Getting Familiar with Community Resources

The resources available to students and their families around here are numerous! Yet, as the beginning of the academic year is just around the corner, there are a few resources within the community that you may want to get intimately familiar with right away, such as…

A Bank. Where will your student do her banking when she’s at school? Getting this situated now will make things easier throughout the year.

A Hotel for Parent/Family Weekend. It’s a good idea to book this now, if you haven’t already, to beat the rush! Places can sell out quickly. And, while you’re at it, making dinner reservations couldn’t hurt either.

A Mechanic. If your student has a car on campus, urge him to ask around to see whom local folks use as their mechanic. Asking people like housekeeping and support staff makes a lot of sense—they often know this town well!

A Place of Worship. If your student wants to attend services, there are options on and around campus.

Connecting with these community resources—and more—now will add to the comfort level in your student’s new town. Our community is looking forward to welcoming you and your student!

Health Care Options

If your student needs mental or physical health care while away at school, don’t hesitate to connect with the campus health center for help and referrals. It’ll provide great peace of mind to have these things in place.

Seasonal Student Issues

It’s likely hitting your student now… he or she is heading to college in a few weeks. With that revelation will likely come some excitement—and some anxiety—regarding topics such as…

- Will people like me?
- Will I find friends as good as the ones I have now?
- How can I reinvent myself?
- Will I be able to handle college academics?
- How will I find my way around campus?
- Who will I turn to if I’m struggling?
- Will I still be as connected to my family/friends?
- What if I don’t get along with my roommate?
- Will people make fun of how I talk/dress/act?
- How will I get involved?
- Will I find a place to belong here?
Missing Their Furry Friends

For some college students, one of the hardest things about going away to college is missing their animals. From dogs and cats to horses and goats, our furry companions provide us with love, devotion, humor and friendship. It can be hard for students to fill that void while they are away from home.

What You Can Do

Recognizing the struggle your student may be facing means that you are validating her feelings. Just allowing her to talk about her feelings without acting like they are dumb or strange will help her work through this aspect of being homesick.

You can also keep your student connected with her animals—here are a few ideas to consider…

- Send a postcard or an e-card each week from the animal to your student. Head to a website such as www.smilebox.com for a free resource to create these cards and lots more including slideshows and scrapbooks that you can send online or through the mail.
- Facebook offers free applications called “Dogbook,” “Catbook,” “Horsebook” and even “Ferretbook” (plus others too). You can use these applications to create a profile for your favorite animal. Once you’ve created it, your “animal” can post messages, share photos, friend others and more. This is a great way for your student to stay in touch with her pet.
- If the animal will cooperate, get a print of his paw (or hoof or foot) using washable paint. Put his name and the date on it. Then, frame it and send it to your student as a keepsake.
- If you are close enough and the animal is small enough, surprise your student with a visit. You may not be able to bring the animal into the residence hall, but outside on campus grounds or a local park could work.
- Text new pictures of the animal each week or post them on Instagram so your student can see the latest and greatest.

Missing one’s pets can be tough on students… especially if there aren’t any other animals on campus. Help fill the void with creative expressions of endearment and connections from afar!

Living Safely in Community

Living in a positive, caring and safe community is all about teamwork. As a campus community member, your student is responsible not only for her own safety, but also contributing to the safety of those around her.

Since she may turn a deaf ear to anything you have to say regarding her safety and respond with a “Sure, Mom” or something similar, here is a different twist you can offer her on keeping herself and her friends safe.

- Don’t act like it’s all about you.
- Don’t prop open outside doors—you never know who might get in.
- Don’t tamper with fire equipment—you’ll want it ready to go in an emergency!
- Don’t disregard your gut instincts—if something feels “off,” it’s probably true.
- Don’t just “get to know” fellow community members by following them on social media—do face-to-face too!
- Don’t be alone with people you don’t know.
- Don’t slam doors.
- Don’t vandalize others’ property.
- Don’t let your choices about alcohol and other drug abuse negatively impact others around you—or impair your judgment.
- Don’t let things like burned out lights, broken glass, water leaks and more go undetected—report them right away!
- Don’t always have ear buds plugged in—it makes you seem really unapproachable, plus you may not hear someone coming up behind you.
- Don’t assume things about others. Engage them in conversation and find out the real scoop instead!
- Don’t take advantage of others in your community.
- Don’t keep to yourself so much that it’s impossible to get to know you.
- Don’t just look out for yourself—it’s about community safety!
- Don’t forget what a great opportunity it is to live with other people—and a great responsibility.

Although today’s campuses remain some of the safest places to live and learn, they are not immune from incident. When students stay alert, report things that seem amiss and work together with others, everyone can stay safe and live happily in our community.
Ways NOT to Connect with Others

When students are looking to connect with others at the beginning of the academic year, they may turn to not-so-positive actions as they figure things out. You can offer some gentle warnings to help them avoid these possible missteps.

**Don’t Just Go with the Crowd.** For example, drinking to excess, just because others are, isn’t a true way to connect. Instead, your student can easily find others who aren’t interested in that behavior and spend time with them.

**Trust Your Gut.** Your student may be tempted to try things that just don’t feel right, whether it’s vandalizing a space or trying a substance. Encourage him to trust his gut as a way to steer clear of those harmful behaviors.

**Take Care with How You Spend Your Time.** Time is a precious commodity, so squandering it by always letting others direct what activities will happen can be a waste. Help your student see that she can try new things with other people some of the time while also spending other times doing things that she finds quite satisfying and purposeful.

**Don’t Compromise Your Values.** “No one will care if you take that from the dining hall.” A peer may tempt your student with this type of moral dilemma, which, really consists of stealing someone else’s property. Remind him that being a person of character requires that he stick to his own values and not let others substitute their judgment for his own.

**Positive Ways for Students to Connect**

- Go to a club’s organizational meeting to find out more
- Head to dinner with that group from your floor
- Say hello to someone in class or as you walk by their room
- Ask that guy in line about the 5K race on his T-shirt
- Attend a program or workshop
- Work on a service project through the community service office
- Invite others to play volleyball or cards

7 Ways to Be a Good Friend

One of the biggest things on students’ minds when they head off to college is making friends. That’s why it can’t hurt to arm them with some tried-and-true friend-making tactics, such as:

**Listen.** Be an engaged, active listener who looks at the person speaking instead of their phone or the floor. When people feel listened to, chances are they’ll be very interested in pursuing a friendship.

**Ask Appropriate Questions.** To find out more about new people, encourage your student to ask questions that are friendly without being too intrusive. It can all begin with where others are from, what they’re looking forward to studying, books they’ve read, etc.

**Share Who You Are.** In turn, students can share bits about themselves so that others can see the things they have in common as well as the differences they can each learn from. Just don’t over share, especially when first meeting someone!

**Look Out for People.** It feels good when others care about your well-being.

**Be Encouraging.** Help others see the good in themselves. Encourage them to try new things and explore possibilities. We can all use a dose of genuine cheerleading!

**Show an Interest.** There are so many things we can learn from other people—and vice versa. That’s what true friendships can give us and it often starts with showing an interest.

**Remember What’s Important to Them.** And then ask them about it. Enough said.
The college years are ripe with opportunities for students to get involved. Whether they choose to pursue new hobbies or hone skills they’ve been developing for quite some time, the campus community will open your student’s eyes to a wealth of new experiences in which they can choose to take part.

Talk with your student about how he wants to spend his out-of-class time. Does he want to try out a sport that he has always wanted to play? If so, intramurals might be the ticket. Is he looking for a way to make a difference in the local community? Volunteering through a campus organization could work. Or maybe he wants to develop a particular leadership skill? Joining a programming or advocacy club could be the way to do so. There are so many options!

You can help your student by encouraging him to get out there and explore. Talking with the residence life staff or an orientation leader is a good place to start. You can also suggest that your student check out the following resources on campus to see all that is available:

- The student activities office for a list of clubs and organizations
- The residence life office for information about getting involved in the residence halls
- The recreation center for a list of intramural teams, club sports and fitness classes
- The career center for a list of internships and practicum options
- Academic departments for academic-related opportunities such as doing research, studying abroad or participating in activities led by faculty members
- The community service or campus ministry office for a list of local volunteer opportunities and immersion trips

Students should definitely be focused on their academic work, but getting involved in co-curricular experiences is so important, too. After all, students spend so many of their weekly hours out of the classroom. When they choose to use their time wisely, they can really round out their educational experience by developing skills that will aid them with communication, leadership and other positive traits.

Involvement = Academic and Personal Success

Research shows that students who engage in campus happenings, whether it’s joining an organization or attending campus events, often feel more a part of their school. They also learn to juggle more, leading to increased academic success. So, instead of warning your student away from out-of-class involvements, consider encouraging him to balance his academics with some campus happenings. His social life, his sense of belonging—and his grades—will likely thank you!