

Parenting a Resident Student

Some Suggestions

Your child is about to enter an exciting experience: the boarding life of **St. Bernard Prep School**. There will be all the emotions of living: excitement, joy, and of course a little worry and pain. And you will be a part of all this, experiencing it all too.

Some general advice: watch, wait, worry, accept, understand, appreciate.

Here are some guidelines; they might help you stay relatively sane and strengthen your new relationship with your child:

Rule #1:

Don't ask, "Are you homesick?"

Sometimes the power of suggestion of that simple question is all it takes to cause quite an upset. The first days are packed with activities, friends, and other adjustments to a new environment and life. Don't worry; even if it isn't said, you are missed. Resist the need to hear that, and your child will more easily live through the homesickness that is often part of the experience.

Rule #2:

Write – even if you don't hear back.

Your son or daughter may be enjoying some new-found independence in the first weeks away from home, but don't feel rejected; it can be a little frightening and the security of home and family ties are important. Most students love some news from home, however mundane it may seem to you. It's true; absence does make the heart grow fonder. Try writing once a week; but don't always expect a reply! Your child is going to be busy.

Rule #3:

Ask Questions – but not too many.

Don't be *too nosy*. Your child wants you to know what's going on in his or her life, but that's to be disclosed in his or her own time. Show your interest and care by asking questions, but remember that an adolescent might perceive parental curiosity as alienating or nagging.

Rule #4:

Expect change

Your child will change, sometimes quickly and drastically in only a few months, sometimes slowly over a few years – but change will come. It is alternately wonderful and painful. Since there is a distance between you while he or she is away at school, the change can be disconcerting. Through it all be patient, supportive and directive.

Rule #5:

Don't worry (too much) about distressing phone calls or letters.

When troubles become a little distressing – bad grade on a test, fight with a roommate – home seems like the best place to write or call. In fact that may be the only time the urge to communicate is truly felt. You may seldom hear about the “A” in math or the good time your child has on the cross country team, or the great new friendships.

“Crisis” times can be opportunities for unloading troubles and tears. Often that catharsis is followed by a return to routine, and only you are left with the worry!

Be patient with the “nothing-is-going-right” and “I-hate-this-place” letters and phone calls. Be content to serve as the sympathetic ear or punching bag. You might feel awful sometimes, but your difficult role does wonders for a frustrated child. And remember, be in touch with the Dorm Director or the School Office if needed.

Rule #6:

Do not tell your child: “These are the best years of your life.”]

Beginning life as a resident student can be a time of mistakes, insecurity, disappointment. It can also be a good time of discovery, inspiration, friendship and joy, but at first it's not always the good that stands out. Don't insist on the “best years” stereotype; it can work against what might be an already difficult development: “If this is the best it gets, Lord, take me now.” Leave the years ahead for your child to acquire the retrospective view. Accept the highs and lows of your child's reality; that is the support and encouragement so needed.

Rule #7:

Trust your child – but keep your eyes and ears open.

Your child needs to know that he or she is trusted, but that doesn't mean being ignored. For a maturing adolescent, guidance and support are needed as one develops the ability to make good choices.

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