



LEARNING TO SUCCEED, LLC

The

FIRST 30 DAYS

of COLLEGE

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO HELPING YOUR STUDENT
START STRONG AND BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT

COLLEGE SUCCESS PARENT GUIDE

Practical strategies grounded in educational psychology

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WELCOME

A different kind of college preparation



College readiness is not only about admission, grades, or knowing the course material. Students also need ways to plan, begin difficult work, manage time, monitor their progress, ask for help, and recover when things do not go as expected.

Parents can play an important role in that development. The goal is not to remove every obstacle. It is to provide enough support for students to build the skills they will eventually manage on their own.



YOUR ROLE MATTERS

Ask thoughtful questions, teach a strategy when a skill is missing, and gradually return responsibility to your student.

This guide will help you:

- ✓ Notice early patterns before they become academic crises.
- ✓ Support planning and follow-through without becoming the student's manager.
- ✓ Use questions that encourage reflection, problem solving, and ownership.
- ✓ Know when a student may benefit from more structured support.



THE DESTINATION IS GREATER INDEPENDENCE

Strong support helps students become increasingly capable of managing their own learning, responsibilities, and goals.

THE FIRST 30 DAYS OF COLLEGE

What parents should watch for



The beginning of a semester is an important adjustment period. New schedules, unfamiliar expectations, increased independence, and a faster academic pace can expose skills that were easier to compensate for before college.

WEEKS 1–2: BUILD THE SYSTEM

- ✓ Can your student find assignments and deadlines without relying on you?
- ✓ When and where will studying happen - not simply whether they plan to study?
- ✓ Does your student know how to contact professors, advisers, tutoring centers, and other campus resources?

WEEKS 3–4: WATCH THE WORKLOAD INCREASE

- ✓ Notice repeated procrastination, missed work, or difficulty deciding what to do first.
- ✓ Watch for a pattern of underestimating how long assignments will take.
- ✓ Pay attention to whether your student seeks help when confused or waits until the situation becomes urgent.
- ✓ After an early grade, ask what worked, what did not, and what the student will adjust next time.



PARENT TIP

One difficult week does not define a semester. Look for persistent patterns rather than isolated mistakes.

THE PARENT GOAL FOR THE FIRST 30 DAYS

Become less of the person who remembers, reminds, and rescues—and more of the person who asks useful questions. The goal is not a perfect first month. It is for your student to begin developing habits, strategies, and confidence for greater independence.

THREE SKILLS TO STRENGTHEN

Look beneath the behavior



1. LOOK FOR THE SKILL BEHIND THE STRUGGLE

A missed deadline tells you what happened; it does not necessarily tell you why. Before labeling the student as lazy or unmotivated, look for the skill that may be missing.

- ✓ Did the student know what needed to be done?
- ✓ Could they decide what to do first?
- ✓ Did they begin early enough?
- ✓ Could they sustain attention and return after interruptions?
- ✓ Did they notice that the original plan was not working?

2. REPLACE REMINDERS WITH PLANNING QUESTIONS



TRY THIS

Instead of “Did you do your paper?” ask “What is your plan for completing the paper?” Questions encourage planning, monitoring, and ownership.

3. MAKE THE FIRST STEP VISIBLE

Large assignments can feel vague and difficult to enter. Turn a broad task into a visible first action. Instead of “work on research paper,” try:

- Open the assignment directions.
- Choose or narrow the topic.
- Locate two credible sources.
- Write three headings for a rough outline.



WHY IT WORKS

The purpose of a small first step is not to make the assignment easy. It is to make starting clear.

BUILD THE SYSTEM

Planning, attention, recovery, responsibility



4. BUILD A WEEKLY SYSTEM

- ✓ Fixed commitments: classes, work, appointments, practices, and travel.
- ✓ Deadlines: exams, papers, projects, applications, and administrative tasks.
- ✓ Work blocks: specific times for studying or completing assignments.
- ✓ Priorities and buffer time: what matters most and what happens if work takes longer.
- ✓ Recovery: sleep, meals, exercise, relationships, and downtime.

5. PLAN FOR DISTRACTIONS

- ✓ Put the phone out of reach for one work interval.
- ✓ Close unrelated browser tabs and notifications.
- ✓ Choose a realistic period of focused work followed by a brief break.
- ✓ At the end, decide whether to continue, adjust, or switch tasks.

6. TREAT SLEEP AND RECOVERY AS PART OF THE PLAN



A USEFUL QUESTION

“What schedule gives you a reasonable chance of functioning well tomorrow?” This keeps the conversation focused on planning rather than policing.

7. LET MANAGEABLE CONSEQUENCES TEACH

When the stakes are manageable, coach the response rather than supplying it: ask what happened, ask what options exist now, let the student carry out the next step, and afterward discuss what could change next time.

SUPPORT WITHOUT TAKING OVER

Reflection, process, independence



8. USE A SHORT WEEKLY CHECK-IN

- ? What went well this week?
- ? What was harder than you expected?
- ? What are your top priorities for next week?
- ? What might get in the way?
- ? What kind of support would be useful without taking over?

9. FOCUS ON THE PROCESS, NOT ONLY THE GRADE

- How did you prepare?
- What strategy helped?
- Where did the plan break down?
- What will you repeat or change next time?

A grade is an outcome. Reflection helps students connect their choices with outcomes and strengthens their ability to adjust.

10. KEEP INDEPENDENCE AS THE LONG-TERM GOAL

College is a transition toward adult responsibility. Support may vary by student and situation, but the direction should generally be toward greater student ownership of deadlines, communication, planning, help-seeking, and recovery from mistakes.



SUPPORT IS NOT THE SAME AS RESCUE

You can be available, calm, and helpful while still leaving appropriate responsibility with the student.

COLLEGE PARENT QUICK CHECK

Where does your student need support?



Check each area in which your student currently seems to need additional support. This is a reflection tool, not a diagnostic test or clinical screening.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Keeping track of assignments and deadlines | ☐ Estimating how long work will take |
| ☐ Using a calendar, planner, or other reliable system | ☐ Recognizing when they are falling behind |
| ☐ Prioritizing competing responsibilities | ☐ Making a realistic recovery plan after a setback |
| ☐ Breaking large assignments into manageable steps | ☐ Asking professors or instructors for help when needed |
| ☐ Beginning work without repeated reminders | ☐ Using appropriate campus resources |
| ☐ Managing distractions during study time | ☐ Communicating problems before they become crises |

HOW TO USE YOUR RESULTS

There is no magic cutoff score. The number of boxes matters less than the pattern. One persistent difficulty can deserve attention, while several checked areas may point to a broader need for structure or skill-building.



1–3 areas: Choose the most important skill and practice one concrete strategy consistently.



4–7 areas: Look for a cluster—for example, planning, task initiation, attention, or help-seeking—and begin there.



8 or more areas: Consider whether the student would benefit from more structured support, such as academic coaching, campus resources, or another appropriate professional resource.



IMPORTANT

If changes are sudden, severe, or accompanied by significant emotional, behavioral, or safety concerns, seek appropriate professional or campus support rather than relying on this guide alone.

A FINAL MESSAGE FOR PARENTS

The goal is independence



Your student does not need college to be obstacle-free. They need opportunities to learn how to plan, act, reflect, adjust, and recover.



REMEMBER

Ask thoughtful questions. Teach a strategy when a skill is missing. Encourage effort and reflection. Then, when appropriate, return responsibility to the student.

PLAN • START • PERSIST • MONITOR • ADJUST • RECOVER

Want More Support?

Learning to Succeed, LLC provides individualized support designed to help college students strengthen motivation, self-regulation, executive functioning, planning, task initiation, academic confidence, and independence.

To learn more or discuss support for your college student, contact:

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Coming Soon: The College Success Parent Toolkit

A comprehensive resource with practical tools, strategies, and checklists to help parents support their college student throughout the semester while encouraging greater independence.

Visit Learning-to-Succeed.com for updates.



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