

You're On Your Own (But I'm Here If You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child During The College Years

By *Marjorie Savage*

Fireside Press, New York, 2003, 259 pages

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For both parents and students, the college experience can be exhausting. From the summer before the transition to college to the stresses of a job search during senior year, each year of the college experience provides new challenges. Parents concern themselves with rising tuition and room and board costs. They find themselves asking a multitude of questions: “How will I pay the bills? Will he be able to succeed academically? Will she make new friends? Will he experiment with sex, drugs and alcohol? Who will be watching out for her?” Students also find themselves questioning their decision to attend college: “Will I fit in? Will I like my classes? Am I really college material? Will I like my roommate? What will I chose as my major?” During this process, the relationship between parents and students change. The new parent-adult relationship which develops is “one based on love and respect.” In this new “mentor” role, parents must learn to give up control and allow their child to take on new responsibilities.

In her book, *You're On Your Own (But I'm Here If You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child During The College Years*, Marjorie Savage helps parents understand the stages of development through which their student will transition. Her book teaches parents how to manage the changes the entire family will face, how to recognize when intervention is crucial, how to ensure their child's health, how to adjust to their child's changing lifestyle and how to teach their child financial responsibility and accountability.

In the first chapter, “A Summer of Change,” Savage discusses the changes the family will undergo in the months before college begins. Parents attempt to spend more time with their son or daughter while their child prefers to spend countless hours with high school friends, solidifying their relationships. Students scramble at the last minute to fill out necessary paperwork for college orientation or on-campus housing while

parents assume they were completed months ago. In this chapter, the author encourages parents to assist their child in creating a checklist for record management which includes creating files for residential housing records, finances, health, academic information, computer information and automobile information. She also encourages parents to offer last-minute advice on the skills needed to do laundry, balance a checkbook, manage credit cards and prepare simple meals.

Other chapters in the book include “Reality Bites,” “Credit Loads and GPAs,” “Sex, Drugs, and Drinking Games,” “You Pierced *What?*” and “What Can You Do with a Sociology Degree?” In each of the chapters, the author presents challenges parents may encounter, and she encourages parents to serve as a “trusted advisor” to their child through the decision-making process. In particular, the third chapter, “No More Notes on the Refrigerator,” discusses the difficulties of “parenting from a distance.” The author points out that during the first semester of college, students often call home with complaints about dining services, challenging courses and teachers, bothersome roommates and their inability to make new friends. During those late night telephone calls, parents are encouraged to avoid asking simple yes or no questions. Instead, ask open-ended questions, listen to their responses with genuine interest, tell them about things happening at home that might be of interest to them and avoid judging or criticizing them.

In chapter ten, “Moving Out, Moving On,” the author addresses issues that often arise when students prepare to move off-campus into an apartment or a fraternity or sorority house. Students feel that off-campus housing represents independence and freedom from checking in guests, residence hall meetings and on-campus dining facilities. Parents are worried about the added costs of electricity, water, gas, and cable bills, and wonder if their student will be responsible enough to pay those bills on time. Other concerns parents often have include: “Will she eat well? Will he be having sex? Will his roommates have drinking parties?” The author suggests asking a few questions: “During the past year, has your child made good choices? Are you confident that she can manage her finances? Why does your child say he wants to move off campus? Are you satisfied with his answers?” Moving to an off-campus location is a big step for students. Parents are encouraged to discuss as many issues as possible and talk about “general guidelines for apartment life”.

In the final chapter, “I’ll *Always* Be Here If You Need Me,” Savage discusses the concept of “mentoring for a lifetime.” In this phase of his or her life, the graduating student is preparing to enter the workforce, apply for graduate school or tour a few countries in Europe before deciding what to do with his life. During this period, parents should ask questions to help their child weigh her options and support the decisions she makes. In addition, parents should discuss with their child other issues: “When do you expect your student to assume all his or her financial responsibilities? How will college loans be handled? Under what conditions will you help your child financially in the future?” The author notes that the first career decision a student makes will probably not be the last. Therefore, parents should “maintain a respectful distance” and “encourage your child to think carefully about all aspects of a decision.”

You're On Your Own (But I'm Here If You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child During The College Years is filled with sample dialogues, e-mails and telephone conversations with parents and students. While the book is primarily written for parents, each chapter includes a "Quick Tips for Students" section with advice on a multitude of topics. Chapter five contains a worksheet for planning a college budget, chapter seven contains a list of the most common illnesses on college campuses and chapter nine addresses identity development. A bonus "chapter" at the end of the book outlines the "Four-Year College Calendar" which addresses issues from the freshman year to the senior year. Some issues include: time management, study skills, academic complacency, disillusionment, intimate relationships and facing the unknown.

This book is filled with tips for tackling almost any situation, and contains helpful information about four-year college student issues, community college and commuter student issues, gay and lesbian student coming out issues and advice on what to do if your student is a victim of sexual assault. The book is highly recommended to parents who are preparing to send or who have recently sent their first child to college. The author provides insight into new and emerging issues affecting both parents and their students, and she offers helpful advice on adjusting to the new parent-adult relationship and becoming a mentor for life.