

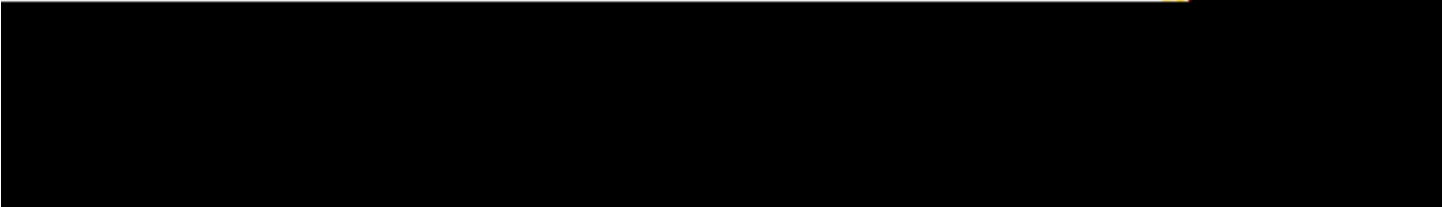
It is sometimes frustrating for parents to go through the growth process with their students, not knowing how to be helpful while receiving unclear or incomplete messages. Students may add to the uncertainty by changing rapidly (e.g. rejecting your help on Tuesday and actively seeking it on Wednesday). We've often heard about parents in great distress because their student predicted a poor outcome on an exam, but forgot to provide an update when the results were better than expected.

As a parent, it can be difficult to know when to help, when to step back, and/or how worried to get. Usually a parent's best guideline is to provide a steady, supportive home base while recognizing that there will be ups and downs in a student's needs and expectations. Try to follow the lead of the student and encourage him or her to work through a problem with you acting as the coach or cheerleader. It can be helpful to:

- Help them balance their thoughts and emotions to make their best decisions.
- Let them know that you respect their right to make a decision and that you will serve as an advisor when asked.
- Remind yourself to notice and appreciate the new skills they develop; students often want their families to recognize their progress toward becoming adults.
- And, remember to take care of yourself during this "Help!"/"Don't help!" process which may cause you a lot of confusion and exhaustion.

Most parents have a high investment in their student's decisions. Problems arise, however, when parents are more invested than students. It can be hard to lessen involvement in a student's decisions out of fear that the student won't assume responsibility. The irony is that students often don't step up to the task of being responsible until parents step back. After all, it's easier to ignore problems when someone else is worrying about them!

Taking a step back as a parent is uncomfortable and, at times, frightening because there is no guarantee that students will assume responsibility nor that they will make the same decision as you would. The fear that the student is not accepting responsibility in the interim makes most parents lose a lot of sleep. There is, however, no need to walk away disinterested and/or frustrated. Consider providing a concerned voice ("We're interested in what you decide, but we know you have to sort this out for yourself.") and remind yourself that you are helping your student develop his/her own decision-making skills.



For many students, coming to Towson University means finding out what college and life are about. It means