

College Life Scenarios

Below are some scenarios that your son or daughter may experience during their time at Coe. These sample situations are presented to introduce issues, provide strategies to initiate discussion, and provide connections to campus resources. The more prepared you will be when challenging events happen. And... if history follows precedent, they will!

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers for any of these situations. Our intent is simply to provide some guidance that we hope you'll find helpful. As always, we are here to provide assistance to you or your loved one.

Scenario: Homesickness

Your son has not sounded like himself when you've spoken with him since he arrived at Coe a few weeks ago. When you press, you discover that he's terribly homesick. He hasn't made any friends and he's feeling lonely and depressed. What should you say and do?

Homesickness is not unusual for students, but it can feel very isolating when students sense they are the only ones who miss friends, family, old traditions, etc. The myths that college roommates are supposed to be best friends and that college is the time of your life are still pervasive, and often intensify normal separation anxiety. Many students find support from their Resident Assistant (RA) or College Adjustment Peer (CAP). For others, simply getting involved with one or more student organizations can provide networking opportunities to help students feel connected to the Coe community.

For many students, learning to adapt to a new environment or build meaningful relationships from scratch may be a new skill. As parents, don't jump in too quickly to rescue your son or daughter from the discomfort of change, but DO encourage them to take risks by joining clubs, attending events, sitting down with strangers in the dining hall, or just asking the RA or CAP for help. You may want to recommend that they meet with additional college resources if the feelings persist.

Scenario: Money Management

You opened up a checking account for your daughter before she went off to college. You put in what you thought would be an adequate amount of money for her entire first term. However, with three weeks still left in the term, she calls home to ask for money. She claims she hasn't been spending foolishly – the little things she had to buy just added up to more than she had planned. What should you say and do?

Communication is key. While you'll have to decide how to respond for this immediate situation, it might be worth the time and relieve tension to sit down and develop a budget with your daughter. Helping her differentiate between needs and wants, and setting realistic projections of day-to-day expenses is part of her development process. An option may be to seek on-campus employment to cover some expenses.

Scenario: Readjustment to Home

Your son has returned home for winter break and you expect life to be "as usual." His first night out with his friends, he doesn't come home until 3:30 AM. His curfew while at home before going away to college was 12:30 AM. What should you say and do?

As with most of these scenarios, we recommend that you talk about how you want to define your relationship with your son before situations like this arise. In most cases, this is an issue of defining adulthood. Your son has experienced independence as a college student and wishes to be treated like an adult. At the same time, you wish for the same respect.

Many families find success when they create a relationship in which their son or daughter is treated as an adult guest. Just as you would ask your old pal from the Navy to let you know her itinerary when she stays with you, it's reasonable to expect the same from your son/daughter.

Scenario: I'm too busy...

After a few weeks away at college, your daughter claims that she cannot find her favorite shampoo and conditioner anywhere, and wants you to send her a supply of toiletries each month. And oh, by the way, please also send pencils and notebooks – she's too busy to get to the store to buy them. Oops, she's also so swamped, she can't find the time to get into the Business office to ask about a job, nor the tutoring office and wants you to help her get this information. What should you say and do?

Ah, it's the old "I can't find my favorite shampoo" trick. Students are busy – both academically and socially. We worry when we think students are not engaged, but we also expect students to learn life and time management skills. Even students who participate in athletics, leadership organizations, campus employment, and have healthy social lives should have time to run errands and manage personal affairs. Finding new hair stylists, restaurants, and other services they can trust will be a valuable learning experience for students. Learning to manage one's time and get things done correctly and on-time is part of their overall development. You might want to suggest to your daughter that she visit with resources to learn more about how to leverage (or learn about) time management skills.

Scenario: Communicating with each other

You're having trouble reaching your son - no answer in his room, his cell phone appears to be turned off and he's not answering his e-mails. When you finally reach his roommate, he says he's been at the Health Services office a few times lately because he's "really sick." Panicked, all you want to do is come to his rescue! What should you say and do?

This scenario may have more to do with communication than Health Services. The expectations parents have for frequency and topics for conversation may be different than those of their son or daughter. This type of situation may open the door for a discussion about how you communicate (e-mail, text, phone, etc), the frequency of communication, and about when you need to know certain information. While deep down, you might not want to know everything your son is doing, you may need to know when he plans to take a road trip, spend a night outside his room, etc.

In terms of health care, the good news in this scenario is that your son sought medical help. Often, students wait until they are very ill, rather than taking proactive measures to address physical ailments. Many health related issues can be handled right here on campus, and when that is not possible,

professional referrals can be made. The Health Services office is not open 24-hours, but when students take proactive measures to care for themselves, they have an exceptional resource right here on campus.

Scenario: Safety & Security

Recent calls from your daughter have not referenced her boyfriend of long standing and you wonder why he is no longer in the picture. When you ask her about him, she starts to cry and tells you that she has done something wrong. After you invest considerable time and energy into your telephone conversation, she describes to you the events of an evening several weeks ago, during the first couple weeks of school. After a party (including several drinks), she went back to a guy's room, one thing led to another, and before she knew it, she awoke the next morning, still in his room, realizing she was the victim of date rape. What should you say and do?

Before you can be of help to your daughter, you may find that you need someone to talk to in order to sort out the myriad of emotions that can flood an individual who loves someone who has been hurt. A skilled counselor may be able to help.

The first step to helping someone who has been victimized is to listen without judgment, believing whatever they share with you, as you may be the first person they have confided in about this incident. It's important that a trusted parent or friend hear their story, and then help the person understand the options available. Coe has a professional staff member called a Sexual Assault Coordinator who has been trained to help students through each step of the process from making sure they are physically cared for, to explaining the options for reporting the violation. Sexual assault involves a loss of control, and what the individual needs the most is to regain that control by making decisions about their own treatment and judicial options. As a parent, you may want to push the sexual assault survivor to press charges; it's much better for the person to make this decision by themselves, so that they begin to gain back the control that was taken from them. This decision making and regaining control will help the person begin along the road to recovery.

We don't wish this scenario on any family, but Coe and the community have a network ready to assist when needed: Sexual Assault Advocate, Student Development & Counseling, Health Services, Women's Programs, Dean of Students, and Public Safety. As a parent, you may contact any of these resources, and we'll reach out as appropriate to your student regarding his/her options.

Scenario: Academic Success

Your son has completed two terms at Coe, and brought home a grade record of all "C"s. He was a straight A student in high school. He has gotten very involved in many activities while at Coe, and is having a great time socially and extracurricular. What should you say and do?

Grades are a reflection of a lot of factors, and the letter grade rarely tells the story.

Starting off with a rough term or semester is not the end of the world, but being able to reflect on what happened and asking for help is essential to turning things around. Just as the College aims to both challenge and support each of our students, parents can do the same.

Taking the time to listen without jumping to conclusions could go a long way. Once you and your son have a good sense of what a grade of "C" means in the long run, you can help your son decide what is best for the next semester.

For academic assistance, your son may wish to consult the Learning Commons, where you'll find information on tutoring, academic advising, the College's Writing and Speaking Centers, and other academic support services.

For assistance with personal matters, Coe offers short-term confidential counseling services through Student Development & St. Luke's Counseling.

Scenario: Son Concerned about a Roommate or Friend

Your son comes home for the weekend and you overhear his telephone conversation with a friend. He is talking about his roommate whom he believes drinks too heavily and uses drugs, and his subsequent problems with that roommate. What should you say and do?

The first question to ask yourself is, "What is my major concern here?" Is it the health of the roommate? Or the quality of life of my son? Another question to ponder is, "What is the core concern of my son and what steps has he taken to address it?" You may find that your son is exaggerating for dramatic effect on the phone, or is genuinely concerned for his roommate and self. Depending on what you find out through discussions with your son, you may want to encourage him to contact his RA, the Dean of Students Office, Student Development, Counseling, or Healthy Alternatives.

Scenario: I'm not Happy Here

Your daughter calls home after a few weeks at Coe reporting that the food is awful, there's no social life, the academic work is too demanding, and that she's planning to transfer for the spring semester. What should you say and do?

Similar to some of the other situations listed here, your daughter may just need someone to listen. It's often amazing how just acknowledging someone's feelings can offer comfort. A key phrase might sound something like: "Sounds like you're dealing with a lot right now." Many parents tell us that repeating back the basic feelings that their son or daughter shared with them can result in a sense of relief on the other end of the phone. "Who do you think you might talk to about your concerns?" might be another non-aggressive way to help your daughter find the resources to sort out her feelings in order to decide what steps to take to resolve them. Gently suggesting that she seek out her RA or Student Development Resources might be a place to start.

Scenario: Joining a Fraternity or Sorority

Your son has decided to join a fraternity and seems to be spending all of his time with pledging activities. You worry that his grades will suffer and that peer pressure might lead him to do things he may not ordinarily do and wonder if this was a sound decision. What should you say and do?

A student's primary role at college is to be a student, so your concern mirrors that of our campus community. At the same time, being involved in co-curricular activities is an essential part of the educational experience at Coe. Here are some questions for you to consider as you talk to your son:

Is there a reason you are concerned about your son's decision (grades, maturity level) or are you basing your anxiety on stereotypes?

Is your son already involved in activities or would the fraternity be the only organization he has as a support network?

Will taking a firm stance on your feelings result in the desired outcome for your son?

You may wish to visit the Greek Life Programs web page to gather more information, as well as the greek life community as a whole.

Scenario: Residence Hall Noise

Your son constantly complains to you that the students on his floor are too loud and that they are keeping him awake at night. What should you say and do?

The easy answer here is to tell your son to confront the people making the noise. If only life were that easy! Many students are comfortable working with peers to solve problems, but many have never had to engage in a difficult conversation before, and find the thought of it quite daunting and uncomfortable.

The first place for your son to start is with the floor's Resident Assistant (RA). While the RA is not going to immediately solve the problem for your son, he/she will be able to offer a number of suggestions to lessen the anxiety as your son decides how best to voice his concerns. Your son may have a lot more options than he realizes.

Again, this may be a scenario in which you ask your son, "Were you calling for advice or just to vent?"

Scenario: Eating Disorder Concerns

Your daughter looks thinner than usual when she comes home for winter break. When you comment on it, she says the food is terrible at school. You've noticed that she seems to be distancing herself a bit from her friends and that she doesn't seem to eat much during your family dinners. What should you say and do?

We recommend that you be up-front, mention your concern, and ask your daughter about her eating habits. If she does not want to discuss your concerns, it is still wise to let her know about the various resources here at Coe. Eating disorders are often times more about control than body image issues. If she is isolating herself from friends and family, then there is likely to be an emotional or psychological component to the issue as well. Counseling may be her best option.

If your daughter suffers from an eating disorder, early treatment from professionals is the goal. Consultation with trained counselors or health care professionals can help you assess your daughter's condition and take the necessary steps to reach out to her. Coe's Health Services and Student Development & Counseling have staff with an in-depth understanding of eating disorders and both may be of assistance to your daughter.

Scenario: Roommate Concerns

Your son's international roommate has already arrived, moved in, and apparently started preparing his native food in the room when you get to campus to move in. There's an unfamiliar smell lingering in your son's tight new quarters and you can tell that your son is feeling uncomfortable. What should you say and do?

What should you do? The easiest answer here: nothing. If we do our job right at Coe, "different," "uncomfortable" and "challenging" will be a part of each student's educational experience. Learning from other students and from new life experiences will help all involved. At this stage, your son has a great opportunity to learn before deciding whether or not the "unfamiliar smell" is good or bad. From there, the communication doesn't have to be any different than negotiating how loud the TV volume should be or when they're turning off the room lights at night.