



*Prepare to Launch*  
*Parent Orientation: September 3, 2006*  
**Challenges for Parents**

**Feeling a Void or Loss**

Feelings of loss or emptiness are common during this stage of separation. Parents may feel confused and uncomfortable without their role as primary caretaker and protector of their child. Parents have devoted so much time and energy to preparing their child to become a successful adult that although they may feel joy about launching their child into adulthood, they may also really long for that old parental role and relationship with their child from time to time.

**Feeling Left Out**

Parents may feel a sense of loss and even experience hurt feelings as they adjust to not being needed in the same way by their child. Parents will no longer know the details of their child's life on a daily basis. Parents may feel they are not as great a priority in their child's life as they once were.

**Giving Up Control**

It is necessary but often difficult to give up control. Whether it is giving advice, or making decisions about curfews, drinking and sexual behaviors, parents have to struggle with and become comfortable with the fact that their young adult will make more of her own decisions and will make mistakes.

**Changes as a couple**

As you play a new role in your child's life, couples whether married, partnered or divorced often have to readjust their identities as parents and re-define their roles and responsibilities.

### **Developing a more adult-to adult relationship with your child**

Your child will always need you, but you may find your relationship becoming more like peers. Your adult child may want and need more privacy in certain areas of her life.

### **Changes in the Family**

If you have other children at home, the entire structure of the family may feel as if it changes and shifts to adjust to the void left by your daughter leaving home for college. Recognize that the other children in the family are affected by this transition. Discuss their feelings about their sister's absence and discuss with your children what they want to do to stay in touch and feel connected to each other.

### **Home for the Holidays and Weekends**

Expect changes in your daughter. She has been experiencing a new sense of independence and making her own rules for the first time. Students are often exhausted following midterms and finals. Your daughter may sleep much of the time during her visit home. Don't worry that's normal.

## **Self Care For Parents**

### **Redirect your time and energy**

Re-evaluate your interests, areas of strength and identify areas of your life you might have neglected. Make a list of the things you wanted to do as your child was growing up, but didn't have time to do. Now is your chance to do them. This is a good time to begin new hobbies, leisure activities or maybe make a career change. Plan a weekend get-away or vacation with your spouse, partner or children who are still at home. Think about doing something good for your mind, body and spirit.

### **Take Care of Yourself**

During periods of stress, good nutrition, sleep and exercise are important. Be a good parent to yourself. Take care of yourself in the same caring, nurturing way that you would take care of your child if you knew she was going through a difficult, stressful transition in her life.

### **Accept your feelings**

Give yourself permission to admit to and experience a wide variety of emotions. Share your feelings with friends, partners, and other parents. Recognize that your feelings about the separation from your daughter may be different from those of your spouse, partner or other family members, but acknowledge that all of you are experiencing a major life transition.

### **Join the Parent and Family Association**

Remember to fill out the post card on the brochure in your folder and mail it to us. Participate in Family Weekend on campus experience life at St. Kate's, meet faculty and staff, your daughter's RA and her friends. Get to know other parents on campus.

## **Suggested Reading**

Don't Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years.

H. E. Johnson & C. Schelhas-Miller. St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Letting Go A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.  
K. Coburn & M. Treeger. Harper Prential, 1997.

Almost Grown: Launching Your Child From High School to College,  
P. Pasick. W.W. Norton & Company, Ltd., 1998.

## **Helpful Websites:**

[www.collegeparents.org](http://www.collegeparents.org)

<http://minerva.stkate.edu/careers.nsf/pages/parents>

Register on-line for informative e-newsletter for St. Kate's Parents:  
[www.stkate.edu/parentupdate/](http://www.stkate.edu/parentupdate/)

## **What Parents Can Do to Support Their Child**

**Don't give unsolicited advice.** Take a deep breath before you give advice or take any action. When your homesick daughter calls in tears and says, "I can't do this, I want to come home." Listen, be supportive, but give her time to work things out.

**Help your child learn to negotiate and resolve conflicts.** You have helped your child resolve conflicts throughout her life. When your daughter is learning to live with a new roommate, remind her of the skills she has learned and used in the past to resolve conflicts.

**Help your child learn to deal with disappointment.** Empathize with your child, but instead of trying to "fix it", help your child move on past the disappointment. Your high school star athlete may become a benchwarmer in college and your "A" student in high school may struggle for a "B" or "C" in some classes at the college level. Help your child focus on her coping skills, strengths and move on from her disappointment. Remember that learning from your mistakes is an important type of learning.

**Help your child learn to solve problems and advocate for herself.** College students grow and develop coping skills and a sense of their own competence when parents listen to their problems and help them strategize, rather than jumping in to rescue them or tell them how to solve their problems. Think of your role as evolving from a CEO to a consultant or from a supervisor to a mentor.

**Loosen the reins a little at a time.** Increase your child's freedom and responsibility more each year. If your daughter is living on campus, she will be deciding when and how much to sleep, what she will eat, who she will spend her time with, how much she will study. If your daughter is living at home and commuting she will probably push for greater freedom and changes in the rules and expectations that were in place during her high school years. You will need to practice letting go to adjust to your child's growing independence. As you demonstrate your trust in her, your daughter's self confidence and sense of competence will grow.

**Continue to help your child learn to manage money.** Discuss credit cards, budgets for the semester, etc. Be prepared for the possibility that your daughter may make mistakes with money and credit. Have direct discussions with your child about what financial help you can and cannot offer.

**Be a coach.** Learn about the resources available at St. Kate's. Your daughter may need encouragement to ask for the help she needs. Coach your child about how to use services at the learning center (O'Neil Center) or how to talk to a professor or make an appointment at the Counseling Center. Remember your daughter may vacillate between wanting to be fiercely independent and "do it all by herself" or wanting you or someone else on campus to do it all for her. Support your daughter's growing sense of independence by coaching her to take action on her behalf.

**Resist the impulse to take your daughter's bedroom and use the space for some other purpose during this first year.** If you absolutely need the space, involve your daughter in planning the changes and finding another space that can feel like her own when she comes home to visit.

**Stay Connected-Remain an anchor in your child's life.** Encourage your child to turn to you in good times and bad. Stay steady even when your child feels shaky. Admire her strengths and celebrate her successes. Support her when she feels she has failed or is experiencing disappointment. Remember no matter how independent and separate your daughter may seem, she still needs you to provide a sense of the familiar and to be a safe haven for her to touch base with as she makes this difficult transition. Send care packages, pictures of family events and activities she has missed, and pictures of pets, articles from hometown newspapers, call or email regularly, send cards, etc. Identify the best times for you and your daughter to connect by phone or email.

**In a Crisis- Support your child's coping and problem solving skills rather than rescuing.** It is really difficult to hear you child's cries of distress. But, remember that often crises described from long distance can sound worse than they really are and that during this turbulent time of transition in your child's life her feelings and perceptions of events can change in the course of a few minutes or days. You are, however, the expert on your child

and the best one to assess when your child might need more direct help in dealing with a problem.

**Have direct discussions with your child about your expectations and limitations.** Discuss finances, rules when your child returns home for weekends and holidays. Discuss curfews bringing guests, romantic partners home, etc. If you are hoping for at least a weekly call or email from your child to touch base, let her know that is important to you. Don't assume she knows what you want and need from her.

**Support your child's interests and passions.** When your pre-med daughter changes her major to art history, listen to her thoughts and feelings about her decision. Encourage her and try to understand her for who she is becoming not who you want her to be.

Remember that even though your child may be moving away from home for the first time, or commuting from home to a new world on campus that you aren't a part of, she is taking you and all she has learned from you in her head and her heart. Even though she may not admit it to you, she will recall and use things you have taught her to solve problems and make decisions.