
Fostering the Launch to Independence

The Dorm Parent Collective

Objectives

- Explore the barriers that prevent changes in the parenting dynamic
- Discuss ways to manage young adult responses to parental behavior changes
- Converse and connect with fellow Dorm families

The Changing Role of Parenthood

As children become adults it is important to work towards **separating** from their struggles in order to **empower** them and support their **differentiation**.

- Two things can be true: “I can love my child **and** they can have struggles that are separate from me” (and I don’t always get to know the details of those struggles)
- **Balancing**: validating vs. problem solving
- Don’t pour from an empty pitcher – take care of your own needs and take ownership of your own challenges in this process
- Tolerate own pain seeing our children suffer – this is extremely difficult
- Young adults expecting their parents to “handle it” for them

Stop Parenting (so much).

With the best of intentions, parents can contribute to a “failure to launch” scenario by being...parents.

Shielding/overprotecting can hinder the psychosocial development of young adults and rob them of the opportunity to mature, launch, thrive and be resilient in the face of disappointment.

It is essential for a young adult **to feel and experience the natural consequences of their actions** (they can provide essential teaching moments). It can be difficult to not step in and watch the fallout, but we see time and time again that this is the only way forward.

Allowing a Young Adult to Fail, Fall, or Miss Out

In practicing allowing your young adult to grow, it is important to:

- **Avoid** being your child's alarm clock, chef, scheduler, or taskrabbit (if you live with them this can be especially difficult). They will never get the practice if they're not given the opportunity!
- **Not help** with that exam or paper they are struggling with. They need to learn to navigate academic difficulties with the resources available to them (academic learning centers/TAs and student centers)

- **Allow** your child to advocate for themselves when it comes to treatment needs before stepping in. If they complain about wanting to swap a group, for example, direct them to their team.
- **Limit** budgets and extraneous expenses

Before stepping in to a situation, take a moment to consider whether you are acting out of your own anxiety, or because you truly believe it will help your loved one in the long-term.

Positive Reinforcement

As you give your adult child more independence and more responsibility, it is natural that they will stumble & have failures. It is key to point out when they are doing well.

Call out what's going RIGHT. This should be a bigger focus than their missteps.

- *For example, rather than focusing on the fact that your child may have waited longer than you would have liked to do the dishes, focus on the fact that they did them.*
- *Commend them for asking for help or support like extra time on the paper / don't point out they needed to do this*

Pay attention to and validate your young adult child's feelings while maintaining boundaries.

- The goal is not to help your child eliminate anxiety, but to support and cheer them on as they learn the coping skills they need to face adversity.
- Acknowledge their frustrations while resisting the urge to retreat to old habits in an attempt to avoid conflict.

Strategizing & Following a Plan

While your loved one is in treatment and you all have the support of a therapist/coach {and community}, now is a great time to talk with your loved one {and family} to think through a plan.

- Identify goals and consider short, medium, and long term objectives.
- What are your loved ones goals for themselves on their independence journey? How do they plan to get there?
- What are your goals for your loved one? What are you willing and able to do to support them on their journey?
- Use **SMART** Goals, set clear & explicit boundaries, enforce boundaries and natural consequences, evaluate plan ongoing.
 - SMART Goal: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound

Family / Parent Self-care

We often see parents get swept up in their young adult's treatment journey, finding they have little time to focus on themselves anymore. The Dorm is in place to do some of the work for you, so you can prioritize your own mental health as you re-adjust your relationship with your child.

Parents remember to prioritize your needs and self-care.

- Reconnect with old friends
- Set new goals
- Make time for parent-only fun

- Pick up a new hobby
- Make time for pampering rituals
- Do nothing! That's right... nothing(!) Your child is a young adult and can be "doing" for themselves. It is okay for you to enjoy doing nothing, if that's what you choose.

Questions to Consider

- Am I working harder to solve my child's problem than they are?
- Am I operating in life as "I can't do well unless [insert my child's name] is doing well?"
- Have I accepted that my child's problems are not my problems?
- Have I accepted that my child may have struggles that I am not aware of?

Perhaps the greatest challenge as a parent of a young adult is coming to the realization that his/her/their problems are not our problems to fix.