

Adjusting to college essay examples

[Health & Medicine](#), [Stress](#)



The freshman year of college can be quite stressful both for students and the parents of the students. In the rush to prepare for college, many prospective freshmen and their parents focus on material things, such as making sure the student has the right clothes, laptop or tablet, sufficient quantities of bed linens and towels, required paperwork, and so forth. Yet having those items rarely decreases stress for students. What actually causes the most stress will be interpersonal issues, such as adjusting to a new roommate, dealing with professors who demand a better quality of work than what the student produced in high school, and learning to balance increased freedom with increased responsibility. Many college freshman lack the coping skills or good strategies to deal with this stress and can make serious mistakes or feel miserable during their first year of college. To prevent college freshmen from feeling overwhelmed by their first year at university, they need to prepare themselves emotionally and intellectually for the experience.

It is quite easy to hear horror stories of freshmen having very bad experiences at college. One can use any search engine and locate numerous stories online about freshmen who die from alcohol poisoning during drinking contests with friends. Other students sink into depression and sometimes commit suicide. Many others simply cannot adjust to the more demanding classes and return home after earning bad grades or even flunking out.

Perhaps even more common than such drastic experiences is this type of situation. A family friend began college a couple of years ago. He came from a family that was very controlling. His parents had told him what to do, when to do it, and how to do it for his entire life, until the point he went away to college. During high school, his parents planned virtually every minute of his

life. They monitored his homework; they monitored his friends and did not allow him to maintain friendships with anyone they disapproved of. They told him which sports to play, which books he was allowed to read, which movies he was allowed to watch. When he did not do well in sports, they berated his coach. When he did not do well on an exam for a class, they confronted the teacher of that class. Their rationale for their actions was that they wanted to prevent their son from making any mistakes in high school. Because of this parenting choice, when this family friend went to college, it was his very first taste of freedom and also his very first taste of being responsible for his own actions. Finally out from under the absolute control of his parents, he wanted to have fun and relax a little. Unfortunately, he discovered a little too late that he could not attend parties six nights a week and still maintain a good grade point average. When his parents attempted to confront his professors about his low grades and demand that they allow him to retake failed exams, the professors were not intimidated and simply pointed out their class policies did allow retakes. By the end of his freshman year, his grades were so bad he was placed on academic probation and is now back at home, attending a community college while he improves his GPA. He readily admits that he was not ready for the personal freedom that college offered him, but he also acknowledges that since that time he has matured enough to make better choices.

The type of micromanagement that this friend's parents used is a parenting style commonly referred to as being "helicopter" parents. They hover around their child and swoop in to take the child away from any perceived danger. While it is understandable that parents want to protect their children

from harm, this parenting style can go to extremes and often produces children who cannot function on their own. College campuses have become accustomed to these parents but psychologists and sociologists who have studied the phenomenon note the problems that this parenting style can cause for freshman college students. One scholar noted that college freshman will face situations such as hard classes, bad roommates, and 8:00 am classes when they are used to a parent waking them up. As this scholar remarked: “ These are facts of adult life, and students who manage these challenges themselves develop the skills that will serve them well in the work world. Parents who intercede on behalf of their child deprive their child of the chance to grow and mature (Bress).

Research into the problems and challenges that college freshmen face supports the idea that over-controlling parents can be detrimental to their child’s college success. Much of the research focuses on the need for students to develop their own support system, instead of relying exclusively on their parents for advice. Freshmen need a network of friends and acquaintances who can provide meaningful advice to them during their first year of college. One college counselor gives this advice to new students: “ I would advise them to identify as early as they can who their campus support people are: Who could be a good mentor? Who has good knowledge? Who do you feel you have a good connection with? Who can give you advice? (Curtis).

Unsurprisingly, a study of stress in college freshmen found that the students who handle the stress the best are those who feel they have the support of their family, friends, and teachers (Bland 362-75). In this case, support

means that their family, friends and teachers are available for advice when asked but not offering unsolicited advice. Students who attempted to deal with stress by calling home frequently did not ultimately cope well with their stress. What seems clear from the study is that students who cope the best with the stress of the first year of college are those who feel comfortable making their own choices and decisions, while also having a support system in place if they want and need advice or emotional support during a bad time.

If the problem is that too many freshmen arrive at college without sufficient experience at making their own choices and taking responsibility for their own actions, what is the solution to the problem? The researcher who studied stress in freshmen offered this idea:

Although, this generation [millennials] is family focused, it almost becomes an obstruction at college. Instead of promoting college students to become reliant on parental support, there needs to be a push by college and university administrators to allow students to make their own decisions and choices. Again, students need to feel supported in their decisions and not reliant on their parent's input. Parents also need to be encouraged to take a step back and allow their college-age son/daughter to make mistakes and learn from them. (Bland 370)

Bland's suggestion is a good beginning, but it does not entirely solve the problem. To enable their children to function effectively during their first year of college, parents need to let go of absolute control over their children well before their children leave for college. The approach that helicopter parents take, of controlling every aspect of their child's life until college, is

based on a ludicrous assumption. These parents act as if their children should not be allowed to make any decisions or any mistakes until they turn 18, and that their children are going to wake up on their 18th birthday and suddenly be endowed with good decision-making abilities, self-discipline, and good judgment. Simply put, this is nonsense. Children and adults acquire those abilities slowly, not overnight. Parents would produce children much better equipped to deal with the pressures of college if they would relinquish some parental control over time during the child's adolescent years. For example, beginning at age 14, the child should get some additional freedom along with some additional responsibilities. Each year both the freedom and the responsibility would increase. In that way, the first year of college would not be a complete shock for students. They would have already made some mistakes and learned how to recover from them. They would have acquired the basic survival skills that students need for the first year of college, making it easier for them to adjust to life away from home and being on their own. Allowing children to become adults a little at a time over a period of three or four years makes much more sense than expecting them to transition from child to adult overnight.

Works Cited

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