

HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE

FORMING GOOD MEN AND GOOD CITIZENS SINCE 1776



HOW TO: HELP A STUDENT STRUGGLING TO ADJUST TO COLLEGE?

There are many different reasons first year students have trouble transitioning to college life. This is one of the first major life transitions for many young adults. Some students are excited to take on the new experience, while others feel apprehensive about making this change. Regardless of their outlook, it is helpful for them to talk to others who have already made that transition, like RA's.

Talking to these students about common changes and common stressors they can expect can be very beneficial. Below are brief lists of each and ideas to offer to students.

Common Changes:

New environment and relationships

- Living with roommates.
- Communicating and compromising with roommate.
- Exposure to new cultures and backgrounds.

Greater personal freedom

- Having to make choices and decisions on their own.
- Managing time can be difficult.

Added responsibility

- Manage basic tasks (eating, sleeping, exercising, going to class) independently.
- More complex responsibilities (balancing studying/work and social life, participating in clubs/activities, handling finances).

Changing relationships

- Being away from friends from high school.
- Ending romantic relationships and beginning new ones or starting long distance relationships.
- Staying connected with old friends.

Common Stressors and Ideas for Managing Them

Time management

- Balancing time and staying organized can be hard for some students.
- Idea: Using a schedule will help the student effectively manage time. Get a planner or calendar or use a calendar phone app!

Academic performance

- College is more challenging and demanding than high school.
- Idea: Attend class regularly, keep up with reading and assignments, and ask for help. Utilize resources on campus (i.e., Office of Academic Success, Tutoring).

Roommate Conflict

- Different living habits and failure to communicate with each other can create tension.
- Idea: Communicate needs and expectations with roommate respectfully, and recognize his own habits may need to change as well.

Long Distance Relationships

- It is common for first year students to begin college and attempt a long distance relationship. This is hard on relationships. Many times there are worries about what the future will hold.
- Idea: Be open and communicate with significant other about concerns and try to let go of what he cannot control.

Alcohol/Other Drugs

- Many first year students experiment when they get to college because of the new personal freedom.
- Idea: Although the social experience is important, successful academics keep him here. Be aware of safe drinking habits and drug use consequences.

Homesickness

- Some students struggle with being away from home.
- Idea: This is normal and will most likely pass with time. Talk to parents over the phone, but become connected with others on campus and stay busy.

Other Ideas

Be patient – While campus may seem new and overwhelming, it becomes more familiar with time.

Connect with others – If you talk to other students, you are likely to discover that they share similar questions and concerns.

Get involved – Student organizations are a fun way to interact with other students.

Utilize resources – There are numerous resources on campus designed to create a rewarding college experience and that many students find helpful.

Care for yourself – The foundation for a productive college career is a healthy lifestyle. Taking the necessary steps for nurturance, getting adequate rest, socializing, eating a healthy diet, and physical activity, will greatly help adjustment.

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HOW TO: APPROACH A STUDENT STRUGGLING WITH ALCOHOL?

College drinking and substance use is a public health issue for the Nation. The first step to addressing this problem is to understand its prevalence and recognize it. The following information, although brief, will help you do both.

Understanding the issue and its impact(s):

High-risk drinking includes:

1. Underage drinking.
2. Drinking and driving or other activities where use is dangerous.
3. Drinking when health conditions or medications make use dangerous.
4. Binge drinking; that is, 5 drinks per occasion for males and 4 for females.

Annual Impact(s), according to NIAAA (2013):

1. Over 1,400 students ages 18-24 die from alcohol-related injuries.
2. 500,000 students ages 18-24 are unintentionally injured, under the influence.
3. More than 150,000 students develop an alcohol-related health problem.
4. 31 percent of college students met criteria for a diagnosis of alcohol abuse and 6 percent for alcohol dependence.
5. Of the 22,400 drug overdose deaths in the US in 2005, opioid painkillers were the most commonly found drug, accounting for 38.2% of these deaths.
6. Nearly half a million emergency department visits in 2009 were due to people misusing or abusing prescription painkillers.
7. A number of studies have linked chronic marijuana use and mental illness.

How to identify someone at risk:

- Failure to fulfill school responsibilities.
 1. Poor attendance, low grades, and/or recent disciplinary action.

- Drinking or using in situations or to degrees that are physically dangerous (i.e., driving).
- Recurring alcohol/drug-related legal problems.
- Conflict with friends, roommates.
- Continued use despite relationship problems
- Mood changes:
 1. Temper flare-ups, irritability, and defensiveness.
- Physical or mental issues:
 1. Memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, slurred speech, sleep disturbance.

How you can help:

It may seem like common sense – take the time to talk to the student. A simple model for talking to a person about a sensitive topic (i.e., drinking/drug problem) involves statements like: “I care,” “I see,” “I feel,” LISTEN, “I want,” “I will.”

1. **I care** – Make statements that help set the tone and describe your relationship with the student. Saying that you care helps the student become more willing to accept the observations you are going to share.
 - Example, “As your RA, I care for your health and safety...”
 - “As your RA, I care about you.”
2. **I see** – Include specific, observable behaviors and avoid making judgmental statements.
 - Example, “I have noticed you have been drinking on weeknights rather frequently the past few weeks.”
 - “I’ve noticed you’ve been using more than usual.”
3. **I feel** – Make statements of how these behaviors concern you and why you want to raise the issue.
 - Example, “I feel this might start to affect your ability to attend class regularly or cause other problems.”
 - “I feel like something might be bothering you and wanted to check.”
4. **Listen** – An important step in this process is allowing the person to react and share information. If he gets angry or provokes you, remain calm and focused. Remain factual and NON-JUDGEMENTAL.
5. **I want** – Try to get the person to agree to some form of positive action. Encourage a referral to the Wellness Center, when needed. Be optimistic, yet realistic.
 - Example, “I want to encourage you to decrease your drinking.”
 - “I want you to know we support you...should you look at your use.”
6. **I will** – Indicate your support, what you are willing to do to help, and your limitations. Don’t make promises you cannot or will not keep. DON’T promise absolute confidentiality.
 - Example, “I will be here if you need support, to ask questions...”
 - “If you think on this and want to talk later, I will be here.”

Things to remember:

- Talking to a person about a sensitive issue does not always work the first time. Have a second conversation if necessary.
- First-year students are at an increased risk for heavy drinking.
- Look out for those with established drinking/drug use habits.
- Educate yourself on resources before you need to use them.
- It can be helpful to observe and document behaviors.
- Choose a location and time where you can talk in private without embarrassment or interruptions.
- Document your conversation with the student.
- Provide the student with Wellness Center contact information, but remember it is up to the student to seek the professional services.
- If your concerns worsen, contact the Office of Student Affairs or some other campus resource for support.



HOW TO: MEDITATE ROOMMATE CONFLICT?

Roommate conflict is inevitable, especially between first-year students. RAs may have to mediate or diffuse conflict between two students. Basic conflict resolution skills can be very useful. The following information explains common causes of conflict, steps to mediation, and conflict resolution tips.

The truth about conflict:

Conflict is a normal, healthy, and inevitable part of relationships. Learning how to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. Just like when conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship, when handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two people.

Where does conflict begin?

Conflict arises from differences. Listed below are the five major sources that cause conflict:

1. Goals – motivations, ideas, desires
2. Values – basic beliefs
3. Tasks – performing basic chores
4. Rules – adherence to laws and policies
5. Communication – being able to talk and listen to each other

The core to almost any roommate/suitemate/relationship conflict is lack of communication. Expressing problems when they arise and working to find common ground in solving those issues is important. Usually, the problem will not “just blow over,” but will most often become a bigger issue and harder to overcome.

What is a facilitator/mediator?

- A person to guide/facilitate the conversation.
- Facilitators/mediators are NOT there to solve the problem.
- Facilitators are not responsible for making the students agree.

Steps to mediation (3 U's):

1. Understand the problem:

- Ask them both to explain each side of the conflict, one at a time.
- Separate controllable factors from uncontrollable factors.
- Encourage use of "I" statements.
- Ask them to be specific about the problem and to focus on behaviors, not personality.

2. Untie interest from position:

- Win-win: Ask each individual what they both want? Choose the best option possible.
- Time-Limited Compromise Commitment (TLC Commitment): If Win-win does not work – ask the to choos a compromise and put a time-limit on it. Let them choose the time (days, weeks, semester) and the agreeable compromise. Recommend setting up another meeting time to revisit situation.
- Additional Alternative: If Win-win and TLC do not work, what is the best alternative solution?

3. Unconditionally constructive:

- Focus on the 4 Ps – 1st person, present, positive and process.
- 1st person: Ask them to use "I" statements ("I feel happy/angry/sad/scared/hurt when ____ because ____.")
- Present: Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, keep them focused on what they can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.
- Positive: Remain positive and encouraging throughout the conversation. Help them be respectful of their differences.
- Process: Keep the focus of the conversation on creating a solution and maintaining the relationship, not the problem at hand.

Other tips for conflict resolution:

- Discuss only one issue at a time.
- Encourage both sides to verbalize emotions and feelings during conversation.
- Keep a calm, even tone of voice.
- Watch your nonverbal communication (eye contact, facial expression, posture, gestures).
- Intervene if either side begins to "hit below the belt" or attack areas of personal sensitivity.
- Help them specify when they use generalizations (never or always).
- Do not be discouraged if the problem is not immediately resolved. Set a time to come back and revisit the issue.

When to refer:

- If either student presents a danger to self or others, contact Counseling Services by calling (434) 223-6411 or (434) 223-6164 after office hours, immediately.
- If there is a continued lack of agreement, refer to Dean of Students office.



HOW TO: HELP A STUDENT WITH A BREAKUP OR LOSS?

Students sometimes have trouble coping with a breakup or loss of a loved one. This can affect their academic performance, relationships with peers, and mood. Not all students need counseling for this, but are likely to benefit from a supportive RA. Below are some ways you can help a student cope with this along with a brief explanation of the grief process.

Loss: the EVENT that occurs (i.e., breakup, mother becomes ill)

Grief: the PROCESS and feelings that occur because of the event (i.e., sadness, anger)

Types of loss: Death of loved one, breakup, divorce, job loss, money loss, rape/violent crime, moving, illness, changing schools, success...etc.

Natural responses to loss: Anger, guilt, sadness, frustration, confusion, anxiety, exhaustion, hurt, feeling lost, overwhelmed, uncertainty about future, low self-esteem...etc.

Natural responses to breakup: Attribute relationship failure as personal failure, fear of being alone, fear of starting over, feeling rejected

How to help a student cope:

- Set up a time and location to talk to the student. You do not have to explain why before the meeting.
- Using a simple model, create a conversation with “I care,” “I see,” LISTEN, and “I want.”
- **I care** – “As your RA, I care if you are struggling with something difficult.”
- **I see** – “I have noticed Sally is not coming around as often as she used to. Did something happen?”
- **LISTEN** – Listen to the student. Sometimes having someone to talk to is all he needs.

- **I want** – If the student is really struggling, it may be beneficial to offer a referral to Counseling Services. For example, “I hear you are really hurt by this, and rightfully so. I want to refer you to a counselor for some additional support.”

Things to remember:

- Many times, students (especially males) think they are supposed to move on from a loss and not experience any feeling-WRONG. Educating the student that how he is feeling is normal can be healing in itself.
- There is nothing you can say to change what has happened.
- Time will help the student heal, along with using healthy coping skills.

Do’s:

- Offer your presence and a listening ear.
- Tell the student his feelings are ok and it is normal to have a range of feelings after a loss.
- Check-in with the student after talking. This shows you care.
- After listening, you may want to consider briefly sharing a time where you had a similar experience.
- Provide the student with healthy coping ideas if the student seems receptive or wanting the help.
- Explain that grief is a process we all go through after loss and it takes time.
- Understand there is nothing you can say to make it right immediately.

Don’ts:

- Avoid overgeneralized statements – “Everything will be okay,” “Everything will work out,” “Everything happens for a reason,” “You did not need her anyway,” “At least he is not suffering anymore,” “God has a plan for all of us,” “He is in a better place.”
- Avoid authoritative statements or providing solutions, “Why don’t you just do...?”
- Although humor can be helpful in some situations, don’t make light of the student’s feelings and experience.
- Ask too many questions or push for information not offered.

Healthy Coping Skills:

- Accept feelings and give yourself time to heal.
- Share feelings and spend time with others who support you.
- Eat healthy foods, sleep well, and exercise.
- Set a time each day for relaxing activities.
- Create a daily routine because structure can be helpful.
- Join new groups or find new things that interest you (if needed).
- Journal feelings, cry, express yourself.

Unhealthy Coping Skills

- Isolating self from others
- Fighting feelings, or saying to yourself, “I shouldn’t feel this way.”
- Making any major decisions right after breakup/loss.
- Using alcohol, drugs, or excessive food intake.
- Not attending class.
- Thoughts of harming self or others.

If a student begins to have thoughts of harming himself or others, this is NOT a normal or healthy coping skill. Contact the Dean of Students office and Counseling Services at the Wellness Center if this occurs.



HOW TO: REMAIN PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY HEALTHY AS AN RA?

RA's have many obligations and responsibilities to meet, in addition to attending classes, completing school work, being involved in sports/clubs, and maintaining a social life. Being an RA can be a rewarding experience, but also a stressful one. There are many different ways to handle this stress, good and bad. This handout reviews some ways you can stay mentally and physically healthy, while handling the pressures of being an RA and a college student. The Mayo Clinic and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer useful information on health.

Physical Health:

1. Stay hydrated : Drink at least 8 cups of water per day, every day, throughout the day.

2. Diet:

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and dairy daily.
- Stay within the recommended daily 2000 calorie limit.
- A healthy diet helps reduce anxiety and stress, improves mood, helps your brain function to its highest potential, helps fight illnesses, and other benefits.
- The Wellness Center staff can provide you with more information on healthy eating.
- Avoid drinking too much caffeine (coffee, sodas, energy drinks, teas). It is recommended by the Mayo Clinic to drink no more than 400 milligrams of caffeine per day. Caffeine creates anxiety-like symptoms when processed in the body.

3. Exercise:

- Physical activity (walking, bicycling, running/jogging, swimming, sports) can help you feel better about yourself, relieve stress/anxiety/depression, sleep well, stay within your recommended body weight, and a many other benefits.
- It is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to exercise 150 minutes per week.

4. Substance use: Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to deal with stress/anxiety.

5. Supplement: Take a multi-vitamin daily, with a vitamin C supplement (check with your primary care provider, before starting any supplements).

6. Sleep: Sleep is extremely important to enhance daily functioning. The Mayo Clinic recommends 7-8 hours of sleep per night for adults.

7. Vaccinations: Make sure you stay up-to-date on all vaccines needed.

Mental Health:

1. Social:

- Surround yourself with people who enrich and support you. Maintain strong relationships.
- Take time for the activities, hobbies, and projects you enjoy.
- Delegate responsibilities, when appropriate, or ask for help.
- Maintain contact with the students who live on your hall.

2. Cognitive:

- Become aware of what triggers stress for you and how you react.
- Triggers – low grade, roommate conflict, taking on too much...etc.
- Reactions – headaches, irritability, mood changes, isolation..etc.
- (For more information on this, contact the Wellness Center).
- Live in the present (here and now), not in the future or the past.
- What types of statements are you making to yourself? Are they mostly positive or negative? Make a conscious effort to make 5 positive statements to every 1 negative statement.
- Avoid catastrophic thinking (making problems bigger than they are).
- Avoid generalizing (i.e., using words like “always” and “never”).
- Avoid comparing yourself to others. Everyone is individually different and unique.

3. Emotional:

- Stay in touch with your basic feelings (sad, mad, happy, scared) and learn how you can express them positively (i.e., talking to someone, journaling, doing something physical).
- Brief anxiety relieving exercises:
 - Deep breathing – Breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, filling the lungs with air for at least 2 minutes.
 - Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Beginning with the feet, tense the muscles and hold for 5 seconds, then release tension and repeat. Continue the same practice with your other body parts (calf muscles, quads, gluteus, abs, etc.) working up from your feet all the way to your face, until you are flexing the whole body at once.
 - Check out mp3 files for relaxation and sleep induction on the Wellness Center webpage (<http://www.hsc.edu/Student-Life/Wellness-Center/Student-Health-Services/Sleeping-Well.html>)

*For more information on how to remain healthy, please contact the Wellness Center at (434) 223-6411.
Any of our staff would love the opportunity to meet with you.*