

Mendon Pediatrics

Things Parents Should Tell Their Children Before They Go To College

General

- Make sure your child has health insurance and keeps his/her card with him/her at college. This coverage should be over and above what the student health service covers.
- Encourage use of the student health service for acute illness, preventative care and counseling services.
- Your child should take a list of regularly taken medications and have extra prescriptions and the name of the pharmacy to use for refills.
- If your child has a chronic medical condition, make sure you identify a specialist near the college before the semester begins. It is hard to find someone on an emergency basis.
- Make sure your child knows his/her whole medical history—allergies, diseases, etc.
- Make sure your child has a copy of his/her updated immunization records.

Medical Care

- A small medicine kit comes in handy and should include Band-Aids, gauze, tape, acetaminophen or ibuprofen, allergy meds, and any items specific to your child's medical needs.
- Discuss with your child how to care for the symptoms of a common cold or flu including knowing when it is appropriate to call you or to go to the student health service.
- Stress that an elevated temperature of more than 101 degrees for more than 24 hours warrants a call to the student health service nurse.
- Sleep deprivation and all-nighters do not improve grades or health. Most of college students' illnesses are related to lack of sleep.
- Provide your child with accurate information about nutrition to withstand all the fad diets. Vitamins do not replace good nutrition, they are only supplements. It is not imperative that each freshman gain the "freshman 15" pounds.
- Also remind your son/daughter of the importance of daily exercise for weight and stress control.
- Sexually transmitted diseases refer not only to AIDS, but also includes herpes, chlamydia, genital warts, syphilis, gonorrhea, and hepatitis B. Students (male and female) who don't use contraceptives or who don't insist that their partner do so are playing with fire. While oral contraceptives prevent pregnancy, they are ineffective against STDs. Therefore, your sexually active son/daughter should be using both condoms and a birth control method.
- Consider a gynecology appointment for college girls. All girls over 18 years old should see a gynecologist, even if they are not sexually active. Daughters who are sexually active should have regular pelvic exams. Also, make sure that your daughter knows how to do monthly breast self-examinations.
- Inform your sons on how to do their monthly testicular self-examinations and what to do if a lump is felt.

- Remind them that fatigue and stress can lead to illness. Most fatigue is not mono; most diarrhea is not colitis; and most headaches are caused by poor nutrition, sleep deprivation, too much caffeine, smoking, or drinking.

Student Life

- Sex, sexuality, alcohol, drugs, independence and finances will confront every college student. Is your child ready for these issues? Discuss these points and give very specific examples of your expectations regarding each of these subjects. Also, have a specific plan related to finances and be careful with giving your son/daughter a credit card with unlimited spending while they are away.
- Roommates are not always perfect matches. They don't have to be your child's best friend. Give-and-take is an important message to carry to college.
- Tell college students to make use of campus security and police. Things do get stolen in the dorms. Remind them to lock their rooms and all important items. Also, encourage the use of campus escorts if walking through campus by themselves late at night.
- If your child has a learning disability, inform the school.
- College is a place and time to further education. But it also is a time to explore ideas and possibilities. Encourage your child to become active in clubs and/or sports.
- College means more freedom, therefore more self-discipline is needed. There is less time spent in traditional classrooms and more time spent on homework, studying, and research. There will be much less opportunity for extra credit, but more opportunity for enlarging the mind.
- Cults, racism, bigotry, vandalism, gangs and violence are alive and well on every campus. Rape and sexual assault do occur at college. The use of alcohol and drugs increases the risk. Have discussions frequently on how to stay safe at college.
- When your child comes home, your interactions and how they see themselves fitting back into your family will be different. Be prepared for changes.
- College is neither easier nor harder than high school—just different. Enjoy the way your child's mind is expanding and learning.

The hardest thing to realize is that this is the beginning of the "letting go" of parenthood.