graduated seniors off to their first year of college. However, in 2020 we find ourselves in an unprecedented time with both families and schools managing unforeseen stressors. The strategies below are an effort to support you and your college student during their first year of college at home.

- **Listen:** Take the time to listen to your student's expectations for themselves and the expectation they may have of you as their main support. Consider check-ins to see what you can do different to be more supportive.
- **Have Empathy:** Remember your college student is in a time of transition and the pandemic has stripped them of their long-anticipated dreams of independence and campus life.
- **Affirm Their Experiences:** Given the climate of our world it is important to have conversations with your college student about their experience of things and allow them to grieve the loss of all the benchmark experiences they will be deprived of because of COVID-19.
- **Encourage Social Connections To Others & Creativity:** Encourage your student to commiserate with their friends and peers about their experiences as another sounding board. Encourage your student to be creative in expressing themselves. They can use different media such as music, art, poetry, or the internet. They can join student clubs that have virtual activities.

- **Give Them Space:** Give them the space to be an adult and do things in their time. This can include helping them make a work space in the home or encouraging them to create a schedule that works best for them.
- **Respect of Time:** In this time of social distancing it may seem that students have plenty of time on their hands, but being in their first year of college will require them to develop new study and coping strategies. The adjustment will take some time and require that they figure things out themselves. Ask to schedule time with your college student so they recognize that you value their time and space. This will also provide them with a greater sense of autonomy.
- **Communicate your Experience:** Sharing your feelings and thoughts, either with your college student or separate support system, can model healthy coping. It can also help you to manage stress and improve communication skills.
- **Lots of Love:** Make them feel good about the correct steps they've already taken. Then feel free to give more suggestions if needed. Do your best to affirm your student's experience. Try not to minimize their current experience or compare your student's experience to yourself or others that are dealing with the impact of the pandemic.
- **Connect to Resources:** Encourage your student to learn about all the available mental health and academic resources available online or in the college community as well as near your home through your health insurance. Let them know that you understand how hard it is to be a college student, especially during this unprecedented time, and remind them that they don't have to go through it alone. There are many free resources available to them.