

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

College Prep

Giving Faith the Good Ol' College Try

Prom is over. Final exams and AP tests are done. Schools, scholarships, grants, sports teams are all determined, and one thing is certain: Our kids are no longer kids anymore. As high school comes to a close, marking the end of a long era of their lives, they simultaneously lament what once was and excitedly anticipate college for the promise it holds. But while they're saying goodbye to old friends and stressing over how to decorate their dorm rooms, we parents are being much more realistic, fretting about keggers, atheist professors, coed dorms, and the allure of total freedom. Ultimately, as our children leave home and our loving boundaries for the first time, we're concerned about a much more important question: ***How do I help my kids keep their faith in college?***

More than being concerned about statistics or behaviors, we want them to choose to follow Christ because they know that doing so is the only way to find abundant life, both now and for eternity. But we know that colleges and universities can be places where other promises of happiness, success, love, and satisfaction compete voraciously to win their hearts and minds. So we begin to wonder: Did we do enough? What can we do before they leave? And what can we do once they're there?

First of all, don't panic. We know that this transition can be terrifying, but we want to encourage you in two things. First, colleges typically aren't as hostile as we see in movies like [God's Not Dead](#), and second, challenges and new environments can (and often do) help deepen faith as long as they have the right place to go to ask questions and get guidance. So rather than dreading this time, remember that it's really good for them to be tested a little. With the right connections and resources, your child can emerge from college with a deeper faith than when they started.

— What are the chances my child graduates with his or her faith?

Before we talk numbers, remember that, on the surface, the statistics can be a little intimidating. But we need to take them for what they are: *just* numbers. Your child is not defined by a number, and God is bigger than the statistics.

With that in mind, Fuller Youth Institute found that [40-50%](#) of students walk away from the church after they graduate high school. And according to the Public Religion Research Institute, [38% of young adults](#) are religiously unaffiliated, compared to 24% of all Americans. And here's the kicker: Most of the young adults who walk away from God or their faith actually do so *before* leaving for college. This shows that **the assumption that colleges destroy faith isn't true**. We can't oversimplify the situation and say, "*If* my teen goes to college, *then* they're going to lose their faith." The issue is more complicated, which leaves a lot of room for opportunity, hope, and the Holy Spirit.

Whether or not our teens graduate with their faith intact depends on two things: God and their own hearts. We need to free ourselves from the expectation that if we don't do everything right, our kids are bound to walk away (or the reverse, that if we do everything right, then they won't walk away; Adam and Eve had the perfect Father but ultimately chose to rebel against Him). It's not ultimately up to us because our kids are their own people with free will, but there are definitely steps we can take to prepare them well. Just keep in mind that God deeply [knows the heart of your child](#), and He's guiding them through every phase of life, including college. There

are awesome opportunities for Christian community on just about every college campus, but it may take a little bit of elbow grease from you and your child to find the right one. So don't lose heart! We're only getting started, and we've got some tips for setting your teen up for success in their faith.

—— If I send them to a Christian school, will that help?

It might! But there are so many factors at play—your child's personality, the schools themselves, your child's friends, costs, whether their field of study is offered at a school, etc.—it's impossible to say for sure, so it's worth considering and talking about with your child. Things like community, quality of education, location, and cost are important, but it's possibly more important to assess where your child is at in their faith and if they're ready to represent Christ to those at a non-Christian school or if they need more time in a safe environment to ask questions, experience Jesus, and allow their faith to solidify.

Keep in mind that choosing a school *for* your child is not necessarily a good way to make sure they keep their faith. For example, if your teenager wants to go to a non-Christian school because they like the freedoms it offers but you force them to go to a Christian school anyway, they will still find ways to do those things at the Christian school. If our kids want to do (or not do) something, they'll find a way. So when talking with your teenager about his/her future, remember that asking them about what they hope for and dream about can be more effective in getting them to think beyond the short-term fun or happiness they're currently pursuing.

That being said, we can ask some important questions to get our teenagers thinking about things they likely haven't considered. Start by asking these questions:

- Do you want to attend a private or public school? Why?
- What schools provide programs in your fields of interest?
- Have you thought about the community you'll find at each school? What are the pros and cons of each school in terms of community? How will your community impact you as a person?
- Have you considered the cost of going to a particular school and how you will pay for it?

Once you've listened to their perspective, you can then kindly and gently explain what you hope they'll get from their college experience. If you and your child are still unsure what school might make the most sense, we've listed some pros and cons to consider below. Regardless of the schools your teen is thinking of attending, ask God to give both you and your teen wisdom and discernment.

Christian Schools

One of the biggest draws for Christian schools is the faith aspect, of course! A [2005 study](#) of 16,000 students found that those who attend independent Protestant, Baptist, and other Protestant-affiliated institutions report the largest increases in overall religious commitment. This is encouraging because, if our kids choose to attend a Christian school, we would hope that the school would ultimately deepen their faith, not eliminate it.

Besides the curriculum, chapels, and Christian professors, your student will also enjoy the presence of strong community. This is not to say that friendships are guaranteed to form on day one and never break—we're all human, of course! Everyone can have a little bit of trouble finding the right community, whether it's in a Christian atmosphere or not. But at a school where

everyone shares a common belief, it can be easier to build friendships because those like-minded people are all over the campus.

This is all good news! But here are a few other points to keep in mind.

- Not all Christian universities are created equal. Many are Christian in name but not in action or philosophy. Speak with alumni and admissions staff to find out if this is true.
- Like churches, Christian schools often follow denominations. It's worth finding a school that's transparent about its theology, but also encourages depth of thought over blind agreement.
- Christian schools often have mandatory chapel attendance or some other equivalence. There are pros and cons to this situation, but know that just because a college offers Christian resources like chaplains, prayer, and service opportunities, this doesn't mean your student will pursue those.
- The Christian bubble does exist! We need to encourage our kids to step outside of that bubble and become Christ's ambassadors to the world around them.

Public Schools

Attending a non-religious college can have just as much of a positive impact on students' faith as a Christian school. [The Chronicle Review](#), published by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, states that attending public school as a Christian tends to strengthen the faith of a student, while Bible schools may not actually be the healthiest environment for growth. Part of the reason is that at public schools (more so than at Christian schools), it's almost guaranteed that students' beliefs will be challenged, requiring them to think more deeply and actively wrestle with their faith.

If your child wishes to attend a public school, there is plenty of opportunity to pursue the Christian faith through clubs, Bible studies, and churches; all your student has to do is be willing to try them out. Try looking into some Christian clubs with your students before they leave for college so that they have a good idea of what's out there. [InterVarsity](#), [Young Life](#), [Cru](#), and [the Navigators](#), are all national organizations that are available on most campuses, but make sure to look into campus-specific ministries and clubs as well. Check into denominations and core values to make sure you find the right fit for your child.

A cool part of pursuing Christianity on a campus full of different beliefs is that we can know our students made a genuine choice to follow God on their own. God gave us free will for a reason, and He wants your child to exercise that on their college campus. Faith in Christ is a choice, one we each have to make for ourselves, so we can't force our kids into a faith they don't want. Part of letting them go in their college journey is allowing them to explore God's love for themselves.

In [Romans 12:2](#), Paul reminds us to not conform to the world, but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Paul lived in a world filled with different beliefs, but he didn't run from it; he stayed in it, engaging it in order to show Jesus' love to all. Jesus set this example when He [ate with tax collectors](#) and was [anointed by a sinful woman](#), demonstrating the importance of being *in* the world but not of it. However, we'd be remiss to overlook the temptations that can be much more widespread and pervasive at non-Christian schools. If our children's faith isn't yet mature or they seem easily swayed by culture, college could be a place where their faith isn't refined, but completely eradicated. As the parent, you have the best perspective to know if your child is ready to be in the world without becoming of it, or if they need more time in a less-hostile environment.

What stressors will my child face on campus?

Social

According to the [Fuller Youth Institute](#), only 1 in 7 high school seniors feels prepared to face the challenges of college life. It's "the perfect storm of loneliness, the search for new friends, being completely on their own for the first time, and the sudden availability of a lot of partying." These factors tend to stress parents out even more than kids, but they're not doomed, we promise. While parties and alcohol might be intriguing, if your student doesn't have a desire to participate in those things, they really don't have to! A lot of kids go into college believing that they have to conform to cultural norms in order to fit in, but it's just not the case. There are numerous groups and lots of people who find meaning outside of those things, they just need to explore what the school has to offer. Talk to your student about what they'd like to be a part of socially and help them to find organizations to fit those interests. **It's critical that they get connected in their first two weeks of being on campus** because, as [Dr. Kara Powell](#) says, "the first two weeks of college set the trajectory" for the rest of their experience.

Academic

Aside from social pressures, a lot of students find academics to be highly taxing. A [national study](#) from New York University found that 55% of students said academics were their biggest stressor. And while academics and learning are important, we need to remind our kids that their value is not rooted in or determined by a grade. College curriculum is a major shift from high school, and some students struggle with it more than others. So before your child leaves for school, talk to them about the importance of having a good balance in their life. Encourage them to study hard but not place their ultimate value in a grade. College classes are tough, and they don't need straight As to be successful. Students who went through school getting those straight As may be shocked that they're not getting the same results in college, but the [national average](#) for college students is actually a 3.15, or a B average. We parents can have a hard time with this sometimes because we just want to see our kids do the absolute best they can. But it's important to watch our posture with them, especially when it comes to academics. (For more about this, check out the book [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#) by Carol S. Dweck, PhD.)

If your teen is having a tough time in their classes, try using some of these phrases:

- "Grades don't determine your worth."
- "I can see that you're working hard, and I'm so proud of you."
- "How do you feel about how you're doing? What's your experience in your college classes been like so far?" (rather than saying something like, "Why are your grades so low? Didn't you study?")
- (If your teen is considering switching majors because they're struggling with their current classes) "Getting low grades is embarrassing and frustrating. It makes sense why you're considering changing degrees. But every degree and career path has unexpected challenges, and it's okay to have setbacks. I'm confident you can become good at [major], if you're willing to try."

Reminding our kids of their true identity is essential, because chances are they're drowning in a pit of despair—often due to a fear of failure, judgment, and letting their parents down. Remind them that they haven't disappointed you and that you're immensely proud of them. When our kids know that we love and support them no matter what, they can relax and possibly do better without the burden of pressure and expectation weighing them down.

We've seen that college students can become so overwhelmed by the pressures of life that their faith takes a back seat. College exposes and agitates deep emotional and social needs, and students often try to fill those needs with friends, activities, and parties. Thus, faith falls by the wayside simply because students are so eager to find some shred of comfort and acceptance.

Fear

Another contributor to stress is fear, and many of [teens' biggest fears](#) revolve around their performance, such as:

- Poor academic performance or not getting good grades (75.5%)
- The future or life after graduation (66%)
- Having to audition or try out in order to be a part of something, e.g. auditioning for a musical, trying out for a sports team, etc. (54%)
- Peer pressure or not fitting in with people at school (40%)

From grades to internships to friend groups, the possibility of failure is everywhere. Combined with new environments and possibly shaky support systems, students sometimes shut down. *This is why it's so important to have things in place that they can fall back on.* We need to be there to take tear-filled phone calls whenever they need it, of course, but we can also encourage them to turn to God for strength and to friends when they could use a good laugh. Make sure they take time to take care of themselves (going to the gym, reading, relaxing with art, etc.) in addition to encouraging the faith aspect of rest. God gave us unique ways to cope with stress, and it's essential to participate in those things to maintain our own sanity! Because while many students will turn to partying to let go, we want to remind our kids that there is so much more available to us.

— Should I encourage my child to come home often?

The short answer, no. It's hard enough to let go of our kids, so when they ask to come home every weekend, everything inside screams, "Yes, please, please, please come home!" But we're actually not doing them any favors in encouraging them to do so. It's especially important to encourage your child to get through the first full month without any visits because, as mentioned above, it's [crucial time to form friendships](#), get connected to churches/ministries, and figure out how to live on their own. After that first month, a visit every now and again is completely fine! But we have to find a good balance to ensure they have enough time to spend in their new communities and get into the groove of classes.

Homesickness is completely normal, and we need to help our kids work through it, rather than taking the easy route when loneliness starts to set in. [Weekends](#) are a super important time for students to feel engaged and part of the college community. It's scary to let go on both ends, but if our kids only stay on campus to go to class and come home on weekends, they'll have a really hard time feeling like they're part of anything, which makes college pretty unenjoyable. If students aren't present on campus, they're missing out on a huge opportunity to find community and mature in their independence.

Of course, if your child is facing a severe psychological or emotional crisis, they might need the support of their family and friends back home. We can use our judgment in times like this to find

the line between encouraging independence and getting them the stability and help they need to succeed.

— What challenges of faith will my teen face in the classroom?

Chances are, if your student attends a public school, there will be professors who come from non-Christian worldviews. But this does not mean that all professors are out to destroy your child's faith. In fact, most professors actually tend to encourage individual thought and opinions. One college student we talked to said:

I was worried that I'd be pressured by professors and students to abandon all of my beliefs. But when I actually got into classes like religion and philosophy, I realized that the only pressure I faced was to share my own take on topics. I was always encouraged to talk about my beliefs, even if I knew the professor totally disagreed.

Statistics also aren't as concerning as we might have thought. In 2007, [Harvard Magazine](#) wrote: *Although nearly 37 percent of professors at elite research schools like Harvard are atheist or agnostic, about 20 percent of their colleagues have 'no doubt that God exists.' At community colleges, in contrast, 15 percent of professors are atheist or agnostic, and 40 percent believe in God.*

So even at "secular" universities, your student has a 1 in 5 chance of studying under a God-believing professor.

In addition, most professors want to see their students succeed, regardless of their religious beliefs. A professor from Northeastern University in Boston [says](#), "The best part of being a teacher is the interaction with the students. So often, they do not see their talent, or don't know how to direct it. It takes just a few suggestions to see your students bloom into professionals. I really enjoy the mentorship aspect of teaching."

Some professors might make snarky comments about religion or conservative values. While they might not be actively fighting against religion, professors' subtle disdain might suggest to your teen that "smart" people don't believe in God. But that's clearly not true, and we can help our children by reminding them that beliefs shouldn't change based on what others think of us, but rather be based on truth.

In fact, perspective is everything here. If our kids go into college afraid of anyone who might question their faith, they'll see any such experience as negative and attacking. But if, as we read in [James](#), they "count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing," then they'll see such experiences as opportunities to learn, grow, and possibly even help others examine their own beliefs.

It's actually a *really good thing* for our kids to be exposed to different religions, worldviews, and philosophies. We can't expect to keep our kids in a protective Christian bubble for the rest of their lives. Sooner or later, they'll have friends who hold contrasting beliefs, start a discussion with a coworker on the meaning of life, or see a protest sign that promotes a different view. The point is this: **If Christianity is true, it will stand up to scrutiny, questions, attacks, and mockery.** Therefore, it's good to ask hard questions and think deeply about our faith in pursuit of what is good, true, and real. Then, when we encounter people with different beliefs and values,

we won't be afraid of them; rather, we'll be able to rest in our faith and have calm, respectful conversations with them.

—— Should I be worried about parties and alcohol?

A good question, considering that both are prevalent on most campuses—yes, even Christian campuses. ([As of 2016](#), 57.2% of college students said they drank in the last month, 38% engaged in binge drinking in the past month, and 10.5% were heavy drinkers). It's easy to imagine worst-case scenarios, which compounds the fear and worry, often leading us to want to tighten the reins so we prevent these scenarios from becoming reality. And while it's good to have honest, open dialogue with teens about the dangers of binge drinking, driving while intoxicated, sexual assault, and more, it's never helpful to try to control our kids.

Remember, they are their own people with free will who will make their own decisions. So once they go to college, it's important to trust that you did everything you could while they were in your home to empower them to become thoughtful, mature, Christ-oriented, responsible adults. Even more importantly, rest in the knowledge that the Creator of the universe loves your child more than you can comprehend and is always working to bring their heart closer to his.

With that said, it's not the end of the world if they go to a party or drink alcohol. *Whattt? But parties are where evil itself is manifested!* Don't hear what we're not saying: We don't condone underage drinking, drinking to drunkenness, or putting oneself in risky situations. But because this is the first time that many of our kids will be on their own and in full control of their decisions, they will probably test the waters here and there. Rather than freaking out or taking it as an opportunity to remind them (again) of how terrible partying is, take a deep breath, resist the urge to react emotionally, and ask them about the experience. By doing so, they'll feel safe enough to be honest with you, at which point you can guide them with good questions toward a healthy, based-in-reality perspective of how those choices will affect them in the long term.

In addition, let them know you [trust](#) them to make the right choices. When we say, "Don't drink, don't go out, and don't make poor choices," our kids hear, "I don't trust you to make the right choices, so I'm telling you what you should do instead." Do we intend this interpretation? Of course not! We want our kids to be safe, and our cautionary tales are coming from a place of love, but we need to extend them the respect they're craving. In addition, it's much more powerful to gently and lovingly guide our kids to the truth than to spoon feed it to them. As you have these conversations, two important things to keep in mind are: Even the best kids are not perfect, and we need to talk to them as adults, not helpless kids. Here's some helpful language to use:

- **"What kind of a social life do you hope to have at school?"** With this, remind them that socializing is not confined to parties.
- **"If you're ever uncomfortable or need help, please call me, I'm always going to be here for you."**
- **"If something doesn't seem right, you can leave. You don't owe anyone anything."** Often times, students feel the need to stick around because their friends are having fun, or a significant other wants them to be there, or there's a social pressure to partake in the partying. But our kids don't owe their friends anything, and they need to be reminded that they can do what's best for themselves.
- **Talk through your own experiences with college parties.** Did you drink or engage in risky behavior? Be real with your kids and let them know that you've been there, and that you

just want to make sure they're safe. Create a space for vulnerability so that your kids can feel free to come to you if they need help.

If your teen does decide to drink, a big reason could be [social camaraderie](#). In other words, students who are lonely and lacking intimacy might believe that if they drink, they'll connect better with others, or that parties are the best places to meet new people and make friends. So talk with your child about the idea that friendships do not have to be catalyzed by alcohol, and that they're free to be who they want to be, even if it doesn't match up with the norms of the people around them. (Psst! Check out our [Parent's Guide to Teens and Alcohol](#) and our [Drugs Conversation Kit](#) for more info).

Drinking can also lead to a higher chance of [sexual assault](#). Though it is not inevitable, there is often a direct correlation between drinking and sexual assault on college campuses. According to [Campus Safety](#):

- At least 50% of student sexual assaults involve alcohol.
- Approximately 90% of rapes perpetrated by an acquaintance of the victim involve alcohol.
- About 43% of sexual assault events involve alcohol use by the victim; 69% involve alcohol use by the perpetrator.
- In one-third of sexual assaults, the aggressor is intoxicated.

As we can see, the search for intimacy through pleasure and alcohol can lead to risky situations, and those can lead to extremely traumatic events like sexual assault. Again, alcohol will not inevitably result in assault, but assault is more likely to occur when guards are down and vulnerability sets in. When talking with your child about this, let him or her know the risks of assault in conjunction with alcohol, but state clearly that alcohol is never an excuse for assault. For women especially, others may have shameful passing remarks that she shouldn't have been drinking, wearing those clothes, etc. But assault is not the fault of the victim, whether drinking was involved or not. Alcohol is simply something to be aware of, because when those filters are stripped away, the risk can increase quickly. (Read our [Parent's Guide to Sexual Assault](#) for a deeper look).

While we've mentioned sexual assault, we should also talk about campus sex in general. Sex is openly discussed at most US colleges. Modern culture advocates for sex as long as it's "safe" and "healthy," i.e., both parties are consenting and use protection. So it's likely that the student body will be pretty accepting of sexual activity (again, even on Christian campuses). Many colleges will also present themselves as the authorities on sex. They'll likely provide free events and consultations to students who have questions (here's a [typical college sex-ed webpage](#)). As parents, we just need to let our kids know that there are other authorities to turn to for questions and advice. Talk with your child about how to recognize the culture and live differently. God's design for sex is a beautiful picture of His union with us. If you haven't already (and it's never too late!), talk about sex in an open manner with your child. (If you're lost on this, we've got you covered. Check out our [Parent's Guide to the Sex Talk](#)).

— What can I do to help prevent a loss of faith?

Don't wait or leave things to chance.

Begin preparing your child for college as soon as their senior year of high school begins if possible. Getting them to think ahead sooner will give them more time to ask questions and you more time to have good conversations with them! As part of that, help your child come

up with a game plan for the first few days of college. [InterVarsity notes](#), “**Your first 72 hours on campus are the most important hours of your college career**. The choices you make in terms of friends, peer groups, and using your free time will heavily determine how well you will navigate your college course.” The last thing you want is for your teen to be left alone in his dorm room on the first night of college with nothing to do. See if there are campus ministries hosting student welcome events (there definitely will be). Teens are rebellious and love to test boundaries, and if all they hear is “don’t drink, don’t party, don’t...” guess what they’re going to do. Instead, help them to find fun alternatives so they feel prepared.

Encourage Christian community.

College campus ministries are fun, cool, and life changing. They also provide much-needed community to students. Here’s what one [Cru staff member](#) had to say on community: “One of the best ways to [explore and develop the spiritual area of their life] is in the context of community. Often times, freshmen are curious about faith and want to develop their spiritual life, but they don’t know where to start or who to start with.”

Christian communities often create strong, lifelong bonds because of the shared sense of identity right from the start. Your child will be free to express their faith in an open setting, which then creates a pathway to deeper communion with God. These are the people who will see your son on his bad days, laugh with him in new experiences, and share their hearts with him in trusting confidence. Your daughter may find her greatest source of support in that Christian community, because those are the people she’s living her life with. God created community so that we could [carry each other’s burdens](#), [have fun with one another](#), [pray over each other](#), [encourage love](#), and so much more—but we’ll never know the fruits of community until we pursue it. And in case it hasn’t sunk it yet, we’ll reiterate that finding this community in the [first two weeks](#) is essential.

Don’t forget the Church.

College ministries are great, but they can’t replace the Church. For one, local churches are a great way to escape the college bubble. College students need adult mentorship and open, caring homes that aren’t carpeted with pizza boxes and gym shorts. A local church can also provide service opportunities, networking connections, and creative outlets.

[According to one college student](#), the top three reasons for not attending church are:

- Too much homework
- No car/ride to get there
- Too involved with other campus ministries

There will always be an excuse to not pursue ministry outside of campus. Talk to your teen about ways to prioritize church and exactly *why* church should be a priority in the first place. But here’s where that respect and trust comes in again: We want to encourage our kids to find a home church and maybe even help them to find one, but we can’t force them through the door. As parents, we can and should offer as much guidance as we can, but it’s really up to them whether or not they take us up on that advice. Blanket these conversations in prayer for wisdom and discernment, because it’s a scary thing to let our kids go, but an even scarier thing to do it without the Lord’s provision.

Encourage your teen to join other communities and activities.

If your student is interested in anything, chances are his or her college will have a club for it. You can go online and search most colleges’ student activity lists. Here are a few examples that took

45 seconds to find on one school's website: Anthropology Club, Swim Club, Spirit and Traditions, High school outreach, vegetarian club, and a hundred more we haven't listed here.

Encourage your teenager to check out these clubs early in the school year! It's much easier to join a social group when everyone's new. The good news is that most colleges host campus-wide club fairs where students can visit booths of their favorite activities and interests. The idea in this is to encourage a healthy, holistic lifestyle. It's not enough to go to Bible study once a week; we want our teens to use their God-given talents in the world. Non-Christian clubs and friend groups are also perfect opportunities to spread the Gospel. The body of Christ is meant to breathe: We breathe in through Christian fellowship and soaking in the Word, and we breathe out by going back into the community to share what we've learned with others.

Recap

- There are pros and cons to both public and Christian schools.
- The challenges that college brings are good for the development of faith.
- Stress and social anxiety are overlooked temptations. These factors often push students to excessive drinking or sexual relationships.
- There are opportunities for Christian community on most (if not all) college campuses.
- College professors have their own biases, but they typically want to see their students pursue individual thought.
- A big factor in students' drinking is social camaraderie.
- Colleges try to be the sex-ed experts, but they won't provide godly worldviews regarding sex.
- Remember to discuss a game plan with your teen before they go to college.
- Encourage your teen to get involved with campus ministries, churches, and healthy social groups in their first week on campus.
- College doesn't have to be terrifying, it's a great chance for your child to own his or her faith!

Discussion Questions

- **What excites you most when thinking about college?** If your family visits colleges, you might notice a moment when your teen is hooked. It might be at the gym, it could be while sitting in on a class, or it could be while chatting with a current student. Pay attention to what they're drawn to. Your teen likely has deep craving for something, whether it's friendship, prestige, or new experiences. And these are good cravings! But they're also easily skewed, and it'd be good to keep an eye on those activities.
- **When is a good time to call?** Make communication a regular event. It's easy for your student to fall off the face of the planet. Have weekly or bi-monthly checkups at least. Just don't call too much.
- **What do you think college parties are like?** There's a lot on TV about college parties, but probably 90% of what your teen has seen just isn't true. People aren't that cool. Love and beer don't compliment each other well. Consequences last longer than the second half of a movie. Let's get those preconceptions out in the open. Also, be open about your own experiences. If you come across as the perfect adult who looks down on others who drink, there's a good chance you'll alienate your child. If they do decide to venture into the party scene, they won't be coming to you for advice or consolation if all they expect is judgement.

Encourage them to live godly lives, yes, but if it's part of your story, it's okay to show how God's grace has sanctified you.

- **How do you respond to people who don't share the same faith?** Your child might be worried about how to respond to peers or professors who challenge his or her faith. While an apologetics primer wouldn't hurt (check out our [Parent's Guide to a Doubting Teen](#)), it's unreasonable to expect anyone to memorize rote answers to every argument and counterpoint. As [Jesus said](#), "for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." Encourage your child to be slow to speak and quick to listen, because a potentially Christ-filled conversation will quickly be shut down if your child is unwilling to listen. Plus, a gracious word from your child, even if it's unsure, can be more edifying than a three-point essay.
- **What words do you associate with a professor?** This is a great way to tell your teen that professors are people, not wise, mythic sages or evil tyrants waiting to crush all Christians. While professors do deserve respect and they do know more than your student, it's worth weighing the truths they claim with biblical truths.
- **How did you meet your best friends in middle school and high school?** Sometimes it's easy to take friendships for granted. When you've known someone for years, it's easy to forget how it happened, that you didn't always feel comfortable around each other. Help your child think about how people meet each other. Some students sit in their dorm rooms all day and complain, "Mom, I just don't have any friends!" Well... there are things students can do to be more social, and we want to help guide them in that if they're having trouble.

Final Thoughts

As scary as it can be to watch our babies grow up and embark on their own journey, it's part of [God's beautiful design](#) for our growth as humans. In today's age, college can be a wonderful time for our kids to spread their wings and mature as people and as Christ-followers. But ultimately, your child's faith journey at college will take faith on your part—faith that your diligent efforts to disciple your kids have taken root; faith that your child will remember all they've been taught and choose to be a responsible adult; and most importantly, faith that God is bigger than any college, temptation, or culture and is passionately pursuing your child. No matter what happens in your child's college experience, both good and bad, may you continue to support, love, guide, and diligently pray for them to love Christ above all else and to become a light in this dark world.

Related Axis Resources

- [The Culture Translator](#), a free weekly email that offers biblical insight on all things teen-related
- [A Parent's Guide to Failure](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Teens and Alcohol](#)
- [Drugs Conversation Kit](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to Sexual Assault](#)
- [A Parent's Guide to a Doubting Teen](#)

If you'd like access to all of our digital resources, both current and yet to come, for one low monthly or yearly fee, check out the [All Axis Pass](#)!

Additional Resources

- "[Symposium on Youth Ministries: Dr. Cheryl Crawford](#)," Gordon College (worthwhile 3-part video series looking at factors that impact faith formation during college; [part 2](#) and [part 3](#))
- "[What Makes Faith Stick During College?](#)" Fuller Youth Institute
- "[Why students lose their faith in college](#)," Cru
- "[College Professors Aren't Killing Religion](#)," Five Thirty Eight
- "[How to Choose a College ... and Keep Your Faith?](#)" InterVarsity
- "[How to Successfully Parent Your College Student](#)," Fastweb
- "[Keeping Freshman Friends During the Sophomore Slump](#)," They Odyssey Online
- "[Students Say These Are the Three Biggest Problems on College Campuses](#)," *Business Insider*
- "[The Problem with Freshman Year Friends](#)," The Diamondback
- "[Drinking Levels Defined](#)," NIAAA
- "[The High Risks and High Costs of College Drinking](#)," College Stats

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