

College is a Stressful Time

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

College is such a pivotal time in life. Parents often send their kids to college with reassuring words like, "College will be the best time of your life." There's this expectation that college life will seamlessly integrate young adults into their chosen university with minimal stress or strain. Many view it as a period of exploration, growth, and development, brimming with opportunities.

Yet, college is also undeniably stressful. For many students, leaving home for an extended period is daunting. Suddenly, their support system is miles away, and even though their parents are just a call away, the reality of being on their own sinks in. They're accustomed to the consistency of home life: structured schedules, prepared meals, clear expectations, and external accountability. Now, they're thrust into a world where they must create their own structure and hold themselves accountable.

Now, they thrust themselves into a world where they must create their own structure and hold themselves accountable. Expectations weigh on them to demonstrate greater emotional maturity than high schoolers, yet they remain not fully-fledged adults.

At 18, they gain legal rights like signing contracts and voting, but whether they're ready for such responsibilities is another question. Many need help with decision-making and need more foresight for sound choices. Common pitfalls include maxing out credit cards without a plan for repayment or committing to leases with friends before gauging compatibility.

Even though they may not be of legal drinking age, obtaining alcohol is often easy, and other substances are readily available. The college environment presents ample opportunities for casual or otherwise encounters.

Self-discipline and academic structure pose significant challenges for college students. They often need more preparation or guidance on managing college life independently. Transitioning from the familiar routines of home and high school to the autonomy of college can be overwhelming.

Key stressors include:

- The disruption in routines affects sleep, eating, and exercise habits.
- Academic changes, such as flexibility, enable procrastination and poor time management.
- Lack of accountability allows students to decide whether to attend classes and may only receive feedback on missed assignments once it's too late.
- Financial pressures include tuition fees, conflicts over spending money and navigating financial aid.

Identity shifts as individuals transition from being prominent in a small community to becoming less significant in a larger one, all while navigating newfound independence.

- Social adjustments include making new friends, resolving roommate conflicts, and navigating romantic relationships.
- Family conflicts occur over concerns about future careers, responsibilities when returning home, and conflicts over changing values and responsibilities.

College is undoubtedly a time of immense growth, but it's also a period marked by uncertainty and stress. Students must navigate newfound freedoms and responsibilities while managing academic and personal challenges. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2011 on this site. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

While college presents opportunities for growth and exploration, it also brings its share of stressors, anxieties, and worries. The Worry Workbook offers a structured approach to self-reflection, introspection, and skill development. This resource aims to pave the way for personal growth and well-being by developing self-confidence and resilience. Learn to take charge of your anxiety and stress to achieve a state of well-being.

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