

## Graduation Thoughts

In American culture, few transitions are anticipated as much as graduation from high school. All eyes are on the graduate; celebrations abound characterized by excitement over the possibilities ahead. Parents experience the mixed emotions of joy for their child's successful completion of high school as well as anxiety mixed with sadness over what comes next. Parents are facing the reality that their control over their children's choices and decisions will lessen significantly over the next few months.

Graduation is an opportunity to reflect back on and celebrate your child's growth over the past four years. Throughout the post high school planning process, if your child makes the choice to pursue further education, the illusion is perpetuated that 1) where your child attends college is a measure of your parenting prowess 2) once the deposit is made, his/her future is a *fait accompli* and 3) college is an oasis of happiness and joy. Social media and press serve to exaggerate these myths, leaving students and parents dismayed when college proves to be just like other stages in life, full of both joyful and challenging moments. In addition, these myths imply that your child's worth can be evaluated easily and that the major challenges of her life have already been faced. This perspective is oversimplified and unfair. High school is only the first chapter of a child's life and the years post-graduation are just like every other time in life, full of both significant opportunities and challenges. While parents are taking a step back from the day to day guidance, your calm support and understanding will be critical in the future.

We have gleaned the following tips for navigating the next few months:

- 1) **Give your graduated senior more responsibility.** Now is the time to teach him how to do laundry, use his own money to pay for extras and teach him to cook a few meals. These skills will be invaluable in college and can be accompanied by an extended curfew or other increased freedoms.
- 2) **Discuss potential roadblocks ahead and how she might handle them.** Ready availability of alcohol and drugs are a given, as are more unexpected challenges such as roommate issues and unfair professors. In advance, help your child identify where he can reach out for academic or emotional support.
- 3) **Reinforce that regular exercise, sleep and good nutrition are essential to keeping perspective when the inevitable road bumps come.** Once she has left home, **check in regularly to ensure well-being but don't expect or insist on daily updates.** The whole point of being away from home is for students to experience independence! Parents can find themselves dragged along with the daily ups and downs of their child's life if they are in constant contact. Better to send a message that you trust her to manage life.
- 4) **Accept that, with the exception of significant crises, most of what you will be offering is love and support.** The days when you could clean up the mess and make everything better are gone. Your heart will hurt but resist the desire to offer unwanted advice or say "I told you so." Review places s/he can seek help or, in most cases, offer empathy and a reminder that s/he is loved.

*The Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples Guidance Department aimed to promote the well-being of our students and foster a positive, inclusive school community.*

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