



So, your child is going away to college!

Did you get him or her
ready for it?



By *Elena Brouwer*

THEY GROW UP SO FAST! One day, they won't let go of your hand as they march into the kindergarten class, and before you know it they are getting ready to go away to college. Fear, anxiety, and excitement are in the air for both the parents and the college-bound young ones.

If you are the proud parents and are wondering how to prepare your child for this rite of passage, be aware that it won't be easy. One of the biggest challenges is letting go as your children get ready to leave home. Do you help them by becoming "helicopter parents," hovering above them and making all the decisions for them, or do you set them free to experience adulthood on their own terms? Tough decision either way!

Have you done your homework? The book *The Complete Guide to Parenting a Teenager* has a few tips to guide you.

Walk the walk. Practice what you preach when it comes to alcohol and drugs. Pass up that glass of wine at a restaurant dinner if you know you'll have to get behind the wheel.

Turn off your cell phone in public places and public bathrooms. Children learn by example.

Be polite and courteous with family members and strangers alike. Good manners are born at home.

Use proper table manners at all times. First impressions are often decided over a meal.

Stress the importance of writing kind thank-you notes. Always handwritten and promptly sent.

Have a frank talk about sex before your child goes away. Keep the lines of communication open.

Teach your child about money responsibilities. Set limits as to how much to spend by providing a credit card in his or her name, with the bill coming to you, for the first year away at college.

Make contact once a week, by phone and/or email. Don't be too surprised or hurt if your child does not often respond. She may be busy; he may feel you do not trust him to make his own decisions while away from you. Keep communicating regularly anyway.

Go visit, but not too often. Freshman year is a period of many adjustments for the college student. Let your child get acquainted with classmates and new surroundings. Entertaining parents may not fit into the schedule.

Learn to cope with Empty Nest Syndrome. Imagine: No more 17-year-olds to open the refrigerator day and night looking for something to eat; no more discussions about the unfairness of curfew time; no more sleepyheads to wake up in the morning after pulling an all-nighter for a school project. The silence is going to be deafening. Fill it with new possibilities. Just think of all the things you can do now, with plenty of time to enjoy them.

When my daughter went away to college, it took all my willpower not to call her every day to tell her how much I missed her. When she came back for the winter break, she had matured so much; I knew she was on her way to being a responsible adult. Isn't that what we want for our children?

And by next May, your child will come back for the summer and you will hear those four wonderful words you never thought would come out of his or her mouth: *Mom, I missed you!* SA