



Calm Down? Who, Me?

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CALM DOWN? WHO, ME?

Five reality checks to calm the fears and anxieties of college parents

We are well aware that telling an anxious, nervous, or angry person to calm down never actually gets the person to calm down and may, in fact, make matters worse.

But here we are, reminding ourselves just as much as our audience--that is, other parents of high school students--that we can and should find our happy place as we work through the process of getting our student ready for college.

Let's be honest, though: If you are a parent of a student in high school who is preparing for college or already in college, chances are that you're just like us: worried, anxious, and fretful about a number of issues:

- Will my student get into a good college?
- Will we be able to afford college?
- Have I done enough as a parent to prepare my student for college?
- Will my student make friends and fit in at college?
- Will my student be safe in college?
- Will my student maintain our family's culture, values, and faith?

- Will my student finish a degree?
- Will my student get a good job after graduation?
- Will my student still need me for anything?

Do any of these questions resonate with you? Are there any questions not listed here that trouble you? As a devoted, caring parent who has invested 16-20 years of your life into your son or daughter, it's natural and normal to have questions about your student's college experience and to be concerned about how you will answer them.

These are not the kinds of questions that most of us are comfortable answering, so we may try to take action or control the circumstances in our student's life to reduce or eliminate these uncertainties. We step in, intervene, control, and advise, in the hope that our student will have the best chance to get into the best college or university while taking the best classes in the best major to get the best career and live happily ever after.

But when we describe the path as one that has a fairy-tale ending, it doesn't sound right, does it? The questions

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we worry about, and the actions we take to eliminate that worry put our student on a path that we know won't be perfect.

From our own personal experiences in life, we know that life never works out perfectly or the exact way we planned. We know that struggles, setbacks, obstacles, and failure are a natural part of life, and our student needs to learn how to live and even thrive in the midst of these challenges.

So where does that leave us? We want to help calm your worries a bit. We're not going to tell you exactly what you should be doing as a parent on your kid's behalf. Instead, we want to help you feel less anxious, fearful, and worried about your kid. We want to help you feel greater confidence about their future.

To do this, we're going to share important realities about college and draw upon our combined 40 years of experience in higher education to help you find informed answers to the questions you have about your student's college experience.

Reality Check #1: Your student will get into college (but it may not be the college YOU had in mind).

Fact: Today there are almost 5,000 colleges and universities in the U.S., including 2 year, 4 year, public, and private institutions. There are also institutions in the U.S. that have open enrollment (or open admissions), which means that almost anyone who applies with a high school diploma or equivalent will be admitted.

The stories about institutions who only accept 5% of applicants or that require a 4.40 high school GPA represent a relatively small portion of colleges and universities. If your student doesn't have the GPA or test scores to get into a highly selective institution, it's not the end of the world. There are many high quality institutions that provide a great education at a great value without requiring your student to be the valedictorian of their school.

Reality Check #2: A college degree still has value.

Fact: We know from employment data that college graduates earn more and have lower unemployment rates than people without degrees. And, while there are differences in average salaries across different majors, earning a degree of any kind increases a student's chances of success. So,

you and your student may not agree on the major they want to pursue or the college they want to attend. Whether you choose to fight that battle with your student is up to you, but if you do fight it and lose, they are headed in the right direction for success by pursuing a degree.

We offer these facts to give you greater confidence that your student will get into a college somewhere, and by earning a degree, regardless of the college they attend or the major they choose, they will have an opportunity to be successful in life.

Reality Check #3: Despite the dreary news, college is still affordable.

Fact: With the overall decline in state funding for higher education across the country, there's no denying the fact that parents today pay more for their student's degree than in the past. But the return on that investment is still positive, overall, and there are a number of options that parents and students can explore to make college more affordable.

- Community college tuition across the country remains low;

- Every state in the country offers high quality public college and university access;
- Private colleges and universities are competing for students and thus offering a range of financial incentives to applicants;
- Pell grants and scholarships are available; and,
- Student loan interest rates remain low. The average student loan indebtedness of a family in the U.S. is roughly equivalent to a car payment, so even families that have to borrow a modest amount of money to pay for college are making a reasonable investment.

Reality check #4: Regardless of your parenting style, financial resources, or educational background, if you've helped your student get through high school, you have done enough to prepare them for college.

Fact: Every year, thousands of students graduate from colleges and universities across the country, each with their own unique personalities, abilities, and family backgrounds. The number of first-generation students (students whose parents do not have a college degree) who are graduating

has never been higher, and every one of these graduates is living proof that a college degree is an attainable goal.

And if you're a parent of a high school student preparing for college and you've taken the initiative to download this e-book and read this material, you're already demonstrating that you've been a caring, supportive, helpful parent to your student, and they are launching into college with a very strong foundation of family support.

Fact: Today's colleges and universities provide a broad range of programs and resources to help students make a successful transition from high school to college.

They have offices across their campuses with faculty advisors, professional counselors, student peer mentors, and other faculty, staff, and students who have committed their lives and careers to helping students succeed and overcome the obstacles along the way. Institutions also offer a wide range of programs that are specifically designed to help students make a successful transition to college and be successful their first year and beyond.

Reality check #5: The college experience is a safe experience.

Fact: Interpreting campus crime statistics is a complicated task, but the overall reality is that campus crime in the U.S. has fallen over the last 10 years, including a decline in the incidence of rape and other sexual assault. Furthermore, the incidents of rape and other sexual assault is much lower for students of college age than for people who are not college age.

We certainly need to teach our students to be vigilant and make good decisions to protect themselves and their property, but we should find solace in the fact that the campus environment is a relatively safe place. When crimes do occur on campus, they receive a great deal of media attention, which naturally leads some parents to fear for the safety of their student. Let the facts calm you, and keep your focus on what you can control, like driving safely and without distractions to campus when you drop off your student during move-in day.

Fact: College campuses provide a broad range of services geared directly towards student safety and wellbeing; they also offer a wide range of programs

and resources to make their campuses a safe environment and help students develop safe habits. Take a moment to peruse any college or university's website for safety-related programs and resources and you'll be amazed at the depth and breadth of these efforts.

Do these five reality checks make you feel calmer? We hope so. We could provide a longer list, but we know you are pressed for time and have a lot of other competing priorities in your life right now. We're in this with you, and wanted to offer some perspective to help you re-examine the questions or fears in your mind that are causing anxiety and worry.

As a parent, you are the most important person in your student's life, regardless of what he may convey in his conversations with you. Both of you are going through a lot right now, as you prepare for the transition from high school to college. We hope that this e-book gives you information and assurance that can help you enjoy this time with your student, even in the midst of the uncertainty and change.

Check out our website

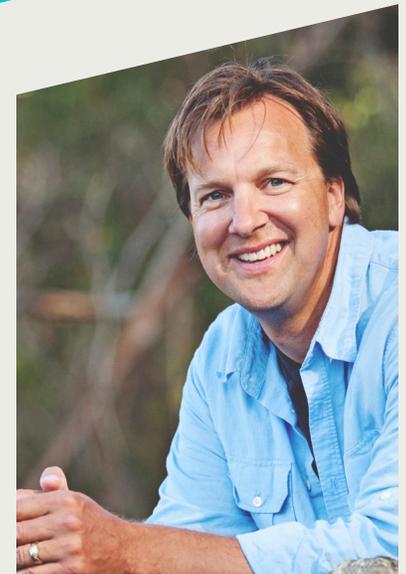
<http://www.collegereadyparent.org> for more information and e-books on topics that can help you and your student become college ready.

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is a renowned educator and educational entrepreneur. She wrote the first, groundbreaking student success textbook for community colleges and the first student success textbook for first-generation students. In response to nationwide demand, in 2011 she founded Educational Frontiers Group (EFG), which provides educational services, such as consulting, professional development, and educational novelties. After 18 years as an award winning community college professor, she now serves as Director of University College at the University of Central Arkansas.

BRIAN TIETJE, Ph.D.



is a thought leader in higher education and a passionate advocate for student success, particularly for those who face challenging circumstances. Brian took his life experiences and determination from rural Ohio cross-country as he traversed educational and corporate ladders to reach an executive leadership position in higher education. Dr. Tietje is the Vice Provost of International, Graduate and Extended Education at Cal Poly (San Luis Obispo), a weekly contributor to the Wall Street Journal's weekly marketing review for college professors, and the co-author of *The College Experience* with Amy Baldwin and Paul Stoltz.

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