

HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH DISPLACED COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO HAVE MOVED BACK HOME INDEFINITELY?

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When it comes to college-aged children, most parents have similar expectations. You invest significant sums of money so they can obtain the education and experiences necessary to live on their own. You miss them and love them and wish them the best. You're getting used to your own schedule, the additional space, and the reduced general clutter in the house—that is, until they arrive back on your doorstep for the last few months of school to reclaim their old bedroom as their new online classroom.

In fairness to college-aged children, a national health crisis isn't exactly what they had envisioned for the end of their school year either. The coronavirus closed or impacted more than 4,200 U.S. colleges and universities in the past few months, upending nearly 26 million students.* Many who were forced from dorms, apartments, and Greek houses now find themselves stuck in their parents' homes with no parties, no friends, and little independence. Amidst all the upheaval, somehow schoolwork continues.

This is NOT how it's supposed to be.

SO THE PARENTING CONTINUES...

Along the way you've probably attempted to prepare your children for life's adversities. But up until now, they haven't experienced the hard realities of a pandemic or a financial downturn limiting their current options and delaying opportunities that only a few months ago seemed likely.

So parents get to, well, be parents. You get to listen, empathize, offer advice, and share experience—not on a phone or on a video call, but in person.

WORK THROUGH THE HARD DECISIONS TOGETHER.

The coronavirus is impacting almost every aspect of our lives. Your children can benefit from talking through the stressful situations brought on by the coronavirus with you and understanding what's most important to your family. Difficult questions affecting their future and your family need to be asked, such as:

- What are the risks to your health and our finances if you return to campus in the fall?
- If your college isn't open by fall, is online learning a good fit for your major?
- Could you attend a local college rather than going away?
- Should you consider taking a gap year and, if so, how will you fill your time?
- What other experiences might interest you while on hiatus?

As you consider how to shift, you would be doing your college-aged kids a disservice by not including them in these conversations. Life isn't perfect—this is their lab class in what that means.

WHAT ABOUT THE IMPACT ON FAMILY FINANCES?

Hard decisions frequently center around family finances, which may need to be reevaluated. Definitions of a “need” and a “want” may have changed. You could dictate those changes to your college-aged children, but often what's missed in that exchange is the broader purpose behind why it's necessary.

“We can't plan to send you abroad next year because it's more important to have financial flexibility to make the mortgage payment if one of us loses our job.” A popular decision? No. But the idea that a personal sacrifice is contributing to a broader purpose may eventually become something they understand and share with their own children someday.

*Entangled Solutions, “COVID-19: Higher Education Resource Center,” April 23, 2020; <https://www.entangled.solutions/coronavirus-he/>

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