

Don't Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide To The College Years

By Helen E. Johnson and Christine Schelhas-Miller
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Reviewed by
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Preparing for the transition to college can be an exhausting experience for both parents and their children. Parents generally concern themselves with such issues as tuition costs, the health and safety of their child, violence on campus, and their child's experimentation with sex, drugs, and alcohol. Their children, however, are more concerned with social adjustment, wondering whether they will get along with their new roommate, hoping they will be able to meet their parents expectations, and questioning their ability to cope with the academic pressures college has to offer. The new found independence these students find in college can be exhilarating for the student and worrisome for the parent.

In their book, *Don't Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide To The College Years*, Johnson and Schelhas-Miller help parents understand the developmental changes that their student will undergo. In the first chapter, "Letting Go, but Still Showing That You Care," the authors discussed the transition from the parent-child relationship to the parent-adult relationship. Since parents are no longer able to supervise their children when they are away in college, a new "adult-to-adult relationship" must be formed. Parents must recognize that they no longer have control over the decisions their child will make. However, the authors argued that through mentoring, parents can continue to influence their child's behavior. This first chapter, one of the most prophetic of the eleven chapters, offered "essential skills for mentors." Some of these skills include communicating effectively, listening, learning to ask questions as a mentor, and how to avoid "why" questions.

Other chapters in the book included "Getting Them Off to College," "Is Your Child Confident, Confused, or Coasting?," "What to Expect from the College/University," and "When to Worry, When to Act." In each of the chapters, the authors emphasized the importance of the guiding process. In this process it is the responsibility of the parent to guide the child through the decision-making process but ultimately realize that they should not make the decision for the student. In particular, the third chapter, "Roommates, Fraternity Parties, All-nighters, Changing Majors, and Hanging Out," provided a discussion of the critical "first year" adjustment process. The chapter stressed

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the significance of keeping in touch and listening without being judgmental; it is critical to remember that this adjustment phase is just as stressful for the student as it is for the parent.

In chapter five, “Just When You Get Used to the Empty Nest, They’re Back!,” the authors discussed the importance of spouses sharing their feelings and concerns with each other. For the mother, the “empty nest syndrome” can invoke intense feelings of sadness. Fathers may feel a sense of freedom but could suffer from “empty den syndrome.” During the parenting years, more attention may have been focused on raising children causing the marriage relationship to be neglected. The authors noted that the empty nest period may be a confusing time for parents and their relationship with each other. They pointed out the need for spouses to share their feelings, to be open-minded and not criticize each others feelings, and seek counseling if necessary.

Don’t Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money is filled with sample dialogues and suggestions about “What to do” and “What to avoid.” In addition, each dialogue is accompanied by questions that help parents determine “What’s on your mind?” and “What’s on your child’s mind?” Doonesbury cartoon strips can be found throughout the book and shed humor to a sometimes stressful and confusing situation. This book holds a wealth of information and tackles almost any situation that a student could possibly face, and it offers parents suggestions on how to handle those situations.

With more than two decades of experience each, these authors have the combined expertise to create a comprehensive parenting guide for the college years. This book is highly recommended for parents whether they are sending their first child or their last child to college. In addition to those parents who never attended college, this book is also recommended for parents who have previously attended college. The authors discussed new and emerging issues that affect today’s college student and offer insight and encouragement into the “new” role parents will play in the development process.