

Technology, close parental relationships are changing how young people transition to college

August 5 2011, By Eryn Jelesiewicz

It's orientation for Temple University's incoming freshmen, and both students and their parents are coming to terms with the reality of their impending separation.

A mother looks at her buzzing [cell phone](#) — it's another text from her son, the fourth since they'd arrived on campus. She writes back, with a twinge of guilt, "You're not going to be able to take me with you to college."

At a parents'-only session, another mother asks dozens of questions of the student affairs staff.

"Finally, I think she realized there was nothing else she needed to know," said Stephanie Ives, Temple's dean of students and associate vice president of student affairs. "She turned to us with tears in her eyes and said 'This is really hard for me.' We could see this really wasn't about needing the information — it was about needing the connection. And that's OK. We understand."

Experiences like these reflect how technology and the nature of parent-child relationships are changing the way young people transition into college.

The changing dynamic comes into focus during freshmen orientation,

which at Temple includes a full-day parents' session and an overnight stay for rising undergraduates. The program is designed to ease the transition and ultimately help students become autonomous and self-assured.

“Parents today seem to have a different dynamic with their children,” said Ives. “In some ways, the bond seems to have become a little less authoritative and parental and closer to friendly and supportive. You’ll hear students say today, ‘My mom is my best friend,’ or a father say, ‘My daughter is my best friend.’ For these reasons, we see some parents who have a more difficult time separating from their child when it’s time to go to college.”

Technology has played a major role in altering parent-child relationships, explains Ives. Instead of checking in with parents once a week on a hallway dorm phone, students can now text message them throughout the day. Students and parents agree that the ability to stay in near-constant communication brings both benefits and challenges.

Jennifer Fox of Queens, N.Y., whose oldest child, Korelle, starts at Temple this fall, is grateful for the cell phone.

“It’s a very scary feeling for me to let her go but I know I have to,” said Fox. “I am just so happy for the cell phone so that we can be in contact. Even if we’re not talking we can text each other just so I feel secure that she’s OK.”

Andrew Wakefield, of Coopersburg, Pa., has given his daughter Amanda a cell phone — with certain expectations.

“The ground rules we laid down are since we provide the cell phone for her, if we try to reach out to her, she needs to get back to us in a timely manner,” he said. “Even a quick text is OK.” It can be hard to strike a

balance between being involved with your college student and being able to let them live independently, says Ives.

“For some it happens very naturally, but for others it’s more difficult,” she said. “In the end it’s something that has to be done.”

Ives assures parents that it’s very normal to experience a wide variety of emotions and reactions to sending a child to college, especially when it’s the first time.

“Just keep in mind the ultimate reward: that when your child graduates from college, the challenges they’ve met and the experiences they’ve had will have helped them to develop into a very complete person.”

Temple Dean of Students and Associate Vice President of Student Affairs Stephanie Ives and her colleagues offer these recommendations for parents sending their children to college:

1. Talk with your student regularly about your expectations for everything from academic performance, staying in touch and coming home to alcohol and drugs, money and expenses. Studies have shown that such conversations are influential and effective.
2. It’s good and healthy to let go. It’s an important part of your child’s healthy transition to adulthood.
3. Letting go doesn’t mean going cold turkey, however. Many students feel homesick initially. It’s OK to let them come home and welcome their calls as they adjust.
4. If you want your child to share his/her college experiences and problems with you, don’t reprimand or overreact. Listen carefully and help them look at their behavior and figure out a solution.

5. When your child does need help, whether it relates to homesickness, roommates or classes, encourage them to use the university resources and services available to them: advising, academic support, counseling and student activities.

Provided by Temple University

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