

Letting Go While Staying Connected

Parents frequently ask, "What can I do to support my daughter or son" or "What things should we be prepared for?" While every family relationship is unique, we have observed some common themes over several years of living and working with college students. We offer our suggestions with the hopes that you may find some of them helpful.

A Time of Transition

College is a period of transition not only for your son or daughter but for you and the other members of your family. During this time of transition your son or daughter (student) will still continue to need your support. Parents can help by being supportive and trusting, while encouraging independence and responsibility.

Accept that you won't know every detail of your student's life. Most students come to college having lived in a somewhat structured environment. It is important to realize that although your student may never have lived away from you before, going to college is an exciting and important step in his/her maturation process. The values and ethics you have instilled will help your student make good choices and decisions. It is extremely helpful for you to talk about this with your student throughout their first year at the institution.

Even at Earlham, where we believe that we are a small community, it can seem like a large place, unlike anyone's home, your student will actually be living in an environment where staff understand the developmental process and transitional issues experienced by college students. Our goal is to help students adjust to life at Earlham. This will require some effort on the part of your student, as staff depend on students to come forward if they need assistance.

Helping Your Student Manage Concerns

Learning to successfully manage concerns in college is an important part of the collegiate experience and becoming an adult. If your student reports difficulties associated with the residence hall experience, we urge you to encourage him/her to take personal responsibility for seeking resolution. Show concern about their lives and understand their struggles. Ask questions, but try not to invade their privacy. Often students will let you know what is happening, but at their own pace and timing. Encourage your student to get to know the Resident Assistant (RA) on the floor, and their Area Director (building director).

For the majority of your student's life you have been right there to help make decisions and choices. As a college student your student will need to be more independent and self sufficient. Although they will still want to talk about their experiences, you need to empower your student to solve their own problems by offering guidance, encouraging independence, and trusting your student's

decisions. Handling difficult situations for them only impedes their development. Since students can and do resolve most of their own concerns, parental involvement is usually not necessary. However, should you need to become involved, please feel free to contact our office (765) 983-1317. Our staff will direct you to the person best able to respond to your questions. If we can not accommodate a special request, we will provide an explanation of our policies and procedures.

Getting Along With a Roommate

Roommate conflicts are natural and healthy. Living in the residence halls at any college include learning to live with a roommate. This experience will help your student to learn essential skills such as communication and boundary setting. We have systems in place to address roommate concerns. You can help this process by challenging your student to actively work through the issues, instead of avoiding them or looking for easy answers. Changing roommates is often not the best solution, so helping your student seek alternative solutions, will enhance the learning that can come from this experience. There is an RA on each floor that has been trained to handle roommate issues. The RA or your student can also ask for assistance from the Area Director when necessary.

Homesickness

Homesickness can be one of the hardest areas to help your student move past. For your student, life has changed and will never be the same. The first two weeks of the year are filled with many activities that help people get connected. Your student needs to take advantage of those opportunities in order to become a successful member of their new community. Throughout the year it is important to write letters, and send food and care packages, a sure sign of support and concern. You have no idea how excited students get when these arrive. But don't hover over the mailbox waiting for a letter in return. Students are curious about what you are up to and may expect to know about what you are doing but are less inclined to let you know what they are doing. It is not unusual for your student to want to come home occasionally during their first year, but if they want to come home every weekend try to find out why. Your student may be struggling with the social aspects of on-campus living. Encourage them to give it time and get out and meet people.

During the first semester of college it is normal for your student to experience...

- Conflict with their roommates or floor mates
- Homesickness and anxiety about events occurring at home or with family members
- Difficulty adjusting to college academic expectations
- Challenge making new friends and reevaluating relationships with high school friends
- Difficulty making positive personal decisions

- Hesitation to access college resources for academic and personal support
- Difficulty managing their time and responsibilities
- Feeling unprepared to accept personal responsibility for their behaviors

Helping Them Stay Informed

You have probably already realized that the Earlham College uses e-mail as a primary method of communication. Please remind your student to pay attention to e-mails sent to them from the College. It will also be helpful to remind your student to set up the voicemail on his/her room phone. This will make it possible for both you and the Office of Residence Life to leave messages for your student if necessary. We realize that many students bring cell phones to campus; they should inform the College at course registration of their cell number as an alternative method for contacting them.

You can help your student to adjust to college life by...

- Agreeing upon regular communication such as once a day, week, etc.
- Agreeing how often they will visit home and you will visit them
- Sending care packages, e-mails, and letters
- Allowing them to experience minor to moderate degrees of stress and anxiety.

Community Expectations at Earlham

Many parents and students come to Earlham with preconceived notions of campus conduct, campus policies, and the law. These preconceived notions are often based on someone's memories and/or assumptions. But every college has to abide by federal regulations; must respect the particular laws of its home state and municipal venue; and has its own traditions, regulations, and institutional integrity. If parents know more about institutional and legal expectations, they can reinforce the positive teachings of Earlham and help their students avoid complications. Rules and regulations are designed to protect the rights of students and encourage individual and community responsibility. They exist for the following reasons:

- To support the requirements of local, state, or federal laws
- To provide for the health, safety, and security needs of residents
- To allow students the opportunity to sleep, study, and pursue their academic endeavors without undue interference from disruptive community members.

To learn about the community standards at Earlham, consult the Residence Life web site at: <http://www.earlham.edu/~sas/reslife/> and the Student Conduct web site, the section "Living in Community": <http://www.earlham.edu/handbook/student/content/community/>.

Academic Life at Earlham

Remember your student is now in college and the academic expectations are rigorous. While your student was in high school you could monitor how much time was spent on academic work but now, they are the masters of their own time and energies. Talk with your student about how they plan on balancing this new freedom to ensure that they succeed academically. Be careful to not make them feel like you do not want them to have fun, but rather that you want to help them succeed socially and academically. Ask very pointed questions that demand answers greater than "things are ok." Your student may not tell you everything that is going on, however if you stay interested, they will know that you are there and will come to you when he/she really needs you.

It is normal for students who receive A's in high school to see their grades drop a little. This may come as a shock to both you and your student, given that they were always one of the best in their high school. Your student is experiencing a life-transition from high school to a college, and for many students a temporary drop in grades is typical. Don't let your student get depressed or discouraged, instead encourage them to get help. Tutoring, study skills workshops, and other academic support is readily available for first year students. Students who seek assistance from the various campus resources typically get back on track and do fine.

"The Phone Call"

Be prepared for "the phone call." Often it comes just after midterms or near the end of the first term, when work is piling up, or grades aren't what was hoped for, your student may feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as well as in the past. Your student may be upset and chances are he/she is going to call you. It's important that you don't panic; remember that this is normal, and as much as you'd like to alleviate the stress, you can not (and should not) "fix this" for him/her. Your student will rely on you to be calm and reassuring about their ability to successfully work through the challenges. Encourage your student to seek help from the campus resources that are available.

Some experiences or behaviors for your student may not be normal, please utilize us as a resource if your student

- Experiences sudden, dramatic changes in mood, behaviors, or attitude
- Identifies experiences that indicate they may be experiencing harassment, threats, or intimidation
- Indicates that they have been the victim of a crime
- Is not in regular, agreed upon, communication with you

Returning Home

Understand that your student may have difficulties returning home on holidays after experiencing life on his/her own. For the last several months he/she has become accustomed to *only* his/her own daily routine - not the family's, and he/she has not been living with the house rules that may have been in existence in your home. Sometimes they come home with new expectations for family members. It's a transition time for everyone.

And Finally

Check out the Earlham Events Calendar at <http://www.earlham.edu/cgi-bin/we/ec/webevent.cgi?cmd=openecal&cal=cal3&> to learn about events at Earlham. Be knowledgeable about campus resources. Visit the Earlham College web site often: <http://www.earlham.edu/> read the plethora of materials that came to your home as your student was preparing to begin at Earlham.

The residence halls are more than just a place where your student lives. Developing your student to be an independent adult who possesses skills that will help him/her to become employable and productive workers is central to the student's residence hall experience. Your willingness to partner with us as your student experiences normal residence hall occurrences will help him/her to develop more quickly and successfully.

You may also call us to consult regarding your student's transition.

Residence Life (Housing Office)	765/983-1317
Bundy/Hoerner Halls – Area Director Office	765/983-2601
Barrett/Earlham/Olvey-Andis – Area Director Office	765/983-1244
Warren/Wilson/Mills – Area Director Office	765/983-1574
Campus Houses – Assistant Director	765/983-1606
Student Development Office	765/983-1311
Dean of First Year Students	765/983-1451