

parenting a college freshman

by Wanda Kidd, CBFNC Collegiate Engagement Coordinator

Having sent a son and daughter off to college and as a campus minister who has received many other people's children, there are a few parenting tips I would like to share with you. I am aware that our culture says that our role as parent is to make sure that our children are safe and happy, so many of these ideas will be challenging to hear and harder yet to enact.

However, regardless of our hyper-vigilant parenting ideals, it is important to remember that parenting young adults is very different from parenting children or even adolescents.

Parenting young adults requires a shift in the relationship between parent and child. As challenging as it is, there must be a belief and trust that you have done enough to allow them to thrive on their own. You need to trust your daughters and sons to utilize the vast resources you have invested in them. In addition, as Christians, we have the power to lean into our faith in Christ because we have graciously been entrusted with the rearing of these children of God.

So throughout the summer, while purchasing all of the gadgets for residence hall living and taking that last great family vacation, here are some discussion starters, things to pray about, and actions to take before you actually leave for campus:

- Agree to talk on the phone only once a day for the first month. They need time and space to find their place on campus and in their new community.
- Send care packages, notes, and letters, and sign them up for the church newsletter.
- Have a frank conversation about money with a budget for disposable income. Except for emergencies, stick to the amount of money you agreed on.
- Teach them basic life skills such as how to do laundry and simple food prep.
- Talk about the necessity and the value of going to class and turning in assignments in a timely fashion. They do not get a second chance for a first semester.
- Give them permission to explore their new world — with opportunities to fail as well as succeed — and provide a soft place to land if absolutely needed.
- Without projecting your own fears or failures, have a conversation with your son or daughter about the things you wish you had done differently as a freshman.
- Ask your pastor or youth minister to have a class(es) with pending students about what to look for in healthy relationships and how to practice conflict resolution.



Give them permission to:

- Make new friends and have challenging experiences;
- Go to the mental health center if they need to talk to someone about issues that are troubling them;
- Seek help through student support services if they have learning concerns;
- Go to a variety of churches and claim their own faith journey;
- Speak directly to their professors about questions they have before it becomes a crisis; and
- Tell you if they need your help, with your promise not intrude into their life unnecessarily.

Taking your college student to campus this August will be an exercise in faith and grace. Just ask the manager of the local steakhouse where we stopped for lunch after dropping off our son at UNC. His innocent question, “Is it just the two of you?” triggered a sobbing, “Yes it is,” from me. As embarrassing as it was, I did not tell my son the story for years. It was important not to burden him with my grief.

While university staff will give you advice and help you understand how the collegiate system works, what will sustain you in the days that follow will be prayer, a community of faith, and a new relationship with an amazing young adult.