Supporting Students through Crunch Time

This is an intense time for students, as they finish final projects, start saying their goodbyes and prep for final exams. How can you help them during this stressful and emotional time? Here are some ideas…

Understand. Your student may not be in touch as much during this busy time because he’s off studying at the library, working on a group project or spending time with friends. Try to understand the communication gaps and be there when he does reach out.

Cheer Him/Her On. Some students may not be feeling super confident right about now, as the academic work piles on and they have to “prove” what they’ve learned during final projects and exams. So, be a cheering section – through words, supportive emails & texts, packages and more. This support can be critical as your student finishes up the year on a high note.

Listen. Sometimes that’s all any of us need – a sympathetic, listening ear as we pour out how we’re feeling. This may be especially true for students who have to say goodbye to graduating or transferring friends. That can be a lot of emotion to deal with, on top of the academic load.

April and May can be the source of many highs (Campus events! Spending time with friends! Learning about scholarships/summer jobs!) and also some lows (Studying all the time. Worrying about grades and money. Saying goodbye to great friends.). Your support and care can help your student navigate this emotional, intense time so that she comes out healthy and positive on the other side.

Care Package Possibilities

Want to send a caring care package? Here are some things your student may love to see:

- Photos of the family pet
- Healthy snacks (nuts, popcorn, sunflower seeds)
- A pack of new highlighters or pens
- A piece of bubble wrap to “pop” as a stress-reliever
- A restaurant gift card to get off campus for a bit
- A note describing something fun you can both look forward to doing together when the term is done
Move-out Prep

Students living in the residence halls need to go through the proper procedures in order to check out – and avoid room charges. Since that time is almost here, sharing these tips with your student can help make the process smooth and simple:

**Don’t Ignore It.** The check-out process isn’t optional – failure to comply with hall policies will likely result in an improper checkout charge. Students need to turn in their keys/cards and sign out of their rooms officially. Ignoring the process just makes the aftermath messy – and expensive.

**Go to Informational Meetings & Read Flyers.** The residence hall staff will pass out information about checkout and the process students need to follow. Encourage your student to go to informational meetings, read the materials and ask questions!

**Make a Checkout Appointment with Your Student Staff.** Students should take a look at their final exam schedule and plan their move-out accordingly. Residents are often asked to make an appointment with their staff member to check out. Encourage them to stick to this timeframe out of respect for the staff’s schedule – and to make sure that, when they’re ready to leave, there is a staffer ready to help. Otherwise, they may have to wait awhile when all they want to do is hit the road for the summer!

**Clean the Room!** Once students start packing and moving things around, the giant dust bunnies are bound to make themselves known. Encourage students to clean as they go so that they don’t have a big mess to contend with when they’re ready to check out. And leaving a room filthy is not only disrespectful to the kind cleaning staff who have helped your student all year, there is also a hefty charge associated with it.

**Think About Other “Little Things.”** Furniture that was in the closet all year needs to be put back on the floor. Tape residue on the walls, floors and doors needs to be removed. These “little things” add up.

**Know What You’re Signing.** Once the room condition has been assessed, your student will probably be asked to sign her room contract, saying that she agrees with the assessment. Make sure that she pays attention to what it is that she’s signing so there are no surprises over the summer.

**Emotions May Surface**

Saying goodbye to friends and moving on can be emotional for many students. Be prepared that move-out day won’t be all about the tasky things – it’ll likely involve seeking out friends, swapping goodbyes and more.

More Move-Out Thoughts

→ **The Way Home.** How will your student get home? In his own vehicle? Will you borrow a truck or van to pick her up?

→ **Storing Belongings.** Most residence halls don’t allow students to store items over the summer. So, if your student is moving off campus, can he leave some bigger items – carpets, furniture, etc. – in that space, even if he isn’t yet paying rent? Or will you need to rent a storage space?

→ **Having Enough Containers.** Boxes, trash bags and other containers are often at a premium during the end of the year. Make sure your student is well-equipped to start packing so that doesn’t need to happen on the actual move-out day! Consider using suitcases and duffel bags, too.

→ **Stuff Disposal.** It’s important that students find out how to discard and recycle unwanted items within the halls. They can’t just leave items in their room or the hall, so encourage your student to talk with residence hall staff ahead of time.
Managing Priorities

Students often have multiple priorities on their plate, yet they may not always have the skills or incentive to manage them all well. You can pose some simple questions that may get them thinking about priorities in other ways…

What’s Hovering Over Your Head? Remind your student how great it can feel when that task that’s been hovering over him for months is finally completed. The sense of freedom is its own reward!

Who is Waiting on You? Thinking about priorities in terms of how they impact others can provide some students with the incentive to finish what they started. Knowing that a friend, a sibling or a mentor is in a tough spot because you haven’t done something may be just the nudge that some students need.

What’s an Indication of Your Best Self? We all have something we want to do as a way to demonstrate our best self, whether it’s committing to a volunteer gig, mending a relationship or finishing up a group project in a quality way. Asking your student the question in this context can help her think about how a task reflects her character, rather than “just something I have to do.” And sometimes that can be one of the best motivators around.

You can’t control how your student handles priorities or even that he’ll rank them in the same order that you do. Yet, you can pose thoughtful questions to help him see cause and result from some varied angles.

5 Ways to Help Students Deal with End-of-the-Year Conflict

Toward the end of the academic year nerves can fray and tempers can flare, as emotions and stress toy with our better judgment. To help your student deal positively with end-of-the-year conflict and anxiety, consider sharing these simple tips:

Don’t Turn to Alcohol. Getting intoxicated sometimes feels like a quick fix, yet our reactions under the influence are rarely pretty. Anxiety and anger can come out in destructive ways like vandalism, getting in fights and putting ourselves in compromising positions when inhibitions are down.

Check Your Reactions. Do you fly off the handle when your neighbor plays his music too loud? Do you yell at your roommate for waking you up? Yes, you’re certainly entitled to your reactions. Just be sure you’re not overreacting due to pent up stress. The old adage of counting to 10 before opening your mouth holds a lot of wisdom. You’re less likely to say something you’re going to regret.

Don’t Burn Bridges. Sure, telling someone off who has been bugging you all semester has a certain appeal. Yet, burning that bridge can easily backfire, as that person may know someone in a student leadership position or a potential employer. And when what you’ve said is taken out of context in a retelling, you are the one who winds up looking like the bad guy.

Preserve Relationships. If you do get upset and react all over someone else, apologize quickly and genuinely. None of us are perfect and there are going to be some relationship missteps. Your actions after the fact can make a world of difference in preserving a relationship. Ignoring it is cowardly. Facing it is true.

Know Your Tipping Point. Chances are that you’re quite in tune with those issues that trigger your anger and push your buttons. So, avoid those conflicts when possible. And, if you can’t, have a strategy that keeps you from exploding, whether it’s taking a few deep breaths, walking away or telling yourself, “It’s not worth it, it’s not worth it.”
Spring Safety Smarts

This springtime, as the weather warms and students “let loose,” there are some safety tips to help them keep in mind…

Crowd Hopping. Whether they’re at a festival or a Phish concert, it takes a heightened sense of awareness to stay safe in a crowd. Let students know that it’s important to keep their money/wallet in a front pocket so that it’s harder to lift. Leaving personal items of value to mark a spot – such as a phone in the pocket of a sweatshirt – is asking for trouble. And keeping a clear head is key so your student is prepared for any “what ifs?” that come with unpredictable crowds, from riots to people intending harm.

Warm Weather Smarts. After a winter of shivering, heat may be the last thing on anyone’s mind. Yet, it’s important to stay hydrated, to wear sunscreen, to don a hat for sun protection and to take it easy exertion-wise so heat stroke or heat exhaustion don’t strike. When doing service outside, playing sports or just hanging out, these warm weather issues can sneak up quickly as the sun beats down.

Alcohol Temptations. Drinking is often associated with warm weather fun, from barbecues to pool parties to concerts. Yet, there’s certainly the underage issue for everyone to take into consideration. Plus, for those who are of legal drinking age, they may be tempted to provide alcohol to underage folks, putting them in a social host position that comes with lots of liabilities. When it comes to alcohol, students need to be smart on many levels and keep their wits about them so they don’t get injured jumping into a pool, make bad decisions from strangers who could easily slip something into them, are careful about being alone with people they don’t know and who don’t walk by themselves at night. Remind students to look out for one another and not to put themselves in compromising positions. It could end badly.

For all these warnings, it is possible for students to enjoy the spring as long as they stay smart, keep their heads and look out for one another. Giving your student a few safety reminders now can help him think twice when springtime temptations arise.

Keeping a Clear Head

It’s very important for students to keep their head about them by not getting intoxicated or being under the influence of drugs during spring celebrations. That way they can enjoy themselves, look after their friends and, most importantly, keep themselves out of harm’s way.

Being a Career Coach

If your student is job searching, you can support him by serving as a coach in the process. Ways to do that include…

→ Practicing interview questions
→ Asking the tough questions:
  • What are you interested in doing?
  • Why?
  • What matters to you?
  • What does “valuable work” mean to you?
→ Giving feedback on his resume
→ Encouraging him to come up with questions for prospective employers
→ Developing a job search strategy with him

Career coaching is about supporting your student as she job searches, rather than doing things for her. Think about how an athletic coach operates. Challenge, support and care are your roles, while the searching is up to her.