Moving from the parent-child relationship to the parent-student relationship

“Relationships [with parents] based on mutual trust, open and honest communication and equal treatment appear to be particularly beneficial in terms of facilitating adjustment [to university].”

- Maxine Wintre and Lorne Sugar from their article; Relationships with parents, personality, and the university transition, Journal of College Student Development, Mar/Apr 2000

Your student is embarking on an incredible journey of developing independence, discovering new interests, taking risks, making important life decisions, and growing socially and intellectually. Your role as a parent is going to change as your student travels along this journey. Your challenge is to learn to let go and allow your son or daughter the freedom to make his or her own choices, as well as mistakes.

Demands on your student’s time

As a general rule, students will need between two and three hours of study outside of class for each hour spent in class. A student with five courses will be in class 15 hours per week and may require between 30 and 45 additional hours for study. That is 45 - 60 hours per week allocated to academic pursuits – more than a full time job.

In addition to academic work, it is crucial to your student’s personal development and transition to university life to be involved in extra-curricular activities. Student clubs and associations, volunteering, being a student leader or other involvements help your student in a variety of ways. Extra-curricular activities allow your student to explore new interests, to build friendships, to feel connected to the university, and may even help with deciding on a career. Many students will spend up to 10 hours per week on extra-curricular activities.

In addition to their academic work and their extra-curricular involvement, students will need to find time to eat well, exercise, and enjoy their own leisure activities. A healthy body and mind make for better studying! Another 10 hours per week are used up pursuing wellness.

There are already so many demands on your student’s time and not everything has been included yet – students will also need time for errands, commuting, and sleep. But, wait – we haven’t even discussed time for family yet.
### Time demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Errands</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commuting</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>154</strong></td>
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With only 168 hours in a week, and 154 hours being spoken for, only 14 hours of unaccounted time is left for the week. Your student is going to be very busy. Routines and regular family habits are going to have to be adjusted.

Have a frank discussion with your student about your expectations. Should they be home for dinner everyday? Is their attendance at all family functions mandatory? Will their chores remain the same as they did when they were in high school?

### House rules

Your student may be as young as 17 when they start university. However, the university views your student as an adult. The university grants your student the freedom to use university resources and facilities at their discretion, choose courses, join clubs or associations, voice dissent, and more. Your student may want to take some of the freedom they experience at university and bring it into your home. It is realistic for everyone to expect some rules to remain intact at home, such as "no food in the family room" or "no music after 10 pm", but certain rules, such as curfews, may need to be readjusted or reevaluated altogether.

### Identity development

One of the most valuable aspects of attending a university is the opportunity that students have to learn about subjects they may have never been exposed to before and discuss ideas and viewpoints that may differ a great deal from their own. This exposure will inevitably lead students to question their own belief systems.

Students living away from home may work through these questions with classmates, roommates, or residence assistants and by the time they go home for a visit at Thanksgiving or Christmas, may have already formed some of the answers. Students living at home may also work through the big questions with peers, but they are more likely to also bring them home and discuss them around the dinner table. As a parent seeing your student everyday, you will witness your student struggling with their identity development.
Here are some tips for supporting your student in their identity development:

• Take a few deep breaths, and count to ten! The fact that your student is asking these big questions means that they are maturing.
• A certain degree of confusion and disorientation is normal as young people begin the process integrating new information into their self-understanding. Avoid offering too much advice, answering their questions for them, or imposing your own beliefs on them.
• The learning that takes place outside of the classroom is just as valuable to the development of a student’s identity as what goes on inside the classroom. To foster the exploration that is central to identity development, encourage your student to try new things and participate in diverse activities that they may never have had the chance to try before.
• Not every student will experience monumental change. But for other students attending university can trigger a significant change in their identity and the way they think about themselves.
• While it might appear as though your student is rejecting the values you instilled from a young age, in reality it is likely they are “trying on” new ideas and will eventually find a balance between their core values and the new information they’ve been exposed to.

**Academic performance**

You are more likely to know how your student’s academics are going than parents who are separated from their students. Even if your student does not show you each grade from each assignment or term paper, you are likely to have a sense of whether your student is excelling or not. The advantage to being at home for university is that parents are able to “step-in” when a student is in trouble. However, this can also be a disadvantage if parents are stepping in too often and the student does not learn how to solve their own problems.

Be prepared for your student’s grades to be lower than they were in high school. The work load is heavier, the content much more challenging, and the method of teaching is entirely different than it was in high school. There is going to be a period of adjustment while your student learns how to learn in university. Putting pressure on your student to excel will only add to their burdens. Instead, ask how you can help or if your help is even desired. You can also suggest that your student access the learning resources on campus at [http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/index.html?main](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/index.html?main).

This new chapter in your parent-child relationship is bound to have a few bumps, but it is also a fantastic time where you learn about each other and reach new levels of mutual respect and friendship. Good luck and enjoy the ride!