

Chapter 1

College Success Requires Maturity: Is Your Teenager Ready, and Are You?

Facilitator: Read the following excerpt from Chapter 1:

Most parents send their students off to college assuming—or with fingers crossed—that they have matured enough through their high school years to handle conflicts, to make safe decisions, and to generally take care of themselves. After all, at age eighteen they are legally adults, and their parents have done their best to teach them the basics: right from wrong, good manners, being responsible. In short, these children have been shaped into well-adjusted, mature young adults. Or have they? Despite parents' best intentions, sometimes their teenager has not developed the maturity he or she needs to handle conflicts with a roommate, to take seriously the investment made, or to know when she or he is overwhelmed. Regardless of why that may be, it is important to be realistic about your teenager's maturity and readiness for college before she fills out college applications. Remember, she will be on her own for probably the first time in her life and facing situations she has never faced before. Is she ready?

Have the participants break into groups of two to four. Have them read the discussion starters as a group, offering individual personal responses. Although they should make notes based on their individual experience, together they should discuss solutions and strategies. Each group should pick a spokesperson. When the entire class comes back together, the spokesperson for each group can relate what the group feels are good solutions and strategies. The facilitator can make notes for the entire class to see. After all the groups have reported, a full class discussion can be held.

Tip #1: College readiness involves more than academic readiness. One important readiness skill is accepting responsibility.

Discussion Starter:	Notes:
Your teenager rarely accepts responsibility for her actions, whether it's leaving a chore undone or missing a school assignment. You're tired of nagging her, and you know it doesn't help.	
Name a problem for which your teenager denies responsibility.	
How do you approach your teenager about the issue?	
What are the logical consequences of her irresponsibility?	
What is your plan to present the consequences to your teenager? If none, brainstorm here.	
How do you plan to follow through on the consequences?	

Tip #2: When your teenager makes a bad decision, it is your job to provide logical consequences that help him learn from his erring ways. Model good decision making and be prepared in advance by developing a list of expectations and consequences for likely pitfalls.

Discussion Starter:	Notes:
You worry about the risks your teenager takes. He has been caught more than once, and you feel out of control.	
Give an example of a bad decision that your teenager made.	
Do you have rules in place regarding the bad decision your teenager made? If not, brainstorm some here.	
What is the best way to confront your teenager about his action?	
Should you let him suggest consequences? Why or why not?	
How do you rate your consistency in following through on consequences? How can you improve?	
Should you develop a plan for him to rebuild trust? Why or why not?	

Tip #3: Living in a dorm or sharing an apartment or house with roommates will inevitably result in conflicts. Teenagers need to learn to satisfactorily and peacefully settle conflicts before they head off to college.

Discussion Starter:	Notes:
Your teenager seems to constantly argue and fight with you about chores. She often ends up screaming or in tears, and you often end up doing the chore in anger or just to avoid the conflict.	
Name an ongoing conflict you have with your teenager. What is the usual outcome?	
Do you have rules concerning arguments in your home? If you don't, do you think rules would help? Why or why not?	
What is the best way to approach your teenager concerning the conflict you listed above?	
Is compromise possible in this conflict? What are you willing to compromise?	
Should consequences be part of the solution to this conflict? Why or why not?	
What are the steps you can take to be certain that the conflict is solved satisfactorily and peacefully?	

Tip #4: Teenagers want to be accepted by their peers, and they often follow the crowd even though doing so results in risky behavior. Teenagers need to develop the self-confidence and coping skills needed to remove themselves from uncomfortable situations.

Discussion Starter:	Notes:
Peer acceptance is of utmost importance to most teenagers. Although certain that he knows right from wrong, you worry about the pressure your teenager feels when hanging with the crowd.	
Name a situation in which your teenager succumbed to negative peer pressure. If you can't think of one, imagine one here. What was (or would be) the result of going along with the crowd?	
How did you confront your teenager about his participation? If you weren't happy with the outcome, what could you have done differently?	
Should you enforce consequences if your teenager shows remorse? Why or why not?	
Do you think your teenager wanted help in overcoming the situation? How can you help him know when and how to ask for help?	
What are some ways to help teenagers overcome negative peer pressure?	