Developing lifelong learning and decision-making skills

One of the best things you can do to help your son with his transition to college is to encourage him to develop lifelong learning skills. I there is an issue with a class, advisor, roommates, etc., counsel your son to confront the issue on his own. Urge him to become familiar with and to reach out to campus resources, particularly the Richmond College Dean’s Office. Making calls to administrators or professors on your son’s behalf actually does him a disservice in regard to skill-building and self-confidence. In addition, staff and faculty would prefer (and often are legally bound) to speak with the student rather than with the parent.

Another important point is to trust your son to make his own decisions. Students rely on parents and on the values on which they were raised for guidance, and rightly so. But as your son becomes his own man it is essential that he begins to make his own decisions. He must learn to solve his own problems rather than to rely on you or others to solve problems for him.

Finally, it is important to realize that he will make mistakes along the way. We all do...and we learn from them. Your son may take a different approach from you to deal with mistakes, and that is okay as well.

Encouraging the best academic experience possible

A great academic experience is more than just grades. It starts with the relationships your son will develop with mentors and guides. Encourage your son to get to know one faculty or staff member well each semester. These relationships will contribute to a better college experience for your son; in addition, they lead to strong ties that will benefit him in post-graduation letters and recommendations from these teachers and mentors. Your son must be willing to make the effort establishing and maintaining these connections through visits during office hours, emails, and other correspondence. Faculty and staff members typically are thrilled to be approached for advice and mentoring and enjoy these relationships immensely.

It is important to realize that the major your son chooses does not dictate his career path. Years of experience and abundant research shows us that students will have the best educational experience AND will most benefit in terms of a strong academic record by finding the area of study that is most interesting to them. His academic passion may be history; it may be leadership studies. Please do not insist that your son majors in an area that will “get a job”...once again, the best way that your son can work toward post-graduation success is in finding his academic passion. For more information, please refer to the Career Development Center’s Web site: http://cdc.richmond.edu/students/major.html.

When you talk with your son, try to focus on what he is learning and how he is developing. Try to help him connect what he’s learning in the classroom or in other activities to what is going on in the world.
Supporting your son

Students typically go through a number of changes as they learn new things and make new friends inside the classroom and outside of it. While these changes may feel uncomfortable to you at first, it is part of his essential development into adulthood.

Be prepared to listen to your son. He may want to share his frustrations, joy, and anxiety with you...let him “vent” and then come up with his own solutions. It may help him most to simply talk it out with someone who is not “in” the problem such as yourself. A way to encourage this is to ask open-ended questions such as “What’s been the toughest part of having a roommate for you so far? What have you liked most?”

Communicate on a regular (though not overwhelming) basis with him. Although he may seem indifferent to you when you tell him you love him and believe in him, consistent words of support have a huge impact. Studies have shown that praising students for working hard (as opposed to “being smart”) have the greatest impact.

We can help him with adjustment issues

If your instincts tell you something is wrong, please contact the Richmond College Dean’s Office. We’ll check it out, no matter what the concern, and get back to you. You know your son, and you should listen to warning signals about anything, including academic difficulties, homesickness, “fitting in”, depression, or substance abuse.

This is an exciting time in your son’s life, and we hope that you enjoy and celebrate this transition with him. We also want you to remember that this is a time of transition for you as well. It is perfectly natural to have mixed emotions about returning home with one less (or no) child/children. We want you to be a partner with us as we help your son make the most of his University of Richmond and Richmond College experience.

Resources you may want to check out:


Richmond College exists to educate men and to challenge students to pursue a life of purpose.