

HOW to support your child at Penn

A GUIDE FOR PENN FAMILIES

Understanding The Transition To College

The transition to college is a time of excitement in the life of your son/daughter. He/she will experience greater autonomy, intellectual stimulation, increased choices, and new explorations and relationships. For some families, a sense of excitement about the transition also brings feelings of ambivalence and concern. Most families adjust to the transition period fairly well. This brochure will attempt to give you both general and specific suggestions to help your child succeed at school. In addition to the support you can provide, there are also professional support services available to students on campus through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). CAPS staff are also available to consult with you about providing your child with the help that he/she may need.

What You Can Do To Support Your Child

Stay in touch

Even though your child may express the need to be independent, he/she still needs to know that you are available to talk about normal events and difficult issues. So, discuss with your child a reasonable plan for you to stay in touch on a regular basis whether it's through writing, emails, or over the phone.

Allow space

Let your child set the priorities for some conversations. Ask open-ended questions and give him/her room to explain him/herself to you.

Discuss expectations

Set up some time to talk to your child and agree on expectations, e.g., how often you expect to be seeing or speaking with him/her, money matters and so on. Negotiate a realistic plan.

Be realistic about college life

College life is quite hectic and most students find their time crammed because of numerous academic and social obligations. Plan in advance so the time that you have becomes meaningful. Take the time to remind your children to take care of themselves physically and emotionally as well as academically. A balanced life that includes work, play and rest is essential to a healthy student.

Pick your battles

Conflicts are a part of the parent-child relationship. However, you may want to prioritize what's really important to you and decide which issues you are willing to let go.

Encourage your child to make use of Penn resources

Penn offers numerous resources to enhance your child's experience while in college. (See Penn Resources section at the back of this brochure.) Penn is a big place but you can help your child by suggesting various resources when you think it's appropriate.

If You Think There May Be A Problem

Sometimes it can be difficult to figure out how to talk about concerns you may have. Here are some general suggestions:

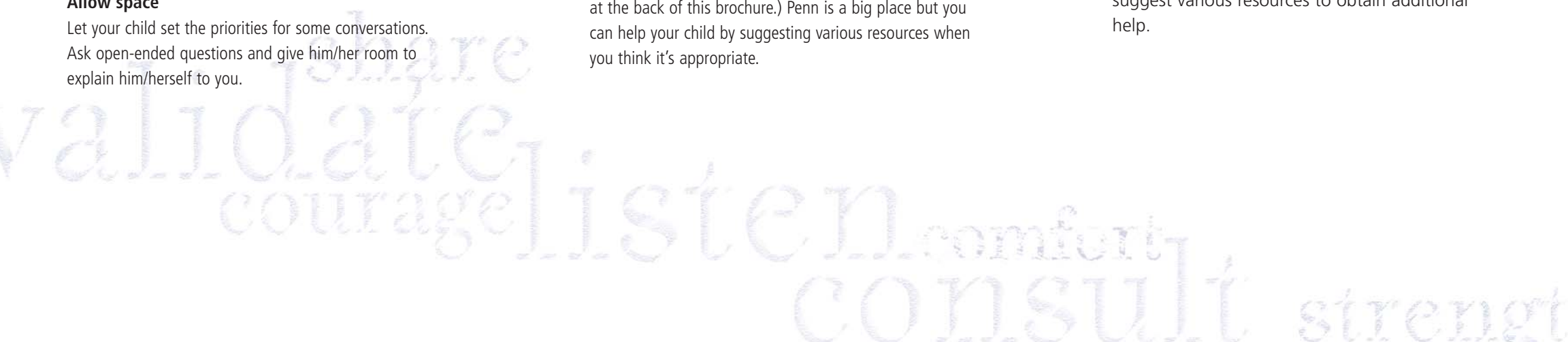
Be **specific** about why you are concerned. Tell your child what you've observed and why you are concerned.

Listen. Your child may benefit most from having you listen to their concerns attentively.

Clarify things that are unclear so there is no confusion and there is a mutual understanding of the situation. Once you've listened and your child feels understood by you, he/she is more likely to be receptive to hearing ideas or advice.

Avoid judging, evaluating and criticizing, even if your child asks your opinion. These behaviors will likely push your child away. Also, avoid minimizing the problem by saying, "don't worry about it." If it's causing your child some concern it is probably significant to them.

Develop **options.** Brainstorm with your child some possible ways to resolve the issue and suggest various resources to obtain additional help.



If You Know Your Child Needs Help

There may be situations where outside help is essential. Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- If your child has been acting differently, such as not engaging in usual activities, spending more money, or appearing depressed, agitated, and/or anxious.
- If your child reports increased physical problems or academic difficulties.
- If you sense that something is different or seriously amiss.

There are professionals on campus that you can turn to when these situations arise. These individuals include your child's House Dean, RA/GA, or a CAPS counselor. It is important to realize that you are indeed helping your child by contacting these professionals because the situation requires their knowledge and experience.

Counseling and Psychological Services is the campus student counseling center, and it is free of charge to Penn students. CAPS offers brief counseling as well as referrals to professionals in the community. Recognizing the essential role that parents play in the lives of their college age child, CAPS staff welcomes consultation with parents. Please remember, however, that state laws regarding confidentiality bind CAPS professionals. Federal and state laws, as well as professional ethics will inhibit the professionals from talking with you about your child unless your child has provided them with a written authorization for such communication.

If your child has a history of treatment issues, is currently taking medication, or you think that they may benefit from certain types of long term support during their years at Penn, the CAPS staff can help you to establish a relationship with a professional in the community in advance of your child's arrival on campus. Please feel free to call CAPS for such a consultation.

You May Need Help Too

There may be times when you may feel unsure about how to approach certain issues with your child or despite your best efforts your child may resist your attempts to be helped.

Consultation with CAPS is available

Call 215-898-7021 and ask to speak with the on-call counselor or an administrator.

Penn Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services
133 S. 36th Street, Second Floor,
(Corner of 36th and Walnut Streets)
215-898-7021

Emergency number after hours:
215-349-5490
(Ask for CAPS clinician on call)

Penn Police
215-898-7333 or 511 (on campus)

Academic Support Programs
3820 Locust Walk
215-898-0809

**Learning Resources/Student
Disabilities Services**
3820 Locust Walk
215-573-9235

Career Services
3718 Locust Walk
McNeil Building, Suite 20
215-898-7531

Office of the Chaplain
3643 Locust Walk
215-898-8456

Office of the Vice Provost for University Life
3611 Locust Walk
215-898-6081

Student Health Service
Penn Tower, 34th & Civic Center Boulevard
215-662-2850

comfort share
validate
listen courage
strength
consult

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