Helping your student find & use supports

By Sarah Bodily, MS
Program Director

Whew! We made it through the first three weeks of college. Can you believe it? One question that is asked a lot from parents is “what do I do if my student comes to me with a question that I feel like they should be learning in Aggies Elevated?” First off, great question! Secondly, remind them that they have resources on campus that might be more readily accessible. Some of those resources include the writing center—“Mom will you look at my paper and tell me if I did okay?” Counseling and Psychological Services—“Dad, I’m feeling really anxious about my text next Wednesday, how can I get through it?”, or the Disability Resource Center—“My teacher only allows 1 minute per question and each question is worth 10 points! I don’t think I can do it!”

Before you come and storm the castle, or campus, please take a minute and remind the student that they have people that can help them on campus. The three resources I mentioned above are resources readily available for all students at Utah State. They have been introduced to these services but might need the reminder that they exist.

If you are unaware of a specific resource that might help your student during a “crisis” situation you can always refer them to their mentor and ask them to let you know what resource they find that can help them. The more you can direct them to searching for the resource the better off they will be as they exit Aggies Elevated. Direct them to a resource-- don’t solve the problem for them!
Parents know that their roles as givers and providers change continuously as their children get older. The changes accelerate as children become adolescents and young adults. As Dwyer, Grigal, and Fialka (2010) state:

Where once family members played the role of guardian, overseer, protector, and decision maker, they must learn to step back and support their child in taking more control. This may mean watching their child make new and different and potentially less optimal choices, and watching him/her stumble and learn to recover. (p. 208)

If we consider a young adult with a disability who is leaving for a college experience at Utah State University’s Aggies Elevated program, the changing roles of parents may be accompanied with feelings of loss, anxiety, and insecurity. It’s hard to let go, even though a parent may want to allow the child to grow into an independent adult. Morgan and Riesen (2016) report a psychologist who described one particular parent’s behavior during the transition of a youth with a disability as “pushing her out the door with one hand while pulling her back with the other” (p. 222). A youth may do the same thing, that is, seek independence one minute, then the next minute, switch gears and run back to the security of a parent’s nurturing. The act of leaving home for a college experience, particularly for a young adult who has challenges, may elicit a ballpark full of emotions for both parents and the young adult, including some that seem deep into “left field.”

For a parent in the middle of these changes, a starting point is to understand that the entire range of emotions is acceptable. It’s all normal. Different behaviors are to be expected. The next step is to be assured that Aggies Elevated staff, mentors, and volunteers are prepared to support new students. They understand what it means to move away to college both from the perspective of students and parents. Instead of waiting for emotions to swell, they will work proactively with each student to anticipate changes. Also, they will encourage students to keep in touch with parents to report happenings and feelings. Beyond the program, residential life staff at Utah State University understands student needs. Support systems on campus are wide-ranging and ever present.

For students with disabilities who move away to college, there is dignity in taking risks. And there are supports in place for doing so. But we understand how difficult it is for parents and family to let go and change roles. As Morgan and Riesen (2016, p. 222) state, parents go from being “doer” to “observer.” From “choice maker” to “one who allows (the young adult) to make choices.” And from “one who does more” to “one who does less.” It’s not easy, but the change in roles is an important part of a youth’s transformation to college student, independent adult, and contributing citizen.


www.aggieselevated.com
This is an excerpt from the book, “I’ll Miss You Too,” formerly titled “Doors Open from Both Sides,” by the mother/daughter duo Margo E. Bane Woodacre and Steffany Bane. The excerpt, and the book, offer helpful, real-world tips for parents and students on surviving the first year of college, the first visit home, and more. The book is available at Amazon and Barnes & Noble.

Freshman Year: Communication with Sensitivity (The Screen Door)

A screen door allows for an open view, while at the same time affording a degree of privacy. Similarly, communication between parents and their child away at school should have openness in expressing viewpoints but, at the same time, demonstrate mutual respect for privacy. For both parent and child, the changes in the environment will necessitate extra effort to maintain positive and supportive relationships.

Don’t bug your student during the first semester. Allow time for your student to comfortably adjust to college life. Plan on staying in touch, but arrange a time that is convenient for both of you to converse. Remember that 8:00 a.m. on a Saturday or Sunday morning tends not to work well for new college students!

Use the power of email. This form of communication is an excellent way to communicate for both parent and child. It is amazing what your student can and will share with you through this medium. There is no parental negative tone of voice or body language to which the student can react. We, as parents, can receive the messages, react and have time to reflect before responding.

Be aware of “signals” of unusual behavior from your child. Look for hints of chronic homesickness or persistent avoidance of communication from your child. If unusual behavior is sensed, arrange to get help through the proper college channels.

During your first visit to campus, understand, as a parent, that you are now on your student’s turf. This is a time for enjoying his/her sense of role reversal. Allow for a healthy show of independence.

First Visit Home: The Door Jam

The first visit home can bring warm feelings, excitement and, unfortunately, confrontations. “Home sweet home” can take on new and different definitions for parents and child when the latter settles in for this particular, unpracticed first visit.

Be prepared for the first visit home to bring challenges. Remember that when your student returns home for the first visit, he/she will have changed. You might expect the same child who left in the fall, but understand that your student will be returning home with a good dose of independent living under his/her belt. This could be a time to consider a sensible renegotiation of home rules to fit the needs of all.

Your child will probably sleep late for the first few days. With finals usually just before vacation, your student could be exhausted. Give him/her space and time to catch up on rest. Also understand that most home beds are more comfortable than college beds!

Make sure that you spend some meaningful time with your child. Don’t be surprised if your child wants to spend most waking hours with former high-school friends. When possible, arrange time for the family to be together. Whether it involves an activity or sport or just having a meal together, this will give all family members an opportunity to share views, discuss any differences and preserve an appreciation for family values.
By Sue Reeves, CRC  
*Career Success Coordinator*

The four courses of the Aggies Elevated Career Success sequence are Career Exploration I & II and Internship I & II. Each class builds upon the one before it, introducing skills and building a knowledge base that students will use far beyond their two years in the program. It can be hard to think beyond the next quiz or project, however, so I explain it to the students this way:

Think of the four courses as a series of your favorite books or movies that tell an epic story.

For example, in the Harry Potter series (7 books, 8 movies), the end goal is the desperate battle between good and evil, where Harry defeats Voldemort. In Aggies Elevated, the end goal is that you will have the skills to find, get and keep a job that you will enjoy.

Each book moves Harry closer to that goal, but each one also has its own plot, or storyline. It’s helpful to read the books in order because each storyline builds upon the one before it.

Like each book in the Harry Potter series, each course has a specific storyline—the objectives that will build the skills you need to succeed. And like each book in the Harry Potter series, each course builds upon the one before it.

Each book has individual chapters that tell the story of Harry, Ron, and Hermione, and move the story to its final objective. In a similar way, each course has individual chapters—the class periods in which specific skills are discussed, moving you closer to your final objective—a satisfying career in a field you enjoy.

**What is a Stepping Stone job?**

Since it’s very rare for someone to land their dream job right out of college, we talk about Stepping Stone jobs—jobs that help you build skills to reach that dream job.

**SPED 1020 Career Exploration I**

Students will complete a variety of assessments to identify their strengths and preferences involving the world of work; use online databases to learn about interesting occupations; create job-seeking products such as resumes and cover letters, and interviewing skills.

**SPED 1040 Career Exploration II**

Students will continue to explore interesting occupations; create an online portfolio of products of interest to employers; learn to use job boards and understand job postings; participate in a variety of on-campus job shadow experiences and a series of skill-building practice interviews.

**Employment Expectation**

At the conclusion of Career Exploration II, the student is expected to use his/her skills to get a part-time or full-time job during the summer break between the first and second years. Each student will also be expected to participate in finding his/her own internship experience for the second year.

**SPED 2110 Internship I**

Students will learn appropriate on-the-job work behaviors through the job placement, weekly discussion topics and problem-solving seminar.

**SPED 2110 Internship II**

Students will finalize online portfolios, reflect on what they have learned, and be able to explain it to potential employers and others. After Spring Break, students will begin the search for their Stepping Stone jobs in the location in which they intend to live.

**Employment Expectation**

Upon graduation, the student is expected to use his/her skills to get and keep permanent employment in his/her chosen field and location.

[www.aggieselevated.com](http://www.aggieselevated.com)
Help your student avoid the “Freshman 15”

By Kayla Currier, BS
Rehabilitation Counseling Intern

Many of you have probably heard of the dreaded “Freshman 15.” It is a common phrase used to describe the typical weight gain that freshmen experience during their first year at college. Of course, the buffet-style cafeteria and cheap pizza contribute to weight gain, but many other aspects of freshmen life also play a role.

Living on a college campus exposes young adults to an endless potential of new experiences. Universities ask a lot of college freshmen. Students are expected to adapt to a new living environment, take part in college-level classes, and build new relationships as they redefine their role as a student and individual. This change can result in times of stress. With everything freshmen have to take on, health is often the last thing on your student’s mind. Although the average weight gain for a college freshmen is 15lbs, there are ways that students can avoid weight gain all together. By taking small steps to maintain a healthy lifestyle, someday your student will celebrate that they dodged the “Freshman 15!”

Parents can support their students in maintaining a healthy weight by taking part in the following activities:

Provide Healthy Dorm Room Snacks: Parents love to make sure their children are getting plenty to eat! Send a care package full of healthy alternatives such as baked chips, nuts, wholegrain crackers, and bottled water.

Create an On-Going HealthRelated Conversation: Without nagging, ask your student for an update on their most recent activity. Encourage your student to participate in physical activities by sharing your most recent physical adventure!

Engage in Healthy Choices During Visits with your Student: A student visit may seem like the perfect time to spoil your child with all of their favorites, but it is also the perfect time to have a significant influence on their health choices. Instead of hitting the movie theater and ordering a large popcorn, ask your student to lead the family on a hike. Pack healthy trail mix and flavored water to enjoy along the way!

Discuss the Natural Consequences of Weight Gain: Weight gain is associated with increased illness, low self-esteem, lack of energy, mental fog, and of course, tight clothing. Having an open conversation about the benefits of maintaining a healthy weight, and the possible consequences of weight gain can help your student develop their own purpose behind watching their waistline!

Remember that nobody sets out to gain weight. Weight gain can be embarrassing and unpleasant for the individual experiencing it. Although usually done with good intentions, pointing out weight gain most often has the opposite effect of what parents intended. If you find that your child is experiencing symptoms of the “Freshmen 15,” providing them with a supportive and understanding environment may be the most beneficial weight related thing you can give to them.