

# Ten Things To Do If You Need To Call Your Child's College

As a college parent you've listened to all of the advice and you're working hard to help your college student gain independence and responsibility. You encourage her to handle her own problems and talk to the appropriate contact people at the college when she has questions or problems. But something has come up and you feel that it is absolutely necessary for you to step in and talk to someone at the school. What do you do now?

Here are ten things to consider that will make your phone call effective.

## **1. Stop and consider whether the phone call is really necessary.**

Before you dial that phone, stop and think one more time about whether or not there is anything that you can do to help your student deal with this problem himself. Your phone call should truly be a last resort. Is the issue really beyond his control, or has he just avoided dealing with the problem? Yes, dealing with the issue may be uncomfortable for him, or there might be consequences if he doesn't deal with it, but there might be an important lesson to be learned – and a great feeling of satisfaction if he works it out on his own.

## **2. Let your student know that you are planning to call.**

Don't go behind your student's back and make a phone call without telling her. Let her know that you plan to call – and what you plan to say or ask for. Do not say to the college official, "Please don't let my child know that I called." This request places the college official in an awkward position, and the trust you lose with your child will not be worth it.

## **3. Respect the experience and expertise of the college.**

Remember that although this experience or problem may be new to you and your college student, there is a good chance that college officials have encountered the situation before. Respect their expertise in dealing with the problem. Listen carefully to what they tell you and remember that, although you may not always get the answer that you want, you may get the answer that you need.

## **4. Remember FERPA.**

Keep in mind that the [Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) says that once a student attends school beyond secondary school, the right to student academic information belongs to the student – and not the parents. This means that, without written permission, faculty members and administrators of the college are legally prohibited from discussing your child's progress with you. You may be told that certain information may not be shared with you – even if you are paying the bills. Don't ask college officials to breach this policy. They are legally bound to adhere to it.

## **5. Get your information straight.**

Do your homework before you call. Check or confirm college policy regarding the issue. Use the [college catalog](#) or student handbook (usually available on line). Read any materials that have been sent home. Ask your student for as much information as possible about the problem. Have your student's ID number, know important dates, know the person with whom your student has already talked. Be informed.

## **6. Be honest.**

Don't lie for your student. Don't stretch the truth. Don't give only part of the story. Remember that everyone – both you and the college – want what is best for your student. You and the college both want to see him succeed. The college cannot do its part if you provide only partial or false information.

## **7. Be firm, but not emotional.**

Be firm in your request, or your complaint, but don't get emotional. Anger will not accomplish what you want. Remember that the college wants to help you. If you believe that a mistake has been made, or something has been mishandled, say so firmly but calmly. Give the facts and state your dissatisfaction. If you have a desired outcome, say so, but don't demand. Remember that the person to whom you are talking may not be the person who will ultimately make a decision or have authority to look into something. Don't take out your frustration about the situation on the person on the phone.

## **8. Don't put anyone on the defensive.**

Remember that everyone has the same goal – the success of the student. Don't accuse. Know that sometimes, just possibly, your information may be incorrect. Your student may have mistaken something, or, just possibly not been accurate in describing the situation to you. Listen to what the college representative has to say and consider how it relates to what you already know.

## **9. Expect to give them time.**

Not every problem can be solved immediately. Once you've given the college representative as much information as you have, be prepared for them to ask for time to check into it. They may need to confirm facts, check records, consult with others, or even talk to your student. It is reasonable to expect follow-through, but don't expect immediate answers or solutions.

## **10. Don't be annoyed if you're told your student needs to call.**

Remember, again, that the ultimate goal is for your student to be successful and to gain independence. If you are told that your student will need to call, or come in to the office, don't assume that you are being brushed off. This may be an issue that your student will need to deal with in person. At least you've laid the groundwork and you can let your student know where he

needs to go and who the correct contact person may be. He will be one step closer to handling the problem himself if it should arise again.

**11. (Bonus) Let the college know if they're doing a good job.**

College officials get phone calls all of the time. Sometimes the calls are from students and sometimes the calls are from parents. Some calls are appropriate and others are not. The majority of the calls they receive, however, are about a problem, a question, or a concern. Once in a while, someone calls an office of the college to thank them for something they've done. Someone calls to let the college know that they've made a difference for a particular student. These calls represent a small percentage of the daily issues that most college officials handle – but these are the calls they remember. If something's going right, if someone has gone above and beyond what was necessary, if someone has reached out in a special way to your student, let them know. They will appreciate your thoughtfulness.

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[The College Catalog: Source of Information for Parents of College Students](#)

[Ten Ways Parents of College Students Can Use the College Website](#)

[Who Is Advising My College Student About Academic Issues?](#)