

10 Ways to Make the Most of Your Orientation Experience

When you have the opportunity to go through a parent orientation program, there are some key ways to make the most of this gateway experience:

Prepare Questions. Think about what you really *want* to know, not just what you “should” find out. Interested in how students can apply their learning in practical settings? Ask about internships, jobs and co-op opportunities. Want to know whom your student can turn to if he’s having learning difficulties? Ask the question. Thinking ahead will help you determine what’s truly important to you and your student.

Don’t be Shy. Sitting back and listening to presenters and panels makes good sense. However, if you have additional questions, don’t hesitate to ask. Whether it’s in a group setting or one-on-one after a presentation, your concerns deserve attention. And no question is a “dumb” one!

Listen and Take Notes. Jot some notes as various presenters bombard you with information. That way, you can read through them when you get home and clear your head. It’s easy to say, “I’ll remember that point or that contact info” yet the sheer volume of information you are offered during orientation makes remembering everything from memory very difficult.

Get to Know Other Parents/Family Members. Orientation is an excellent time to mix and mingle with others who are going through the same thing that you are: sending your student to college. Develop informal support structures and compare notes with other parents and family members.

Give Your Student Some Space. This is his first campus experience as a matriculated student so it’s important that he learn to navigate on his own. Give him space to meet people, to ask his own questions and to take charge of his college life. Starting off with a dose of self-responsibility during orientation will set a positive tone for the rest of his time on campus.

Take Tours. It may be hot and you may be tired. Yet nothing beats seeing something with your own eyes. So, consider taking tours that are offered. You’ll get to see academic buildings, residence halls, community spaces and much more. Then, when your student starts talking about these places during the semester, you’ll be able to accurately picture her in her

Questions to Consider

Commuter Concerns. What meal plans are available for commuters? How can they get involved in campus life, even though they don’t live there? What is the parking situation like?

Residence Hall Life. What are students allowed to bring and what is against policy? Do the mattresses require extra long sheets? What kind of staff are available in the halls?

Academics. What services are available to students with learning disabilities? How do professors’ office hours work? If a student is feeling behind, what can he/she do?

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Determine what is important to YOU.

surroundings.

Keep Yourself Healthy. Orientation sessions often happen on some of the hottest days of the year. Drink water, stay cool and pace yourself.

Don’t Cause a Scene. If you cause a ruckus during a session or raise your voice at an administrator, not only will you cause an unpleasant scene, you’ll also make things harder for your student by embarrassing him. We all know how to handle concerns with care and dignity. Make that your mode of operation so that people will respond to you better and so that your student doesn’t have to suffer.

Have Paperwork in Place. Work with your student to make sure that you’re bringing all the required paperwork to campus for orientation. Go through a checklist ahead of time so that you both feel prepared to dive into orientation without worry!

Join the Parent Association. If your campus offers a Parent/Family Association, why not join? These organizations typically do everything from keeping families informed to planning Parent/Family Weekend events—and much more. Plus, they offer another connection to campus that can be invaluable when you have questions, concerns and ideas.

Orientation can be an exciting time for both you and your student. Make the most of it!

9 Books for Parents of College Students

And you thought your student would be the only one doing all the reading during the college years! Needless to say, you may want to pick up a few “text-books” of your own to learn more about your role as a college parent.

Here are a few suggested titles that you can pick up at your local bookstore.

1. *You're On Your Own: But I'm Here if You Need Me* by Marjorie Savage (2003).

A great resource for parents attempting to understand the boundaries between when to intervene and when to respect their child's privacy. The author knows her subject as she currently serves as the Director of the University of Minnesota's Parent Programs and is a parent herself, affording her the experience to offer advice and tips on multiple issues.

2. *I'll Miss You Too: An Off-to-College Guide for Parents and Students: What Will Change, What Will Not, and How We'll Stay Connected* by Margo E. Woodacre and Steffany Bane (2006).

The authors, a mother-daughter team, provide the differing perspectives of parent and child through the transition to college. Using humor, this guide provides insight into maintaining a meaningful relationship through ongoing communication and understanding of the other's experiences and feelings.

3. *Paying for College Without Going Broke 2007* by Kalman A. Chany, Geoff Martz (2006).

A must have book for anyone looking to better understand the financial aid process. Recently updated, this book provides the most current information on eligibility, laws, taxes and more, to help families tackle the soaring costs associated with a college education.

4. *Almost Grown: Launching Your Child From High School to College* by Patricia Pasick (1998).

Written by a psychologist and parent, the author provides a unique take on the college transition, offering both practical advice for helping your child plan for college, but also helping the family plan for this pivotal transition and the implications of a changing family environment.

5. *When Your Kid Goes to College: A Parent's Survival Guide* by Carol Barkin (1999).

Reflecting back on her own experience of sending her son off to college, the author attempts to make it a little easier for her peers by providing a guide filled with tips, advice, and strategies for making it through the separation and transition of saying good-bye and good luck.

6. *Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years* by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger (2003).

A quick and easy read that offers practical, updated and helpful information to assist parents with both the emotional and social challenges experienced during the college years, by both student and parent.

7. *Don't Tell Me What to Do, Just Send Money* by Helen E. Johnson and Christine Schelhas-Miller (2000).

Using humor and actual case studies, the authors attempt to help parents understand their changing role, still providing influence but with less control and direction. The book is comprehensive and offers strategies for a wide-range of common issues experienced by parents and students.

8. *Dollars and Sense for College Students: Or how Not to Run out of Money by Mid-Terms* by Ellen Braitman and Celeste Sollod (1998).

Written for students, this book is a great read for parents as well. Packed with tips, suggestions, strategies and warnings that parents can use to help their student develop smart habits and make wise choices for managing money throughout college...and beyond.

9. *A Parent's Guide to Sex, Drugs, and Flunking Out: Answers to the Questions Your College Student Doesn't Want You to Ask* by Joel Epstein (2001).

An often sobering read, this book will assist any parent in tackling the sometimes difficult situations that can arise during the college years. Supported by the author's own research, the guide provides useful and informative information on a variety of college issues.

