

12 Steps to Independence

Your child's departure for college is a big step. But the journey from cradle to campus is filled with countless little steps—each an opportunity to prepare for letting go. Here, Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger, authors of "Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years," offer mantras for parents at every phase of the journey.

1. **Take a deep breath.** Give your child a chance to work things out. Even a crying infant eventually learns to fall asleep without being held.
2. **Help your child learn to negotiate conflicts.** Encouraging your toddler to use words rather than grab her shovel back from another child in the sandbox may be the first lesson in the art of conflict resolution.
3. **Help your child learn to cope with disappointment.** Empathize with your grade-school-age child when she isn't invited to a birthday party. Instead of trying to "fix it," help her to move on.
4. **Support your child's interests and passions.** You may have been hoping for a home filled with the sound of music, but your son is mad about metalsmithing. Praise your child for who he is becoming, not who you thought he would be.
5. **Help your child learn to advocate for herself.** The Little League dad who yells at the umpire for a bad call doesn't help the child learn to solve problems or gain confidence.
6. **Encourage your child to dream big dreams and set achievable goals.** Support your middle-schooler's dreams of running a marathon, but help her first achieve her 5K goal.
7. **Loosen the reins a little at a time.** Increase your child's freedom and responsibility a bit more each year.
8. **Teach your child to manage money.** During the early years piggy banks, allowances and household jobs are tools to teach about money management. When teenagers are allowed to make choices about the money they've saved, reality sets in.
9. **Help your child learn to manage time.** The college student who understands the consequences of too little sleep or being late has a big advantage.
10. **Be a coach.** Young people often need encouragement to seek the help they need. Support your child's emerging independence by helping him to take action on his own behalf.
11. **Remain an anchor.** Encourage your child to turn to you in good times and bad. Stay steady even when your child is shaky. And as the parent of a college student you can provide a familiar and safe haven, an anchor in a new and unfamiliar sea, a place for solace and encouragement and admiration.
12. **Finally,** when you drop your "emerging adult" at college, remember she is taking you with her. Though she may not admit it to you, she will quote things you've said—and recount things you've shown her. Resist your temptation to give one last lecture on all the things you fear you have forgotten to teach her during the past 18 years. She has been listening more than she will let you know.