

## 5 Tips for Sending Your Student Off to College

by Dr. Chris Brownson, Director, UT Counseling and Mental Health Center & Associate Vice President of Student Affairs

Remember when your child started walking? That was a true milestone. How about when they started driving? Also a milestone. College is yet another milestone in your student's life, most likely the biggest of the past 18 years. You've made it through all those other milestones successfully, so as difficult as it may seem, keep in mind that you will survive this one, too.

You may be experiencing a range of emotions when thinking and planning for your student's transition to college: fear, happiness, loneliness, uncertainty. All of these are normal. So whether you find yourself thrilled or devastated, the important thing is to embrace this milestone. Because this is a time of major transition, it requires a real adjustment on everyone's part. Luckily, there are some steps you can take to make the process a bit easier:

- 1. Get to know your student's new surroundings.** Familiarize yourself with campus and the resources available: tutoring, counseling, medical services, career services, etc. Knowing campus better can help you to make sense of this transition with your student. You can explore more specifically about the Counseling and Mental Health Center through our website [cmhc.utexas.edu](http://cmhc.utexas.edu).
- 2. Find a time to discuss expectations for staying in touch.** It can be tempting to want to call or text your student several times a day. Set up some mutual boundaries around calling, texting, Skyping and staying in touch in general. Perhaps you will decide to call each other twice a week or determine that a Sunday evening Skype session would be beneficial. Helping your student develop a sense of independence is an important part of the transition to college.
- 3. Help your student develop their passion.** Resist the temptation to choose your student's courses or stipulate which major your student must pursue. Your student is gaining a sense of independence while in college and getting to choose his courses and major is an important step. You can help by encouraging your student to develop his interests and explore courses that interest him.
- 4. Acknowledge that your role is changing.** Where once you were the *manager* of your student's life—helping them plan their classes and extracurricular activities and manage money—you are now a *consultant*. Just as a consultant might work with a business on a specific task, you may now find that your student calls upon your help and advice less often. You may not know everyone that your student associates with or all of the student organizations your student is participating in. Letting go of managing your

student's life and instead being available as a consultant is part of the work for you during this transition and the beginning of your student's burgeoning independence.

5. **Get support for yourself.** The transition from having your student live at home to living in a different town is a huge one for you as well as your student. We often talk about what this change will mean for your student, but just as important is acknowledging that this is a big deal for you too. Your home may feel very different with one fewer person living there. Reach out to other friends or family members to talk about this. You may also find it helpful to speak with a mental health professional.