



a newsletter for parents & families



GEORGIA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

University Housing

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## The Benefits of Having a Mentor

Having an adult guide during the college years can help students succeed. That's why it's smart for students to seek out a mentor. And what better time than the start of a new term?

In today's sometimes fast-paced and superficial world, many folks struggle to develop an *authentic* mentoring relationship. And what does this really mean anyway? Ask your student, "Who in your life has been there to guide you, support you and strengthen you? Who holds you accountable for your actions, goals and dreams? Who *truly* converses with you about your strengths and limitations and helps you sort out difficult decisions or mistakes you've made?" Looking at the mentors he may already have can help him work toward seeking out an effective mentor in college.

January is National Mentoring Month, so here are some mentoring facts to share with your student...

As a matter of skill, excellent mentors...

- Select protégés carefully
- Know protégés
- Expect excellence
- Affirm, affirm and affirm some more
- Provide sponsorship
- Act as teacher and as coach
- Encourage and support
- Offer counsel in difficult times
- Protect when necessary
- Stimulate growth with challenging assignments



- Give protégés exposure and promote their visibility
- Nurture creativity
- Provide correction – even when painful
- Narrate growth and development
- Self-disclose when appropriate
- Accept increasing friendship and mutuality
- Are an intentional model
- Display dependability

As a matter of traits, excellent mentors...

- Exude warmth
- Listen actively
- Show unconditional regard
- Tolerate idealization
- Embrace humor
- Do not expect perfection

**“Mentoring relationships (mentorships) are dynamic, reciprocal, personal relationships in which a more experienced person (mentor) acts as a guide, role model, teacher, and sponsor of a less experienced person (protégé). Mentors act as coaches, guardians, teachers, protectors, and kindly parents. They affirm, support, provide correction, intentionally model behaviors, expect excellence, and know their protégés well (become masterful at studying them).”**

— *The Elements of Mentoring* by W. Brad Johnson & Charles R. Ridley (2004)

*continued on page two*



# The Benefits of Having a Mentor

*continued on page one*

- Attend to interpersonal cues
- Are trustworthy
- Respect values
- Do not stoop to jealousy

Help your student reflect on these traits so she can be ready to seek out a positive mentor during the college years.

**Source:** *The Elements of Mentoring* by W. Brad Johnson & Charles R. Ridley (2004)

**“The term *mentor* originated in classic Greek mythology when Mentor, a wise teacher, was asked by his friend Odysseus to watch over his precious son, Telemachus, as he embarked on a lengthy voyage. As a surrogate parent, Mentor gave support, love, guidance, protection, and blessing to the young child until the return of his father. Thus, we have come to know mentors as those who gently guide and nurture the growth of others during various stages of their development.”**

— Chungliang Al Huang & Jerry Lynch in *Tao Mentoring: Cultivate Collaborative Relationships in All Areas of Your Life* (1999)

## Seasonal Student Issues

There’s a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- Feelings of happiness/restlessness from break
- A resolve to do better academically
- Renewed interest in classes
- New leadership skills starting to emerge
- Unwanted weight gain
- Cold weather blues (in some areas)
- Not many social activities scheduled
- Possible roommate changes
- Anxiety and uncertainty for those who just transferred in

## A Season of Resolve

New Year’s resolutions are in the air this month, as students strive to improve upon last term’s accomplishments. You can provide support while also helping students realistically set these types of goals for themselves.

For instance...

- **When your student says, “I’m going to pull all A’s!”** you can instead discuss what academic improvements could look like. Perhaps it’s being smart about getting assistance at the writing center so he can learn to become more comfortable with writing assignments. Or maybe it’s using professors’ office hours more frequently so she’s not getting behind in her classes.
- **When your student says, “I’m going to get really involved”** you can instead talk about what her passions are and *why* she wants to get involved. Is it to learn new things? Gain new skills? Meet new people? All of these are supremely valid reasons. It’s just good for students to be in touch with their “Why’s” before plunging into new commitments so that they’re gaining the most from their experiences.
- **When your student says, “I’m going to get super healthy this year”** you can instead more specifically discuss what that might entail. Do his eating habits need some tweaking in the area of fruits and vegetables? Does she need to get outside and get moving more? Is he spending too much time sitting still in front of devices, games and TV? By identifying a few specific goals, your student is bound to make a healthier lifestyle more of a reality!

That’s the idea when it comes to resolutions. Instead of pie in the sky hopes, you can help your student take good intentions and turn them into plans that become true.



# Being a Sounding Board for Your Student

It's sometimes hard for parents to balance serving as a sounding board and assisting with a decision-making process versus simply making a decision for their student. Many parents believe they have to make tough decisions *for* their student, when in reality it serves students better when *they* make the decision with their parents' support and assistance.

## Big Decisions They Face

Students have quite a few big decisions to make during their college years. Some examples of these decisions include:

- Determining a major course of study
- Considering summer job/ internship options
- Whether or not to transfer to a different college or university
- Where to live on- or off-campus
- Whether or not to continue dating a significant other
- Thinking about quitting an athletic team or musical/ artistic pursuit
- Exploring graduate courses of study versus getting a job immediately after graduation

While it's likely that most students will utilize and value their peers' thoughts on these decisions, some will call home looking for family assistance. It's often easiest and quickest to just offer advice, rather than listening to a student's thought process surrounding the pros and cons of a particular decision. It's also easy to devalue significant influences for them, at times forgetting what it's like to be their age.

## How to Make a Tough Decision

However, as a parent, one of the greatest lessons you can teach your student is how to make a tough decision on his own. Of course, most individuals will always consider others' opinions. Those who are healthiest, however, have the ability to weigh those opinions in comparison to their own.

When your student does call home to process a decision, consider asking several questions, rather than answering them. Here are some questions you can ask to help your student come to his own conclusion:

- If you had to make this decision right now, what would it be? Why?



- How do you think you will feel about this decision four months from now? How about four years from now?
- What factors are pushing you towards this decision?
- What do you hope to gain from making this decision? Is there anything you stand to lose?
- How will this decision impact you (or you as parents!) financially?
- How will this decision impact you physically, mentally and/or spiritually?
- How does this decision help you further your personal goals?
- How will you handle the ramifications of making this decision?

Having these types of conversations can help the parent/student relationship continue to grow in maturity. As students get older and graduate from college, they begin looking to their parents more as peers. Knowing they can come to you for assistance with decisions not only will teach them valuable lessons, but will also continue to forge a meaningful network of family support.

## “It’s Not a Good Time”

If you can't spend the time to have a detailed conversation right when your student calls, assure him that you want to assist in the decision-making process. Let your student know that it's not a good time (i.e. you are making dinner or ready to head out the door with your student's sibling) and set up another time to chat. Your student will appreciate your honesty and commitment to providing him with your undivided attention. Plus, you'll be less likely to get agitated and short-tempered, especially if the decision is one with which you might not necessarily agree.



# The Dangers of Distracted Walking

The risks associated with distraction while walking can be incredibly dangerous. And college campuses aren't immune, as students often don't pay attention when they're captivated by texts, cell phones or using some type of mobile device with headphones.

Preoccupied, distracted pedestrians have become common on busy streets, where the possibility that they might be hit by a car, bike or bus increases. This loss of situational awareness is similar to that of a distracted driver and the results can be injury or death.

## Research Confirms Cause for Concern

Pedestrians, much like drivers, have always multi-tasked by doing things such as snacking or reading on the move. Researchers are trying to determine what makes distracted walking with mobile devices so different from other types of multitasking. A study conducted at Western Washington

University by psychologist and professor Ira Hyman and his students noted that talking on a cell phone takes a toll on cognition and awareness. The study showed that pedestrians using their cell phones often did not notice objects or people in their path.

They also found a type of preoccupation called "inattention blindness," meaning that a person can be looking at an object but fail to register it or process what it is. Adam Gazzaley, a neuroscientist at the University of California at San Francisco, explained that cell phone conversations tax auditory functions in the brain as well as visual functions. Using both functions simultaneously prompts the listener to create visual imagery related to the conversation in a way that overrides or obscures the processing of real images.

## Raising Awareness in Your Student

No one would argue that technology brings great benefits to the way we do our work and connect with others, but it's certainly not without its downsides too. We are so plugged in, that oftentimes we do too many

things at once, not realizing that one – or all of the tasks we are trying to accomplish – suffer.

So, alert students to these hazards of using mobile devices while walking...

- **Cell phones:** Inattention to surroundings or lack of situational awareness
- **Texting while walking:** Eyes taken away from path of travel and inattention to surroundings
- **MP3 players with headphones:** Noise-induced hearing loss and inattention to surroundings

And also how they can prevent accidents from distracted walking...

- Don't walk, talk and text
- If you have to talk or text, move to the side of the walkway out of the way of others
- Never cross or walk in the street while using an electronic device
- Do not walk with headphones in your ears
- Keep track of your surroundings

Sources: whsv.com, 11/17/11; compliance.gov

## What is Distracted Walking?

Generally speaking, distracted walking is when pedestrians who use streets are so oblivious to their surroundings that they fail to see oncoming vehicles or other hazards. Students of all ages—who are often seen walking while listening to music players, gaming on handheld consoles, or talking and texting on cell phones—are particularly vulnerable. The situation is so prevalent that the term, "Podestrians" (iPod + pedestrian) had sprung up to become the common nickname for these foot travelers.

## After-Holiday Money Matters

Once the holidays are over, many students find themselves contending with bills and money woes. If your student is one of those people, here are some tips to share:

- Write out a budget for the remainder of the academic year so he can plan effectively
- Look into campus job possibilities – every bit helps!
- Now that she knows her general expenses, talk with her about what she can cut out to save money
- Find out more about available scholarships and start applying!
- Consider what the summer will bring now – will he need to work or can he take classes? – in order for your student to stay financially viable