

Parenting Advice For College Move-In Day From STEP's Patti Parra

8 things to do to prepare for the big day, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Soon, your baby — who's not such a baby, anymore — will head to college.

You may be feeling excited for their future; worried for their safety; guilty that you can't attend move-in day; or unsure how your family will deal with this change.

Navigating the college transition is hard. I've done it twice: My oldest Ashley went to Wellesley College in 2015, and Leo started Skidmore College in 2020. And, let me tell you, I felt every emotion there was.

But here's the main thing to remember: Your child being away at college is a success — for you and for them.

Looking back, there are some things I wish I'd known. Preparation for such a life-altering event is key.

So, below are eight tips for navigating the college transition and preparing (physically and mentally) for move-in day.

8 Tips For Navigating The College Transition & Preparing For Move-in Day:

Ensuring your child's college campus safety:

Remind your child to be aware of their surroundings. To quote my husband, "Have your head on a swivel." Adding campus safety's number to their favorite contacts will make it easy to find if they are in need of assistance. Always let someone know when and who you will be going out with and what time you expect to return.

Talking to your child about partying and/or making good decisions:

This is an important conversation to have because it is important that your child knows what your feelings are in regards to alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. (or we can say, "these important

topics.) If they will be far away from home, they need to be extra vigilant with their new surroundings. Reassure them that it's ok to change who they are spending time with in order to feel safer and happy.

Preparing to support your kids when they're sick, from afar:

Before your child heads off to college, make sure they have their insurance card and information with them. Have a conversation with your child about listening to their body when they are feeling unwell. Know that the college health services department usually has their own page on the school's website with lots of resources, information and even online appointment scheduling.

Helping your child with move-in day even if you can't attend:

1. **Do a virtual campus tour together.** It will help you and your child visualize where they'll be eating, living, and hanging out.
2. **Consider sending them with some affordable items.** I like:
 - a. Bedside caddies that can be used for phones, chargers and headphones
 - b. Shower shoes or inexpensive flip flops
 - c. A shower caddy (netting style is better than a plastic container because it can drain any water that might splash on it!)
 - d. Small Laundry items including detergent, softener and scent bead bottles (you can find it all at Dollar Tree!); and lastly, snacks that can easily be carried in their backpack, like granola bars, fruit bars, cracker packets and nuts.
3. **Get to the airport early.** You'll want to have time for lots of hugs and kisses. It's OK to cry, but remind your child that this next chapter will be great. They should leave feeling confident that they're on the path to success.

Making move-in day easier:

Pack light! No matter what your child thinks, they don't need nor have room for all their things. Forgo bulky items like pillows, towels, and comforters, and shop for them once you get to the college town.

Things you should pack for move-in day:

1. **Pictures and items that remind your kid's of home.** Consider doing a DIY project together and making a picture montage on a cork board.
2. **Command hooks.** These come in handy and are easy to remove at the end of the year. Your child can use them to hang keys, lanyards, organized cords, secure wall decor, and more.
3. **A First Aid kit.** To keep the price down, buy items they'll need for colds, cuts/scrapes, allergies, and pain relief at home (plus a thermometer!). Then, once you reach the college town, purchase a plastic container to house the items.

Do's & don'ts for college move-in day:

Do:

- Read and understand the college's procedures for move-in day.
- Have everything ready to go the night before.
- Removing packaging and tags from items before packing. This saves on space and trips to the trash/recycle area.
- Buy a multi-tool or take one in your checked luggage. You will need scissors for opening up hard plastic packaging and allen wrenches for moving beds up or down.
- Attend parent move-in day events.

Don't:

- Worry if you forgot a non-essential item.
- Forget to take in the surroundings. Take pictures around the campus to help remind you that your child is in an amazing place.
- Forget to hug and reassure your child that — while you may be far away — you'll see each other soon (and talk often!).

Dealing with negative feelings after move-in day:

Acknowledge your feelings. It's normal to feel sad. Trust that you have guided your child and know that they will still need you. They're not disappearing and you will be missed! Let your child know what your expectations are for keeping in touch with you, while also knowing that they will also be busy, and at times, overwhelmed.



And most importantly: Breathe and celebrate! This is a life-altering experience for your kiddo, but it's huge for you, too. And I promise, you'll get through it.

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