

6 Ways Dads Can Prepare Their Kids for College

What are the keys to your child's college success? One big key is *you*, dad.

Author and sociology professor W. Bradford Wilcox wrote about this for *The Atlantic*. He wrote, "I find that young adults who as teens had involved fathers are significantly more likely to graduate from college." And Wilcox provides research results to back that up.

He also lists four benefits of involved fathers that boost children's educational success:

1. Providing homework help, counsel or knowledge that helps them succeed at school.
2. Helping children steer clear of risky behaviors—from delinquency to teenage pregnancy—that might prevent them from completing college.
3. Fostering a family environment that is generally conducive to learning (characterized by a mix of engagement, affection and supervision).
4. Often, contributing financial support for college.

Wilcox has a lot more about this, which you can read [here](#).

These are important insights for fathers, and today I want to take it a step further and look at *how* we dads can prepare our children for college life and beyond. And this isn't just for dads who have older teenagers. If your children are younger, you can begin preparing them even now.

It isn't difficult to think of the main issues that our kids will be dealing with during those years, and we can start

teaching them and challenging them in those areas. We don't need to pressure them to have their lives all mapped out by age 18, but we can instill some key values and skills that will be big benefits to them later in life.

Here are some areas where you can focus your attention, whether you have a child finishing her first year at State U or your oldest is still years away from college:

1. A life purpose. Graduating is a measurable outcome, so I can see why research has focused on it. But if you're like me, your hopes for your child's college career are about more than that. Finishing college is a real accomplishment, but the college experience can include all kinds of life-changing, life-defining experiences. Even at a young age, talk with your child about the fact that jobs may come and go, but how they need a larger driving purpose that helps determine who they want to be and what mark they want to leave on the world.

2. Friends. Young adults entering college should already be very familiar with the importance of peers and the huge difference these choices can make in their lives—and as dads, we should start sending that message as soon as our kids start school or other organized group activities. The importance of those choices are often magnified when they get to college, where there's no one else to check their choices and where mistakes can have more drastic consequences. And of course, wise choices can bring great benefits for years to come.

3. Education. Once again, it's best to get good habits in place at a younger age so that once your child gets to college, it's a natural expectation that they will attend all their classes, study with other good students and use a reliable system for keeping track of assignments and projects. As your child goes to college, reinforce those messages and talk through some specifics about what they can expect.

4. Money management. It's so easy for a college student to get

a credit card these days—or two or three. Warn your child about credit; teach him or her to create and live on a budget. At what point in the process, for instance, will she become responsible for all her own expenses? Make all of this very clear as she's growing up, and have a plan to move her in the direction of independence.

5. Life management. Many young adults show up for college unprepared for the realities of studying for classes, living in dorms, scheduling their time and all the daily routines of college life. It's also important to instill an appreciation for proper eating, exercise and sleep habits.

6. Dating and social life. In high schools today, there's plenty of talk about the dangers of drinking, drugs and sex, but some college environments are more like a scene from *Animal House*, or maybe a scene from your own college years. What are appropriate standards and expectations? Schedule a daddy-daughter date or father-son outing to discuss some of this. Help your child commit to a high standard since, once again, compromises in these areas can have far-reaching implications.

So, dad, what are your biggest fears or concerns about the college years? How are you preparing your kids? Please join the conversation below.

Action Points for Dads on the Journey

- Help your child come up with a short purpose or mission statement that focuses on a larger goal for his or her life. (Of course, it's a rough draft that they can always adjust later.)
- Think back to things that happened during your college years, and ask your kids some "what if" questions about how they would handle those situations.
- Continue to track with your child's interests and pursuits—especially when they are different from yours.

Do some reading and investigating so you can have an intelligent conversation about something they know about and enjoys.

- Talk with your child about the relationship between freedom and responsibility. As one increases, so should the other.
- Help your child connect with and rely on strong support networks outside your family—a campus group, a church, or something similar—as a safeguard against loneliness and depression.

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