



a newsletter for parents & families



University Housing

July 2018

## Contending with Separation Anxiety

Students leaving home to attend college are likely concerned about their friendships. Questions may arise in their minds such as...

- “How will I *ever* find friends this good again?”
- “What if we can’t stay connected over the distance?”
- “Am I going to regret not staying home?”
- “What will I do without them?”

These feelings are completely natural, as big changes are happening. Some of these concerns may have to do with separation anxiety, which in adults is “characterized by an excessive fear of physical or emotional

separation from close attachment figures or environment, usually the home” (Kirsten, Grenyer, Wagner & Manicavasagar, 2008).

“Part of the adjustment process for first-year students involves grieving the loss of pre-college friendships as they have known,” according to Jennifer Crissman Ishler, DEd, an assistant professor of counselor education at Pennsylvania State University. “This loss and separation



often trigger emotional distress resulting in adjustment difficulties.”

Crissman Ishler said this phenomenon often tends to hit females harder than males.

First year programs and events give students some built-in ways to make the transition easier. There are also many peer helpers – from staff in the residence halls to those at orientation – who are genuinely interested in helping your student make connections. Encourage her to seek out these resources so she can focus less on the perceived friendship losses and more on what’s out there to gain!

**Sources:** “The Prevalence of Separation Anxiety in Undergraduate Students,” Boise State University Undergraduate Research and Scholarship Conference, April 12, 2010; “Separation Anxiety in College Freshmen,” WebMD Health News, August 12, 2003

### Helping Your Student

To help your student contend with the possibility of separation anxiety, you can...

- Encourage him not to spend all his time and energy at school trying to maintain ties with old friends. It’s important that he also gets out there and invests in new friendships. Talk about some simple ways he can do that.
- Discuss how she is feeling now, so all the emotions don’t overwhelm her on move-in day or during the first month of school.
- Consider having him talk with a counselor now to be proactive.
- Let her know there are counselors on campus and other helpful staff who are willing and ready to discuss any issues with her.



# A Sense of Belonging

Belonging is a potent force in most people's lives and college students are no exception. When they come to campus, they're looking for a place where they can fit and matter.

Encourage your student to talk with orientation leaders, residence hall staff and other student leaders about how they found a sense of belonging on campus. Hearing peers' stories is one of the best ways for students to envision ways they can belong among the campus community, too.

## Possibilities

There are so many possible ways that students can find campus nooks that fit them and their personality. They include...

- Community service projects
- Intramural sports
- Campus employment
- The commuter council

- Residence hall government
- Campus clubs
- Giving tours for Admissions
- Theater, band and orchestra
- Student media
- The learning center
- Research with professors
- Multicultural organizations
- Attending campus events

Finding purpose is a key piece of belonging. When students engage in purposeful activities with other people, that sense of belonging tends to naturally kick in.

It's going to take effort on your student's part, without a doubt. Encourage him to reach out and try



new things. Or she can talk with a student leader about her interests and where they might fit on campus. Promoting a sense of belonging often starts with these simple conversations where students can see the possibilities – and see themselves in their midst!

## Seasonal Student Issues

Students preparing to dive into college for the first time may have many things on their minds, such as...

- Feeling sad about leaving established friends and family at home
- Concern about issues of "belonging" and finding a comfortable place on campus
- Excitement coupled with anxiety about making a fresh start
- Worry about academics being "hard" and beyond their abilities
- Thinking about what type of first impression they'll make
- Concern about roommates and housing (if living on campus)
- Wondering what to pack and what to leave at home since space will be limited
- Possibly transitioning into a long-distance relationship or deciding to end a current relationship
- Financial worries – wondering if they'll be able to make enough during the summer and how much they'll need to work once school begins
- What to expect during orientation and what questions to ask so they'll be prepared for the fall



# The College Stuff Shuffle

As students prep to shuffle their “stuff” off to college this fall, it’s important to take a few things into consideration...

**Space.** First and foremost, how much space is there to work with? Chances are that it’s quite limited and needs to be shared. So, triage what will make the cut by discussing...

- What can be swapped out during visits home? (summer clothes, winter coats, etc.)
- What type of room storage is available? (under beds, in closets, etc.)
- What are the top 3 things that’ll help your student’s room feel like home?

**Insurance.** Check into your homeowner’s or renter’s policy to see if it covers students’ belongings when they go away to school. If not, consider a renter’s policy for your student. Some tips before your student heads to college include...

- Have him take stock of his belongings, says the Missouri Department of Insurance.
- Have him estimate and itemize the dollar value of what he’ll have with him at college.
- Then, encourage him to update this list annually and keep it in a safe place, such as a safe deposit box or at your house.

**Proactive Protection.** Encourage your student to ask about an “Operation-ID”-type program, often run by the campus public safety department, when she gets to campus. They provide an engraver so students can engrave an ID number (NOT their social security number!) on the back of major items and then keep a list on file. This allows public safety to help students even more effectively



should any of their engraved items be stolen.

**Avoid Duplicates.** To avoid bringing duplicate items and filling the already-limited living space, encourage your student to communicate with his roommate before arriving on campus. They can discuss who will bring larger items such as...

- A TV
- A rug
- A fridge

**Valuables.** If there are super-special items that your student loves that are irreplaceable, it’s a good idea to leave them at home. They’ll be safer and more protected in a private home.

**What’s Really Necessary.** As your student looks at the contents of her room and other things that she’d like to bring along to campus, help her consider...

- Is she choosing them out of necessity or sentimentality?
- Which few meaningful things can she choose instead of all of them?
- Might she feel crowded by stuff if she brings too much?
- What are 5 necessities and 5 “wants” she can identify?

**Sources:** Missouri Department of Insurance, <http://insurance.mo.gov>; Texas Department of Insurance, [www.tdi.state.tx.us](http://www.tdi.state.tx.us); Kansas Insurance Department, [www.ksinsurance.org](http://www.ksinsurance.org); National Association of Insurance Commissioners, [www.naic.org](http://www.naic.org)

## Transportation

And, of course, when it comes to college “stuff,” it’s important to consider *how* it will get to campus! Consider transportation decisions now. The choice of vehicle and how many people will be attending move-in day will determine just how much stuff your student can bring along!





# Fresh Start Ahead!

Ah, fresh starts. They're quite appealing. That's why so many people make New Year's resolutions, after all.

The beginning of a new academic year offers the collegiate version of New Year's Eve – with a fresh start available to everyone. Whether your student will be new to campus or is returning for another year, it's time to think about what that new start will look like.

## Setting Up for Success

Rather than just wishing for a good fresh start, though, there are some ways your student can set the path for success, including...

- If she's hoping to get serious about her career search, she can job shadow someone in a field of interest, contact career services now for some pointers and get a resume draft together so it's ready for critique in the fall.
- If he's hoping to make good friends, he can look at the campus website proactively to see what

## Setting Short-Term Goals

A fresh start often involves setting a goal, along with action steps to help reach it. Here's a simple example to share with your student...

**Goal:** *Get comfortable with people living on my floor.*

### Action Steps:

1. Accept invitations from student staffers to attend meals, events and more.
2. Say hello and make eye contact when passing people in the hall.
3. Keep my door open when I'm in there doing things that don't require full concentration (i.e. sorting laundry, checking Instagram, etc.).
4. Get involved in programs, hall council, floor meetings and more to meet and interact with people in the community.

activities he might get involved with to meet like-minded people.

- If she's hoping to do well academically, she can spend time now reading, reviewing notes, doing crossword puzzles, writing and other tasks that will limber up her mind for the school year ahead.

- If he's hoping to give back to the community, he can do some volunteering during the rest of the summer months, while contacting the community services office on campus to see what options will be available in the fall.

## Beginning the Transition

When students transition to college, it doesn't mean that they don't need their parents anymore. Instead, it's a natural progression on the road to adulthood – and an evolution in your relationship. Some transition issues that may arise include...

**Taking Responsibility.** Students need to learn to get up on time, go to class, handle their academic work, juggle their commitments and more. This self-reliance will serve them well.

**Handling Issues.** We *listen* to students and encourage them to come forward if they have a question or concern. Learning to speak up and take action are critical skills for them to develop.

**Seeking Support.** While your support is invaluable, your student may need other kinds of support at times, too. Coaches can provide helpful encouragement, advisers can give academic guidance, campus counselors can offer emotional assistance and insight, residence life staff can provide life skills and direction, and more.

