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THINGS PARENTS SHOULD TELL THEIR CHILDREN
BEFORE THEY GO TO COLLEGE

General

1. Make sure your child has health insurance and keeps their card with them at college. This coverage should be over and above what the student health service covers. Most insurance policies will now cover your children until they are 26 years old.
2. Encourage use of the student health service for acute illness, preventive care and counseling services. A local ER can provide after-hours emergency care.
3. Your child should take a list of regularly taken medications and have extra prescriptions and the name of a pharmacy to use for refills. If you have a drug plan, find a participating pharmacy in the area in advance.
4. If your child has a chronic medical condition, make sure you identify a specialist near the college before the semester begins. It is hard to find someone on an emergency basis.
5. Make sure your child knows his whole medical history – allergies, diseases, etc. – and provide a written copy for him/her.

Medical Care

1. A small medicine kit comes in handy and should include bandages, gauze, tape, antibiotic ointment, acetaminophen or ibuprofen, Maalox/Mylanta, allergy meds and any items specific to your child's medical needs.
2. Discuss with your child how to care for the symptoms of a common cold or viral illness (like flu), including knowing when it is appropriate to call you or to go to the student health service. Do not send your child away to school with antibiotics.
3. Sleep deprivation and all-nighters do not improve grades or health. Much of college students' susceptibility to illnesses is related to lack of sleep.
4. Provide your child with accurate information about nutrition to withstand all the fad diets. Vitamins do not replace good nutrition; they are only supplements. It is not imperative that each freshman gain the "freshman 15" pounds. Continue healthy nutrition and exercise habits.
5. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) refer to herpes, chlamydia, syphilis, gonorrhea, hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS. These diseases are transmitted via sexual intercourse, as well as through oral sex. While oral contraceptives prevent pregnancy, they are ineffective against STIs. For "condom failure" use your student health service for advice within 24 hours.
6. The first PAP smear should be done at the age of 21, or within 2 years of becoming sexually active, whichever comes first. Remind your daughters to do breast self-examinations. We have taught her how to perform these exams at her checkups.
7. Remind your sons to do testicular self-examinations. We have taught him how to perform these exams at his checkups.
8. Remind them that fatigue and stress can lead to illness. Most fatigue is not mono; most diarrhea is not colitis; and poor nutrition, sleep deprivation, smoking, or drinking causes most headaches.
9. Encourage them to start/continue regular exercise for weight management, stress reduction and general well-being.

Student Life

1. Sex, sexuality, alcohol, drugs, independence, and finances will confront every college student. Is your child ready for these issues? Are you ready for these issues? Discuss these points and have a plan related to finances. Discuss the risks of credit card debt.
2. Have you discussed with your child how to avoid sexual assault and what to do if she/he is sexually assaulted? Have you discussed with your child how to avoid being accused of assault? (avoiding risky situations, always assume that no means no, be careful if you drink too much)
3. If not covered on your homeowner's policy, dorm insurance can be obtained at National Student Services, Inc. (www.nssinc.com)
4. Roommates are not always perfect matches. They don't have to be your child's best friend. Give and take is an important message to carry to college.
5. Tell college students to make use of campus security and police. Things do get stolen in the dorms. Encourage locking their rooms and all their important items. Make sure they understand not to walk alone late at night.
6. If your child has a learning disability, inform the school. Ask how they can assist your child.
7. College is a place and time for further education. But it also is a time to explore ideas and possibilities. Encourage your child to become active in clubs and/or sports.
8. College means more freedom, therefore more self-discipline is needed. There is less time spent in traditional classrooms and more time spent on homework, studying, and research. Learning "time management" is a critical skill.
9. Cults, racism, bigotry, vandalism, gangs, and violence are alive and well on every campus. Rape and sexual assault do occur at college. The use of alcohol and drugs increases the risk.
10. When your child comes home, your interactions and how they see themselves fitting back into your family will be different. Be prepared for changes. Be prepared for changes in sleeping patterns, eating habits, hairstyles, fashion choices, etc.
11. College is neither easier nor harder than high school – just different. Enjoy the way your child's mind is expanding and learning.

The hardest thing to realize is that this is the beginning of the "letting go" of parenthood.