

New Beginnings: From First Backpacks to First Dorm Rooms

Every August brings a season of firsts. For some Manhattan Beach students, it's their first day of TK or Kindergarten with a backpack that's as big as they are, a classroom full of new faces, plus the excitement and nerves of starting school.

For others, it's moving into a college dorm, saying goodbye to friends at home, and learning to live independently.

While these milestones may be years apart, they have something in common: they both represent the beginning of a new chapter.

For Our Newest Learners

Starting school is a big transition for children and parents alike. A few simple things can help set everyone up for success:

- **Practice independence.** Encourage your child to zip their backpack, open lunch containers, put on their jacket, and use the restroom independently. These small skills build confidence.
- **Establish routines early.** A consistent bedtime and morning routine make those first weeks much smoother.
- **Read together every day.** Even 15–20 minutes of reading builds vocabulary, curiosity, and a lifelong love of learning.
- **Focus on excitement, not perfection.** It's okay if there are tears at drop-off. Most children adjust quickly when they know they're safe, loved, and supported.
- **Get involved.** Introduce yourself to other families, volunteer when you're able, and become part of your school community. Those connections often become just as valuable for parents as they are for students.

College Advice from Mira Costa Alumni

We asked recent Mira Costa graduates what they wish they had known before leaving for college. Their advice was refreshingly honest, and surprisingly practical.

Set Yourself Up for Success

- **Use a calendar for everything.** College gives you tremendous freedom and with that comes responsibility. Alumni overwhelmingly recommend getting into the habit of scheduling your life. Add classes, assignment deadlines, workouts, meals, study blocks, and even downtime to a calendar system that works for you. One graduate suggested thinking of social activities as the reward after you've put in focused work at the library.
- **Stay ahead from day one.** College moves fast. It's much easier to keep up than to play catch-up. Visit your professors during office hours early in the semester—not just when you're struggling. Building those relationships can make a tremendous difference.
- **Be memorable for the right reasons.** Introduce yourself to your professors and their TAs. Ask thoughtful questions. Attend office hours regularly. Those connections can lead to better study strategies, mentorship, and support when you need it most.

Find Your People

- **Everyone is starting over.** One of the biggest pieces of advice? Don't let high school define who you are in college. Everyone is meeting you for the first time. If you've always been shy, this is your chance to be more outgoing. If you've wanted to be more confident, now is the time to practice.
- **Start conversations.** During Welcome Week, Club Fair, or even while standing in line for coffee, simply introduce yourself.

"Hi, what's your name?"

It sounds simple, but alumni say those small conversations often led to lifelong friendships.

- **Join more clubs than you think you should.** Student organizations, intramurals, volunteer groups, and clubs make a large university feel much smaller. Even if you don't stick with every activity, they're one of the fastest ways to build your community.
- **Your roommate doesn't have to become your best friend.** The healthiest roommate relationships are built on communication and mutual respect. Different

personalities and schedules are perfectly okay—as long as you're considerate of one another.

Take Care of Yourself

- **Protect your sleep.** A quality mattress pad may not seem exciting, but several alumni called it one of their best purchases. Dorm mattresses aren't exactly luxurious, and good sleep makes everything else easier.
- **Find your study space.** If your room is full of distractions, head to the library, a coffee shop, or another quiet campus space. Keep exploring until you find the environment where you do your best work.
- **Take care of your body, too.** Build routines around meals, movement, and rest—not just studying. A balanced schedule is easier to sustain than cramming for exams.

Make College Feel Like Home

Sometimes it's the little things that make the biggest difference.

- **An electric kettle.** If your residence hall allows it, a kettle can be invaluable for making everything from tea to instant oatmeal quick and easy.
- **Embrace the weather.** For students heading somewhere with four seasons, one graduate offered this advice: decorate your room for the first snowfall, watch cozy movies with friends, have snowball fights, learn to ski and lean into the cold-weather experience. Instead of wishing for California sunshine, make new traditions that help your new surroundings feel like home.

Every Beginning Matters

Whether it's learning how to line up for recess or navigating your first college lecture hall, every new beginning comes with uncertainty—and incredible opportunity.

At MBEF, we're proud to support students throughout their educational journey. From funding smaller class sizes and literacy support for our youngest learners to providing outstanding academic programs, counseling, and college readiness resources at every grade level, our community's investment helps ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

To all of our students beginning a new chapter this fall—from our newest TK and Kindergarten learners to the Mira Costa graduates heading off to college—we wish you a year filled with growth, discovery, and unforgettable experiences.

Here's to new beginnings.