

Tips for parents when their loved one goes to college

From Walden Behavioral Care

Provided your child is clear to start or return, here are some tips:

1. **Plan for regular visits:** Face time is key. If they're attending school nearby, make a plan to visit – or have them come home – once every two weekends. If further, try once or twice per semester. It's a fine balance, though – you don't want to be overbearing (visiting every single weekend). Your child must eventually learn how to properly navigate the college campus without a watchful eye.
2. **Work with a college counselor or outpatient team:** These services are extremely accessible to students, and in some cases, there are staff right on site who specialize in eating disorders treatment. Work with them to determine what measures should be put into place for your child, whether it's weekly weigh-ins or vitals. Set up the first appointment before your child leaves home.
3. **Draft a meal plan:** Build off your home environment. Study the on-campus options available to them (you can always reach out to the school), and based off that, work with a dietitian to create a customized meal plan for your child. Make sure components are easily accessible. Creating extra work (requiring them to shop off campus) might stray them off plan.
4. **Monitor grades:** Eating disorders can have a profound impact on studies. Although a grade point average doesn't solely dictate how your child is doing, it's often a strong indicator. Keep in mind that not only can a significant dip in grades be a warning sign of something more serious, but also a significant rise in grades. Check with the school to see if ongoing status reports (more frequently than end of the semester grades) are an option. Additionally, keep asking your child what they're working on, and follow through on the outcomes.
5. **Designate a peer ambassador:** If possible, identify someone on campus – your child's roommate, close friend or resident advisor – who can provide you with regular, general updates on how your child is faring in general. They don't need to watch over every meal or follow your child to the bathroom. Don't hide this from your child either – make it known you're in contact, why it's in their best interest and the (non-intrusive) nature of it.
6. **Most of all, trust them.** I can't stress this enough. Unless they've violated it, they deserve your trust. It's not easy at times, but if your child knows you trust them, your relationship – and what they share with you – can be stronger in the long run.