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From the Office of the  
Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs

Jerry Price, Ph.D.

To the parents and families of incoming first year Chapman students:

I hope your student is excited to begin their Chapman experience. I can assure you we are looking forward to having them here as part of our Chapman community. In preparation for their arrival, I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you some things that your students can expect at Chapman, how we will be working with them during their first year, and how you can play an effective role in their college transition.

First of all, I am confident they will soon encounter all of the amazing opportunities they had hoped to discover in college, especially new people, experiences, and perspectives. At the same time, these new opportunities will be accompanied by many challenges and even the occasional failure. Please understand that these are not signs that something is wrong! **Challenges and stress are normal and necessary parts of learning how to succeed in a demanding college environment and how to navigate their increasing independence.**

We recognize, however, that some students are more prepared for this transition than others. In fact, **the data suggest that more students are arriving at college today with higher levels of stress and anxiety than previous generations.** As a result, even routine college challenges may lead them to feel overwhelmed and distressed. At the end of this letter I am sharing several short articles that explore this issue. While some of these articles reference parenting styles, please understand that we would never try to tell you how to parent; we simply have found these articles instructive to understanding today's students and how best to help them with their college transition. Included in these articles is a testimonial from one of our first year students from spring 2022 that not only captures the doubt and anxiety that first year students typically feel, but also illustrates how students eventually overcome their anxiety and thrive.

At Chapman we take great pride in the system we have in place to support students in both their academic and personal success. You can learn more about these resources at the links below:

- <https://www.chapman.edu/students/new-students/first-year-experience/academic-resources.aspx>
- <https://www.chapman.edu/health-and-wellness/index.aspx>
- <https://www.chapman.edu/students/health-and-safety/student-concern/scope-of-services.aspx>
- <https://www.chapman.edu/students/new-students/first-year-experience/involvement-resources.aspx>

However, we also firmly believe that students must develop several critical life skills to attain and sustain this success. In particular, we want our new first year students to begin developing **autonomy, balance, and resilience.** Students develop these skills through their daily life interactions and experiences – and by reflecting on them – but we also will have programs and services in place to help them along. **Developing these life skills will not only enable them to successfully navigate the challenges at Chapman, but also give them confidence that they are ready for the new challenges that will come after college.**

Parents and other family members also can be important partners in a student's development. They can serve as an important support system, encouraging and reminding their student that trials and tribulations are all normal parts of becoming an independent adult. We have seen time and time again that students struggle most when they lack belief in themselves, do not seek support when needed, or fail to manage their priorities properly. These are critical skills that we all developed through practice!

**Here are some other ways to support your student's growth and development:**

- Being informed: Ask questions about University resources, policies, and processes so you can provide accurate guidance to your student.
- Alerting us to concerns you have about your student so that we can explore appropriate interventions if needed.
- Updating us in the event of a medical or family emergency so we can coordinate accordingly with your student's professors.
- Taking the lead on financial matters as appropriate, depending on your family circumstances.

**That said, not all parent and family intervention is equally productive.** While it is perfectly natural to want to jump in and support your student when they seem to be struggling, there are some really good reasons to reconsider doing so:

- **First and foremost, students learn important skills by addressing and resolving their challenges themselves.** Solving your student's problem for them is only a short-term victory; they will only need you again when the next challenge emerges. In particular, intervening directly with your student's professors is never helpful, and usually is counterproductive. The most important relationship at college is the one between student and professor, so disrupting that relationship – even when well intentioned – only results in more problems. Unless it is a medical or other emergency, students should be the ones communicating with their professors about class attendance issues.
- Similarly, we really need to let students resolve their roommate conflicts themselves. Learning how to resolve conflicts with peers is an essential skill – and one with which new students seem to have less practice in recent years. Developing this skill will serve students well the rest of their lives, both personally and professionally.
- In working with us to solve the problem, students develop valuable staff and faculty connections that will benefit them throughout their time at Chapman. Personally, many of the students I know best I first met when they needed help with something.
- We can begin addressing the concerns more quickly and more efficiently when we hear directly from the student.
- Information parents and family receive from their student may not always be complete or accurate – and often is not intended to be. Students typically share information with their parents simply to vent their stress and frustration, so precision regarding the details isn't their priority – receiving your support and affirmation is.
- We genuinely want to help students who need assistance; the notion that we will take the problem more seriously if a parent calls is a myth. Please remember we all share the same goal of helping students learn how to help themselves.

So, when your student has a problem and you feel the urge to jump in, I encourage you to consider doing this instead:

- **Encourage your student to contact us for answers and guidance;** in most cases, when a parent contacts us we will reach out to the student anyway.
- In particular, **if your student is feeling overwhelmed, encourage them to contact us for support.** Once we process the situation with them, it is usually more manageable than they think.

It bears repeating that **when students partner with us to address their concerns, they develop valuable staff and faculty connections that will benefit them throughout their time at Chapman.** We look forward to working with them, supporting them, and watching them learn and grow throughout their college journey.

I hope this information is helpful. if you have questions about any of this information or would like to discuss it further, please do not hesitate to contact me. Welcome to the Chapman family!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'L. Price'.

Articles:

Why American Teens Are So Sad – *The Atlantic*

Why Kids Are Suffering Today – *Psychology Today*

Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation? – *The Atlantic*

Stress, Worry and Anxiety Are All Different. How Do You Cope With Each – *New York Times*

How Leaning into Negative Emotions Can Help Your Mental Health – *New York Times*

Wait, freshman year is over? — *The Panther Newspaper*