

This is a good read to all of my friends who sent their child off to college—see below:

Having had no less than 12 students (male and female) sob in my office in the past 3 weeks, this is a public service announcement to all my friends out there who have just sent or are soon to send their kids to college....

Most of you know that I serve as an Academic Advisor at Virginia Tech. It puts me in the unique position of witnessing firsthand a lot of what most of you only speculate about higher ed and the college experience today. I am here to tell you that it is NOT the same as when we went to school, and that is for a variety of reasons. In my mind, it is a perfect storm of (1) high schools engaging in massive grade inflation and not fully preparing our kids for what lies ahead; (2) our generation's over-involved, fix-it style of parenting; and (3) social media/technology and the strange dichotomy of these platforms meant to connect us that often do just the opposite.

I went to a recent training on this generation, termed GenZ, yet also depressingly termed "the loneliest generation." Record numbers of students are facing anxiety, depression, mental health issues, and suicide ideations on campuses ill-equipped to deal with the sheer volume. Regardless of our own opinions about how "real" this epidemic is, I am here to tell you that our opinion doesn't matter - because it is real to OUR KIDS.

So what can you do for your them while they are away, be it down the road or across the country?

Do not text your child hourly. Or even daily. Let them set the tone. And if you don't hear from them, don't panic! That's a good thing! And it's ok NOT to answer occasionally or immediately. Also, do not get roped into negativity and complaining via text either. If they want to vent, have them call. Or tell them to go see their advisor. This is why I have had 12 people crying in my office thus far. It's a safe space. Your child needs to find those safe spaces wherever they are.

Remember when you were away at school and had an issue - what did you do? You talked to roommates and friends. Or yourself. You figured it out. THEN you might have told your parents. Or not. Your children need to learn how to solve problems on their own. You jumping on their school's website and finding everything for them might be helpful in the short term but I can tell you that it leads to total paralysis day to day and most especially when they go to find an internship or a job and have not developed any of those professional competencies yet. If they ask you for help, your answer should be, "Why don't you ask your Advisor." That is why we are here! You would not believe the random questions I get....and they make me laugh and I am happy to get them because it means they aren't asking you.

PLEASE get off the Parent Pages of your child's universities, or use it only as a means to get very basic information, or just for a laugh. Engaging in lengthy conversations with other parents complaining about X,Y, and Z at your child's institution and then passing that along to your child

does nothing but make them more anxious in feeling like you don't trust them to navigate things on their own and also that their privacy is being violated.

Encourage them to join clubs and professional societies. It is far more likely that they will find "their people" there than in their dorm, and joining things is all part of the personal growth curve in college.

Many of your kids didn't have to work that hard in high school and did well. Not so now. Tell them to treat college like a job with a 40+ hour work week. They can play hard but need to work hard to earn the playing part.

Tell them to get help before they think they actually need it to avoid the unenviable spiral downward. Use all the resources – academic and otherwise – that their universities have to offer.

Time management is the single biggest factor in a student's success, in my book. Tell them to schedule their downtime just as they do their classes and allow themselves to totally check out from academics with whatever activities bring them joy and balance instead of stressing out about what they should be doing. This prevents what I like to call "going down the rabbit hole of no return" where they become so overwhelmed that all they do is sleep and skip class because they don't even know where to start to get caught up and engaged.

Tell them to be open to new knowledge, new experiences and new people, to not trust their first judgments of people/situations, to not make assumptions. It is important that they push themselves outside their comfort zone from time to time to avoid complacency. Being off balance is a good thing once in a while!

If they mess up, hold them accountable, and make them do the same. Cheating is a major issue on campuses for a reason. They can learn and grow from their missteps only if held accountable.

A lot of what I do on any given day is normalizing what a student perceives as failure. That is an important message for your child to receive. If they are really struggling, even failing - academically, socially, whatever - they need to know that others are as well, that it is short-term, that there are valuable things to be learned from those struggles. And don't be afraid to share your own struggles with them!

And finally, did I mention the part about seeing their advisor?? Early. Often. They need to build that relationship. All of your campuses have strong advising resources, I have no doubt.

I often joke that I wouldn't have a job if my generation weren't such shitty parents. So thanks for the career, my friends! 😊 It truly is a pleasure. 😊