



They Graduated, Now What?



Jane Reynolds, Shayna Pond, Allie Bishop, MacKenzie Corrigan

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Time Frame 65

Essential Question(s)

- How can I support my college student as they transition to college?

Summary

This workshop is designed to help parents and family members support students as they move from high school to college. Guided by the essential question, “How can I support my student as they transition to college?”, the session focuses on shifting from a directive role to a supportive “co-pilot” role. Participants explore student independence, changing communication dynamics, and key differences in academic expectations, including time management demands and the development of essential life skills.

Learning Goals

Standards

College and Career Preparation Family Standards 6–12 (6th - 12th)

F.11-12.12: Support students in navigating the challenges and stress of preparing for college or a career by breaking the process into manageable steps, providing emotional encouragement, and celebrating their progress, reminding them that they are not alone in this journey.

F.11-12.20: Support and value students' growing independence as they prepare to leave for postsecondary education, recognizing this as an important step toward their personal and academic development.

F.11-12.32: Be involved as students move from high school and beyond. Help them prepare by discussing the changes they'll face and the skills they'll need, such as managing time, taking more responsibility, or exploring college entrance requirements.

Attachments

- [Gallery Walk Posters—They Graduated, Now What.docx](#)
- [Presentation Slides—They Graduated, Now What.pptx](#)
- [Role Play Conversations—They Graduated, Now What.docx](#)
- [Role Play Conversations—They Graduated, Now What.pdf](#)
- [They Graduated Now What Scenario Practice.pdf](#)

Materials

- Presenter Slides (attached)
- Poster paper or Gallery Walk posters (attached)
- Role Play Conversations handout (attached)
- Colored markers/highlighters (3 different colors)

10 minutes

Engage

Use the attached **Presentation Slides** to facilitate this workshop. Begin by showing **slides 2-4** to introduce the title of the workshop, the essential question, and the learning objectives.

Move to **slide 5** and introduce participants to the [Gallery Walk](#) instructional strategy and locate each of the four posters on the walls. Read the four prompts aloud to give participants time to think of their responses ahead of time:

- Question 1: What are some ways you can help your student take charge of their schoolwork and personal tasks?
- Question 2: How can you provide emotional support while encouraging self-reliance?
- Question 3: What campus resources will be most helpful for your student to know about during their first year?
- Question 4: In what ways do you expect your student to grow or change the most this year?

Explain that each poster contains a question related to common experiences and concerns during the transition to college. Ask participants to move in small groups and spend 2–3 minutes at each station. At each poster, participants will read others' responses and add their own thoughts, questions, or examples directly on the posters.

After participants have rotated to all four posters, ask them to return to their original poster. Invite them to review how responses have evolved and identify any new ideas or perspectives that stood out. Facilitate a brief whole-group share-out, highlighting emerging themes such as independence, communication boundaries, and appropriate support.

10 minutes

Explore

Move to **slide 6** and explain that participants will now examine what the transition to college looks like from both the student and parent perspectives, with a focus on shifting roles and expectations. Emphasize that the goal is to reflect on real experiences and perspectives.

Explain that participants will view a video and should complete the [S-I-T](#) reflection framework as they watch:

- **Surprising** – What stood out or challenges your expectations about supporting a college student?
- **Interesting** – What ideas, advice, or perspectives resonated with you?
- **Takeaway** – What is one key insight you are taking from this video?

Move to **slide 7** to view the video.

Embedded video

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=kSIG3zG4zPY>

After the video, move to **slide 8** and have participants turn to a partner to compare responses and discuss how the concept of moving from the “driver’s seat to the co-pilot seat” shows up in real-life interactions with their student. Encourage them to identify specific behaviors or communication shifts that support student independence.

Invite 2-3 participants to share key insights with the whole group, especially discussing any shifts in thinking about their role, communication habits, or expectations for student independence.

Facilitator's Note

Consider using the [digital interactive version of S-I-T](#) to enable participants to gather everyone’s responses to view as a group.

25 minutes

Explain

Discuss that participants have surfaced ideas and reflections about student independence and support, and now they will shift to clarifying key concepts that shape a successful college transition.

Use slides 9-12 to present the core framework around three key areas:

- **Fostering Independence (slide 10):** Explain the academic and time expectations of college, emphasizing that students typically spend 12-15 hours in class per week and are expected to dedicate 2-3 hours of study time per hour in class. Highlight the importance of self-management skills such as budgeting, sleep routines, and time management as essential to student success.
- **Communication & Emotional Support (slide 11):** Emphasize the importance of being a steady, supportive presence without immediately solving problems. Introduce the idea of listening first, validating emotions, and allowing students space to solve problems and build resilience.
- **Campus Resources (slide 12):** Introduce the idea that success in college is not meant to be navigated alone. Highlight common supports available on campus, such as tutor centers, academic advising, counseling services, financial aid offices, and career services. Emphasize that part of supporting students is helping them identify and use these resources independently.

Introduce the [Fishbowl](#) strategy and ask for 4-5 volunteers to sit in the inner circle. Everyone else will sit on the outside of the circle. Explain that only those in the inner circle may speak during the discussion while the outer circle listens silently and jots down what they notice, especially noting moments that sound like fixing the problem versus supporting the student through it.

Move to **slide 13** and read aloud the scenario: Your student calls home after missing a major deadline and feels overwhelmed and unsure what to do next. Ask the inner circle, “In the moment, how would you respond?” Let the volunteers talk freely. If the conversation stalls, prompt with questions such as:

- What would you say first?
- Would you offer a solution, or ask a question?
- How might you help without taking over?

After 5-6 minutes of discussion, open the conversation to the outer circle. Ask participants to share what they noticed. Use prompting questions, such as:

- What did you hear that sounded like problem solving for the student?
- What did you hear that sounded like guiding or listening?
- Was there a moment where campus resources could have come up?

Synthesize the discussions from both the inner and outer circle. Connect the discussions back to the three key areas of the framework. Reinforce that effective support balances all three areas: building independence, offering emotional support, and connecting students to campus resources. Emphasize that being a “safe place” means listening, guiding, and helping students build confidence in using the systems available to them.

15 minutes

Extend

Move to **slide 14** and introduce the [Role-Play Conversations](#) strategy. Explain that participants will work in groups of three where each partner has a specific role:

- Role 1: Student – the person presenting the situation
- Role 2: Parent – the person responding to the situation
- Role 3: Scribe – jots down notes on what's said

Provide each Scribe a copy of the **Role Play Conversations handout** (attached). Explain that as the Student and Parent have the conversation, they will keep notes on the discussion, specifically identifying when the three key areas are noticed. They will write down open-ended questions that are asked, campus resources that are mentioned, and moments that leaned toward “fixing” versus “guiding” the student.

Remind participants to focus on support, non-directive language that encourages student ownership and problem-solving. Circulate and prompt deeper thinking by redirecting from solutions to questions and guidance when needed.

Debrief by asking what felt challenging, what shifts they made in their responses, and which campus resources were most commonly identified. Reinforce that effective support builds student independence while connecting them to appropriate resources.

5 minutes

Evaluate

Facilitator's Note

Prior to this activity, assign a color to each of the three workshop themes. For example, edit slide 15 to include a color highlighter, such as:

- Fostering Independence & Responsibility - Pink
- Communication & Emotional Support - Yellow
- Campus Resources - Blue

Move to **slide 15** and note that participants will now revisit their initial thinking from the start of the workshop to reflect on how their understanding of student support has evolved.

Direct participants to return to the Gallery Walk posters from the beginning of the session. Provide sticky notes or colored markers and explain that they will now categorize earlier responses using the three workshop themes:

- Fostering Independence & Responsibility
- Communication & Emotional Support
- Campus Resources

Instruct participants to review each response on the posters and highlight or circle it with the appropriate correlating color. Emphasize that responses may fit more than one category, and overlapping is expected and valued.

As participants work, circulate and prompt reflection by asking:

- What patterns are you noticing in the types of support people identified?
- Are there any responses that could belong in multiple categories? Why?
- How has your thinking changed since the beginning of the workshop?

Once categorization is complete, bring the group back together to debrief. Invite a few participants to share key insights or shifts in perspective. Highlight emerging themes, such as an increased emphasis on student independence, more intentional communication strategies, and great awareness of campus resources.

Wrap up the workshop by reinforcing the overarching message: supporting a college student is about balancing independence, emotional support, and connection to resources to help students build the confidence and skills needed to navigate college successfully on their own.

Research Rationale

The transition from high school to college represents a significant developmental shift in which students are expected to assume greater responsibility for academic, personal, and social decision-making. Research consistently indicates that the nature of parental involvement during this period plays a critical role in how successfully students adapt to these new expectations. Rather than reducing involvement entirely, the most effective support structures are those that promote autonomy while maintaining emotional connection and appropriate guidance.

Cullaty (2011) found that parental behaviors that support autonomy—rather than direct control—are positively associated with students' development of independence and self-regulation during the college transition. This aligns with the workshop's emphasis on shifting from a directive "driver" role to a supportive "co-pilot" role, where families encourage student ownership of decisions while still offering guidance. In contrast, overly directive involvement can inhibit the development of critical self-management skills that students need to navigate college successfully.

Complementing this, Schwartz et al. (2011) demonstrate that psychological control and over-involvement are associated with poorer adjustment outcomes in emerging adults, while supportive communication patterns contribute to better emotional and academic adaptation. This supports the workshop's focus on intentional communication strategies that prioritize listening, validation, and structured expectations rather than problem-solving on behalf of the student.

Finally, Mattanah et al. (2011) highlight the importance of secure parental attachment combined with appropriate separation-individuation processes in predicting successful college adjustment. Their findings underscore that students benefit most when they experience both emotional security and increasing independence, reinforcing the workshop's integrated approach to communication, independence-building, and resource navigation.

Together, these studies provide a strong empirical foundation for the workshop's core framework: effective support for college students is not defined by increased parental control, but by autonomy-supportive relationships that balance emotional connection with opportunities for independent decision-making and problem-solving.

Resources

- Cullaty, B. (2011). The role of parental involvement in the autonomy development of traditional-age college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(4), 425–439.
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Fishbowl. Instructional Strategy. <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/3053>
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Role-Play Conversations. Instructional Strategy.
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Surprising-interesting-troubling (SIT). Instructional Strategy.
<https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/926>
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<https://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/journal-college-student-development>
- Mattanah, J. F., Lopez, F. G., & Govern, J. M. (2011). The contributions of parental attachment bonds to college student development and adjustment: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(4), 565–596. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024635>