

Residential Life at the University of Connecticut

Parents frequently ask, “What can I do to support my daughter or son” or, “What things should we be prepared for?” While every family relationship is unique, we have observed some common themes over several years of living and working with college students. We offer suggestions with the hopes that you may find some of them helpful.

A Time of Transition...

College is a period of transition, not only for your son or daughter, but for you and the other members of your family. During this time of transition your son or daughter (student) will still continue to need your support. Parents can help by being supportive, trusting and encouraging independence.

Accept that you won't know every detail of your student's life. Most students come to college having lived in a somewhat structured environment. It is important to realize that although your student may never have lived away from you before, going to college is an exciting and important step in his/her maturation process. The values and ethics you have instilled will help your student make good choices and decisions. It is extremely helpful for you to talk about this with your student throughout their first year at the institution.

Although UConn can seem like a large place, unlike anyone's home, your student will actually be living in an environment where staff members understand the developmental process and transitional issues experienced by college students, and will be able to help students adjust to life at UConn. This will require some effort on the part of your student, as staff depend on students to come forward if they need assistance.

Helping your Student Manage Concerns...

Learning to successfully manage concerns within a complex organization is an important part of becoming a competent adult. If your student reports difficulties associated with the residence hall experience, we urge you to encourage him/her to take personal responsibility for seeking resolution. Show concern about your student's life and understand their struggles. Ask questions, but try not to invade their privacy. Often students will let you know what is happening, but at their own pace and timing. Encourage your student to get to know the Community Assistant on the floor, and other staff members in the area.

For the majority of your student's life you have been right there to help make decisions and choices. As your student begins college, they will need to be more independent and self sufficient. Although they will still want to talk about their experiences, you need to empower your student to solve their own problems by offering guidance, encouraging independence, and trusting your student's decisions. Handling difficult situations for them will only impede their development. Since students can and do resolve most of their own concerns, parental involvement is usually not necessary. However, should you need to become involved, you should begin with the complex office. Please visit our website www.reslife.uconn.edu for a complete listing of complex offices and staff members. If we can not accommodate a special request, we will provide an explanation of our policies and procedures.

Getting Along with a Roommate...

Roommate conflicts are natural and healthy. Part of the experience of living in the residence halls at any university involves learning to live with a roommate. This experience will help your student to learn essential skills like communication and boundary setting. We have in place, systems to address roommate concerns. You can help this process by challenging your student to actively work through the issues,

instead of avoiding them or looking for easy answers. Changing roommates is often not the best solution, so helping your student seek alternative solutions will enhance the learning that can come from this experience. There is a Community Assistant (CA) on each floor that has been trained to handle roommate issues. The CA or your student can also ask for assistance from the Hall Director or Community Director when necessary.

Homesickness...

Homesickness can be one of the hardest areas to help your student move past. For your student, life has changed and will never be the same. The first two weeks of the year are filled with many activities that help people get connected. Your student needs to take advantage of those opportunities in order to become a successful member of their new community. Throughout the year it is important to write letters, and send food and care packages; a sure sign of support and concern. You have no idea how excited students get when these arrive. But don't sit around waiting for a phone call or e-mail. Students are curious about what you are up to, but may not let you know what they are doing. It is not unusual for your student to want to come home occasionally during their first year, but if they want to come home every weekend try to find out why; they may be struggling with the social aspects of on-campus living. Encourage them to give it time and get out and meet people.

Helping Them Stay Informed...

You have probably already realized that the University of Connecticut uses e-mail as the primary method of communication. Please remind your student to pay attention to e-mails sent to their HuskyMail account from the University. We realize that most students bring cell phones to campus, which is why we ask for this on the Housing Application. For those students who do not have cell phones, it is important for them to set up the voicemail on his/her room phone. This will make it possible for both you and the Department of Residential Life to leave messages for your student.

Community Expectations at UConn...

Many parents and students come to UConn with preconceived notions of campus conduct, university regulations, and the law. These notions are often based on media accounts, someone's memories, and assumptions. But every university has to abide by federal regulations; must respect the particular laws of its home state and municipal venue; and has its own traditions, regulations, and institutional integrity. If parents know more about institutional and legal expectations, they can reinforce the positive teachings of UConn and help their students avoid complications. Rules and regulations are designed to protect the rights of students and encourage individual and community responsibility. They exist for the following reasons:

- To provide for the health, safety, and security needs of residents
- To support the requirements of local, state, or federal laws
- To allow students the opportunity to sleep, study, and pursue their academic endeavors without undue interference from disruptive community members

A great way to start this conversation is to discuss with your student the importance of safety and security on-campus. This is a shared responsibility and students should always be aware of their surroundings, report any suspicious behavior, lock their room, and make sure that doors to their residential areas are closed after they enter and leave.

To learn about the community standards at UConn, consult the Residential Life web site at

www.reslife.uconn.edu for the On-Campus Housing Contract 2007-2008 and the Dean of Students web site at www.dos.uconn.edu for *Responsibilities of Student Life: The Student Code*.

Academic Life at UConn...

Remember your student has joined the ranks of the “best of the best” at UConn, and the academic expectations are rigorous. While your student was in high school you could monitor how much time was spent on academic work but now, they are the masters of their own time and energies. Talk with your student about how they plan on balancing this new freedom to ensure that they succeed academically. Be careful to not make them feel like you do not want them to have fun, but rather that you want to help them succeed socially and academically. Ask very pointed questions that demand answers greater than “things are ok”. Your student may not tell you everything that is going on, however if you stay interested, they will know that you are there and will come to you when he/she really needs you.

It is normal for students with high-school grades in the 90’s to see them drop a little. This may come as a shock to both you and your student, given that they were always one of the best in their high-school. Your student is experiencing a life-transition from high-school to a university, and for many students a temporary drop in grades is typical. Don’t let your student get depressed or discouraged; instead encourage them to get help. Tutoring, study skills workshops, and other academic support is readily available for first-year students. Students who seek assistance from the various campus resources typically get back on track and do fine.

“The Phone Call”...

Be prepared for “the phone call”. Often it comes just after midterms or near the end of the first semester, when work is piling up, or grades aren’t what was hoped for. Your student may feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as well as in the past. Your student may be upset and chances are he/she is going to call you. It’s important that you don’t panic; remember that this is normal, and as much as you’d like to alleviate the stress, you can not (and should not) “fix this” for him/her. Your student will rely on you to be calm and reassuring about their ability to successfully work through the challenges. Encourage your student to seek help from the campus resources that are available.

Returning Home...

Understand that your student may have difficulties returning home on holidays after experiencing life on his/her own. For the last several months he/she has become accustomed to *only* his/her own daily routine – not the family’s, and has not been living with the house rules that may have been in existence in your home. Sometimes they come home with new expectations for family members. It’s a transition time for everyone.

And Finally...

Be knowledgeable about campus resources. Visit the UConn web site often, www.uconn.edu, read the plethora of materials that came to your home as your student was preparing to begin at UConn. Check out the UConn Events Calendar at www.events.uconn.edu to learn about events at UConn, and frequent the Residential Life web page at www.reslife.uconn.edu.