

# Helping Your Child Successfully Transition to College: Tips for Parents

## **Dear Parents:**

We look forward to welcoming your student to campus this fall. As you and your family prepare for this exciting time, we want to help make your student's transition to Union as smooth as possible.

With that in mind, we have put together the following information guide to get you thinking about what your student will need to be successful in college and beyond. In addition to earning a bachelor's degree, we believe the goal of college is independent, successful adulthood.

## **Three Key Areas for Success:**

### **1) SELF KNOWLEDGE**

- We encourage students to “think about their thinking”, i.e. use **metacognition** to reflect on and be able to answer the following questions:
  - What are my interests (academic and extracurricular)?
  - What are my strengths (academic and personal)?
  - What is my learning style? Am I a visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learner?
  - What areas do I need to improve in?
  - What is my disability? What are the functional limitations of my disability and how does it impact my academics?

- ❖ **Executive Function** skills are important for college success and can be improved. Think of executive function as the “air traffic controller”, or management system of the brain. It allows one to manage information and emotions, handle distractions and frustration, utilize working memory, and maintain focus and effort.
  - ❖ Have your student fill out **The Executive Function Skills Questionnaire** (see appendix). This is a great tool for measuring executive skill strengths and weaknesses. Our office can assist in working with your student on skills that need improvement.
  - ❖ Learn about and discuss the concept of **growth mindset** with your student.
    - Students are more motivated and engaged when they “believe that ability can change as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice. These students see mistakes as a way to learn, embrace challenges, and persist in the face of setbacks. E.g. ‘Math is hard, but if I try, I can get better at it’ “(Landmark College, 2019).
- For more on growth mindsets vs. fixed mindsets, watch Dr. Carol Dweck’s 2014 TED Talk entitled “[The Power of Believing that You Can Improve](#)”.

## 2) **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

- In addition to executive function skills, students need to cultivate **resilience**, which is ***the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness***. According to the American Psychological Association, “*resilience is not a trait that people have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone*”.

- A great resource for helping your student cultivate resilience: 10 Tips for Raising Resilient Kids by Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S. You can find this at <https://psychcentral.com/lib/10-tips-for-raising-resilient-kids/>
  
- ❖ Self-management and independence take practice. There are many ways that your student can **practice practical life skills** now that will also foster their confidence and resilience. Encourage your student to:
  - Do his own laundry
  - Wake herself up in the morning with phone or alarm clock
  - Call to make his own appointments or find out information
  - Know dosage and timing of her medications and administer medication accordingly
  - Use a planner (paper or smartphone) to keep track of appointments and other commitments. When classes start, this will be used for keeping track of assignments, due dates, etc.
  
- **Emotional Regulation** is another key skill in self-management. Emotional regulation enhances well-being, improves school and work performance, and enhances personal relationships.
  - If your student needs help in this area, have her talk to her current school counselor or therapist about transition and stress management strategies for college.
  - Refer to Union's Wellness Center website for information on counseling services provided.

- ❖ **For overall health, and to cope with stress and/or anxiety, students should focus on these 4 habits:**

**1. Getting enough sleep.** Good sleep hygiene is crucial for cognitive and emotional functioning.

**2. Eating nutritious food.** Lean protein, whole grains, and plenty of fruits and vegetables. Limited amounts of sugar, junk food and soda.

**3. Exercise.** Physical health, cognition, executive function, and mood are all improved with regular exercise.

**4. Mindfulness meditation and/or time in nature.** Many resources are available to help assist with developing the practice of mindfulness meditation. Have your student check out apps for their smartphones, such as [Calm](#) or [Headspace](#). A simple 30 minute walk outside, or time spent in the beautiful gardens on campus can provide similar benefits.

### 3) **SELF- ADVOCACY**

- ❖ Self-advocacy starts with **knowledge of self**. It also includes:
- ❖ **Knowledge of Rights.** You and your student should know the difference between the laws and rights that govern disabilities in high school vs. college. (See appendix)
- ❖ **Communication.** As a parent, you will need to begin stepping back so that your student can practice speaking on their own behalf.
  - Your student will need to communicate with professors, administration, and staff at Union in person and through email.

○ Students should be able to describe and discuss their disability with the Disability Services office if they are seeking accommodations. Students may also need to discuss their accommodations with professors to make arrangements for things like extra time.

○ The ability to communicate their feelings, needs and desires is important. Good listening and the ability to negotiate and compromise are additional important skills.

❖ **Knowledge of Resources.** Your student has many resources here at Union; encourage him or her to become aware of all that is available. Check out Union's website and click on the "Student Life" tab.

#### **ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING:**

○ Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living by Amit Smoot (paperback, 2013)

○ Ready for Take-Off: Preparing Your Teen with ADHD or LD for College by Theresa E. Laurie Maitland and Patricia O. Quinn (paperback, 2011)

○ A Parent's Guide to College for Students on the Autism Spectrum by Jane Thierfeld Brown, Lorraine E. Wolf, Lisa King and G. Ruth Kukiela Bork (paperback, 2012)

○ How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success by Julie Lythcott-Haims (paperback, 2015)