



# What Parents Can Do!

Parents frequently ask, “What can I do to support my daughter or son?” “What things should we be prepared for?” While every family is unique, we’ve observed some common themes over several years of living and working with new university students. We offer our suggestions with the hope that you may find them helpful.

## Before They Leave for School

Parents can be supportive and trusting. Encourage independence, but provide a safety net.

Be knowledgeable about campus resources. Ask your daughter or son to let you read the plethora of materials that come in the mail as they prepare to begin at UBC. Check the “Academic Year schedule” at the beginning of the UBC Calendar, so you’re aware of significant dates during the year. If they’re living in residence, read the Handbook and Residence Contract (and ResNet Guide where applicable) enclosed with their residence assignment. You’ll find a wealth of information about campus and residence resources, services and staff.

Pick up a copy of *Don’t Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money* — *The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years* by Helen Johnson and Christine Schelhas-Miller. These authors offer a clear and current look at issues students and parents will face. Best of all they provide easy-to-read, straightforward advice — what to do and what to avoid. If you only have time to read one book before your student starts university, make it this one. You’ll keep it handy and come back to it over and over again. Click <http://www.bookstore.ubc.ca> to order on-line from the UBC Bookstore.

## While They’re Away

It is important to write letters or use e-mail if you have it. (But, don’t hang over the mailbox waiting for one in return.) Students are curious about what you are up to. They may expect to know more about what you’re doing but are less inclined to let you know what they’re doing.

Accept that you won’t know every detail of your son or daughter’s life. You may have not known the details before, and now may know even less. Or you might have been close and sense a change as your daughter or son seeks independence.

Show concern about their lives and understand their struggles. Ask questions, but try not to invade their privacy. Often students will let you know what is happening, but at their own pace.

Be prepared for “the phone call.” Often it comes just after mid-terms or near the end of first term, when work is piling up, marks aren’t what they’d hoped, they’re feeling overwhelmed and their

coping skills begin to fail. They’re upset and chances are they’re going to call you. It’s important that you don’t panic; remember that this is normal, and as much as you’d like to alleviate their stress, you cannot (and should not) fix this for them. They will rely on you to be calm and reassure them of their ability to successfully work through the challenges. Encourage them to seek help from campus resources.

Keep a list of campus resources and contact numbers (see over) stuck on the fridge or some other handy place. That way you can refer your student to those who are nearby to assist them. If you think that a weekend visit would benefit them (or you), there’s on-campus hotel accommodation at West Coast Suites, call 604-822-1000 or visit [www.ubc.conferences.com](http://www.ubc.conferences.com) for info and reservations.

Send food and care packages, a sure sign of support and concern. You’ve no idea how excited students get when these arrive.

## When They Come Home

Understand that your son or daughter may have difficulties returning home on holidays after experiencing life on his or her own. For the last several months they’ve been accustomed to having to be concerned about only their own daily routine —not the family’s—and they’ve lived without the former house rules. Sometimes they come home with new expectations for family members. It’s a transition time for everyone.

Stock up on favourite foods when they come home for the holidays and be sure to have plenty of laundry detergent on hand for all that dirty wash. Even though it might be a great life being a student, be careful about rhapsodizing about university as the best years of one’s life. For a student who may be struggling with exams, papers and worries about a career, this can be of little comfort and sometimes downright irritating.

Remember your daughter or son has joined the ranks of the “best of the best” at UBC, and the academic expectations are rigorous. It is normal for students with high-school marks in the 80s and 90s to see them drop to the 60s and 70s. This may come as a shock to both you and your student, given that they were always the best in their high-school. Your student is experiencing a difficult life-transition from high-school to university, both in and out of the classroom. It is typical for marks to do down in first year, so don’t let your student get super-depressed, encourage them to get help. Students who seek a little assistance typically get back on track and do fine.

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