

Mini-Calendar of the First Six Weeks

Excerpt from *You're on Your Own (But I'm Here If You Need Me): Mentoring Your Child*

During the College Years, by Marjorie Savage. Simon & Schuster, 2nd edition, 2009.

Move-In Day—A tough day for families. Students are tense, excited, scared. Parents are on edge; if anything goes wrong, they may find themselves reacting more strongly than they would expect. Advice for parents: Tell your child you love and trust her, and you have great confidence that she will be fine.

Week 1—Students establish routines as a way to adapt to change. Social acceptance is usually their first priority. Students react strongly to disappointments or problems. This may be the first time they have had to identify problems and find solutions entirely on their own. They will complain, but they usually manage to adjust. Every accomplishment feels like a significant victory. Advice for parents: Talk to your child at least once during the first week; enjoy the excitement, and acknowledge the disappointments.

Week 2—Students may go overboard with new freedoms. They figure out that attendance is not taken in classes, and they decide not to go. They realize that they have two hours between their lecture and their lab, and they spend the time with friends in a coffee shop. They see other students decorating their rooms, and they spend a small fortune on posters and pillows. Advice for parents: Listen for clues that your child might be making poor decisions. Affirm the good choices and talk about priorities.

Week 3—A mix of comfort and uneasiness confuses students. They have established a routine, and they no longer feel “new.” They become extremely close to friends they have just met. They can't believe they've only known these people a couple of weeks. On the other hand, students are

frustrated that there is obviously so much they don't know yet about college. They think that everyone is looking at them and thinking, "Obviously clueless. Must be a freshman." Any mistakes feel like proof they don't belong. Advice for parents: Tell your child you believe in her.

Week 4—Students who have not yet gone home begin to want a weekend away from college. The intensity of it all has become exhausting, and they're worn out. They begin to see things from a slightly different perspective—the gregarious, outgoing friend they met the first week of school starts to seem a bit shallow; the quiet, cynical person next door might not be so bad after all; and they get tired of roommates. They long for a little quiet time. Advice for parents: Listen to complaints, but don't try to fix things. Suggest that, rather than come home for the weekend, your child can stay at school and spend some extra time sleeping and studying over the weekend. The standard recommendation is that students should stay at school until Thanksgiving break.

Weeks 5 and 6—Students begin to react to disillusionment. College turns out not to be everything they had imagined, and they have to admit that some of their initial social choices were poor. Typically, students either confront their challenges and make improvements, or they confirm their original patterns. Students will continue to cycle through frustration and action throughout the first semester, deciding to drop bad habits or bad friends or concluding that "since this is what college is, maybe I'm not cut out for it." Advice for parents: Talk with your child about the good decisions you have seen him make during the first few weeks of school. Let him know there is still time to make improvements.