

10 Tips for Parenting a Lancer

#1: Don't ask if he/she is homesick

The power of suggestion can be dangerous. The idea of being homesick usually doesn't occur until someone suggests it. The first few days/weeks of college are activity-packed and friend-jammed, and the challenge of meeting new people and adjusting to new situations takes a majority of a freshman's time and concentration. Unless a well-meaning parent reminds them of it, they'll probably be able to escape the loneliness and frustration of homesickness. Even if they don't tell you during those first few weeks, they really do miss you.

#2: Write, email or text (even if they don't respond)

Even though freshmen are typically eager to experience all the away-from-home independence they can in those first weeks, most are still anxious for family ties and the security those ties bring. This surge of independence may be misinterpreted by sensitive parents as rejection, but freshmen (although 99% of them won't ever admit it) would give anything for some news of home and family, however mundane it may seem to you. There is nothing more depressing than a week of an empty mailbox. (**Warning:** Don't expect a reply to every letter or email you write. The "you write on, they write one" sequence isn't always followed by college students so get set for some unanswered correspondence.)

#3: Ask questions (but not too many)

College freshmen are "cool" (or so they think) and have a tendency to resent interference with their new lifestyle, but most still desire the security of knowing that someone is still interested in them. Parental curiosity can be obnoxious and alienating, or relieving, depending on the attitude of the person involved. "I have a right to know" tinged questions with ulterior motives or nagging should be avoided. Honest inquiries, however, and other "between friends" communication and discussion will do much to further the parent-freshmen relationship.

#4: Don't worry (too much) about distress phone calls or emails

Parenting can be a thankless job, especially during the college years. It's a lot to give an only a little take. Often when troubles become too much for a freshman to handle (a flunked test, end of a relationship, and a shrunken pair of jeans all in one day), the only place to turn to is home. Be patient with those "nothing is going right, I hate this place" phone calls, letters or emails. You're providing a real service as an advice dispenser, sympathetic ear or punching bag. Granted, it's a service that makes you feel lousy, but it works wonders for a frustrated student. Generally, a good night of sleep will work wonders for your student, too.

#5: Visit (but not too often)

Visits by parents (especially when accompanied by shopping sprees and/or dinner out) are another part of the first-year events that freshmen are reluctant to admit liking, but they appreciate them greatly. These visits give the student a chance to introduce some of the

important people in both of their worlds (home and school) to each other. Additionally, it's a way for parents to become familiar with (and, hopefully, more understanding of) their student's new activities, commitments, and friends. Spur of the moment "surprises" are usually not appreciated.

#6: Don't tell your student that "these are the best years of their lives"

The freshmen year can be full of indecisions, insecurities, disappointments and mistakes. It's also full of discovery, inspiration and fun. It takes a while for some students to accept that being unhappy, afraid, confused, and disliked and making mistakes are all part of the new reality and of growing up.

Parents who believe all college students get good grades, know what they want to major in, always have activity-packed weekends with thousands of close friends and lead carefree lives are wrong. So are the parents who think college-educated means mistake-proof. Parents who insist on the "best years" stereotype are working against their student's already difficult self-development. Those who accept and understand the highs and lows of their student's reality are providing the support and encouragement where it is needed most.

#7: Take time to discuss finances

Most college students are still financially dependent on their parents to some degree. Sit down and discuss your family's financial situation with your son or daughter. Students need to know how much money will be available to them and how much of the financial responsibility is theirs.

#8: Prepare for their return

When the school year ends and your student returns home for break, sit down and discuss the rules of living at home. Parents need to respect the individuality their students have worked hard to achieve, and students need to know there are rules and courtesies to be observed.

#9: Trust them

Finding one's self is difficult enough without feeling that the people whose opinions you respect most are second-guessing you. One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to let your child know that you trust his/her judgment.

#10: Expect change

Your student will change (either drastically within the first months, slowly over the college years, or somewhere in between). It's natural, inevitable, and it can be inspiring and beautiful. Often it's a pain in the neck. College, and experiences associated with it, can affect changes in social, vocational and personal behavior. A pre-med student may discover a strong love for drama or literature, or a high school radical may become a college preppy. Students find college a time to explore their personal belief system. No one is forcing your student to attend

church, and they may choose to sleep late or try other denominations. This is a time where young people make their faith personal, and we strive to encourage that with each student. You can't stop change. You may not even understand it, but it is within your power to accept it.

Remember that your freshmen will remain basically the same person you sent away to school, aside from the interest and personality changes. Don't expect too much too soon. Maturation is not an instantaneous or overnight process, and you might discover your freshmen returning home with some of the habits and hang-ups, however unsophisticated, that you thought he or she had "grown out of."