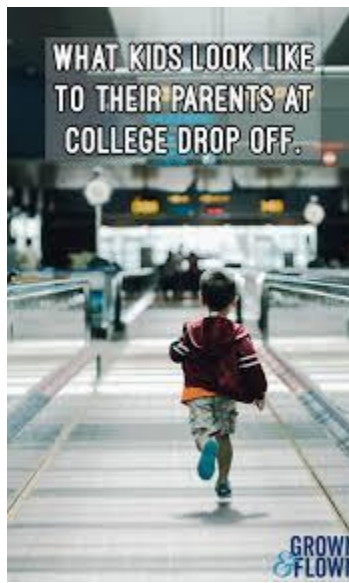


## Launching Teens into College:

by: Susannah Wallenstrom RDN & Anu Mathur LMFT



### Parenting:

Letting teens have open conversations about finances and expectations, encourage skill-building (time management, budgeting), and shift to a supportive-but-distant role, focusing on communication via open-ended questions and check-ins rather than helicoptering, all while teaching self-advocacy and leveraging college resources.

### Parenting tips:

- **Shift from managing to coaching** Ask questions instead of solving problems. It builds confidence and decision-making skills.
- **Normalize that struggle is part of the transition** Homesickness, stress, and uncertainty are expected—not signs that something is wrong.
- **Keep communication consistent but not constant** Agree on a check-in rhythm (e.g., weekly). Avoid multiple daily texts that can feel intrusive.
- **Listen more than you advise**

Sometimes they need to vent, not be “fixed.” Try: “Do you want advice or just to talk?”

- **Watch for changes, not just words**

Big shifts in mood, sleep, engagement, or communication patterns can signal they’re struggling.

- **Encourage use of campus resources**

Counseling, academic support, health services—remind them help exists without pushing too hard.

- **Avoid comparing them to others**

It increases pressure and shame, especially early on.

- **Model healthy boundaries**

Respect their growing independence while staying emotionally available.

- **Focus on effort, not just outcomes**

Reinforce resilience, not just grades or achievements.

- **Know when to step in**

If there are safety concerns (severe depression, substance use, talk of self-harm), it’s appropriate to be more direct and involved.

## **Practical college-life skills for students**

- Navigating campus resources: office hours, tutoring centers, financial aid, career services, student clubs and on-campus jobs.
- Life skills: medical forms, prescriptions, insurance cards, banking, budgeting, and transportation planning. knowing how to do laundry, sharing, being a good roommate, sharing fridge/microwave. What is your plan?
- Safety and social life: parties, consent, bystander skills, and planning for tricky situations before they arise.
- Connecting with student support, disability services, and counseling services.
- Every day routines and protective habits: sleep, movement, eating patterns, friendships, and social media boundaries.

## **Self care**

### **Nutrition**

- **Food as fuel.** Frame conversations around how food affects energy, focus, and mood. When they're exhausted or struggling to concentrate, gently connect it back to what – or whether – they've eaten that day.
- **Regular meals, with some fruits and vegetables.** Encourage a rough rhythm of

three meals plus two to three snacks a day. Skipping meals = hangry.

- **Practical support that respects autonomy.** Offer a small monthly grocery budget with no strings attached. Trust goes further than rules.
- **Easy snacks for the dorm room.** Trail mix, string cheese, apples, nut butter packets, popcorn, protein bars, and dark chocolate are all easy to keep on a desk or shelf and grab between classes.
- **The food-mood connection.** Help them notice their own patterns over time. If they're anxious before exams or crashing mid-afternoon, gently point to the food-mood link as one lever they can actually control in an otherwise chaotic environment.

## Sleep

- Normalize 7–9 hours as the “performance baseline” for mood, memory, and immunity
- Help them think through routines (earplugs, eye mask, screens off before bed, caffeine cut-off) instead of telling them when to sleep.
- If they're exhausted, ask “What's one small change this week that might help?” and let them choose

## Exercise

- **Move your body to manage stress** — even a 20-minute walk between classes can lower anxiety, clear your head, and reset your mood better than scrolling on your phone.
- **Use the campus rec center — it's already paid for** — the gym, pool, fitness classes, and intramural sports are included in your student fees, so take advantage of what's there.
- **Exercise helps you sleep and focus** — Regular movement improves sleep and concentration, which improves grades, not just better physical health.