College Survival Tips for Students with Children

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1. Secure reliable childcare prior to starting your first week of college classes.
   - Childcare is not provided for free once you are a college student.
   - There are centers on many campuses but they charge similar fees to other community based child care centers and child care is expensive.
   - Do not “piece together” informal child care arrangements. You MUST have reliable, daily childcare lined up for the entire term, NOT “Grandma watches my son on Monday and my friend watches my son on Tuesdays…” If one person backs out on you, gets a job, etc., you could fail your classes due to absences.
   - Reliable, quality child care and the ability to pay for it is the number one “make it or break it” point for student parents in college. So have a game plan!
   - There are really good child care grant options at the college level. (See additional handouts and point #10).

2. Have a talk with your MFIP worker ahead of time about your college plans.
   - Not every worker will approve education plans for their clients.
   - Ramsey and Hennepin tend to be the most difficult counties to get education plans approved in, though the first two years of a four year degree are typically covered across counties. IF ANYONE denies a two year plan you should dispute it!
   - Work study jobs DO count toward work requirements, though many workers will tell you they do not. We have checked the MFIP manual and they cannot deny work study jobs.
3. Evaluate your time management skills and correct any issues you have with attendance, being on time or your ability to juggle all the multiple tasks a student parent has to manage.
   - Use your tech tools, cell phone, Google calendar, etc., to log your class schedule and the due dates for your class assignments.
   - Professors will not nudge, pester and remind you of things you need to do like your teachers might have. Missing one deadline for one assignment in college can cause you to fail the class. Many college classes have maybe 3 substantial papers or projects that your entire grade is based on and missing even one will lead to a D or an F for the course.

4. Have your financial house in order.
   - If you have racked up credit card or other debt try to get it cleaned up BEFORE you enter college. Being buried in debt and trying to pay even small tuition payments or text book charges when you are already “under water” will create a huge amount of stress, even if you get good financial aid coverage.
   - Even though financial aid will cover most college cost for low income students, you still have to be responsible with that money.
   - Often you will be given a large check from a student loan or other financial aid at the beginning of the term. This is NOT usually money to spend as you like, it often must be saved to pay future tuition or account charges.
   - Do not buy a NEW car!!!!! This is the one single expense that has tanked the largest number of our student parents financially. Carrying a large car payment along with college expenses is a recipe for disaster. If you have to buy a car get a reasonable used car from a reliable, large name dealership.

RESOURCE: FAMILY MEANS CONSUMER CREDIT COUNSELING SERVICE: 651-439-4840 (ALL COUNTIES).
5. **Evaluate your own study habits and tweak them if needed BEFORE you enter college.**
   - Don’t just rely on your own evaluation, ask your current teachers to evaluate your classroom performance, preparedness, organizational abilities and study skills prior to leaving high school.
   - If there is a study skills course at the college you attend take it during your first year if you have ANY worries about past grades or your study habits.

6. **Attendance is EVERYTHING in college!**
   - If you cut classes and made it in high school you will NOT be able to do that in college. The classes move faster, the material is harder and the competition is stiffer.
   - Missing one day of a college class is typically the equivalent of missing a week or two weeks of high school. Some classes only meet once per week.
   - Most professors have their own attendance policies. Some are as strict as getting dropped an entire letter grade for each day you are absent.
   - You often have to have proof you or your child was sick. So EVERYTIME you go to the doctor for you or your child and miss a day of class or were late for an assignment due to that illness, make the doctor give you a medical excuse. (Colleges have no right to ask what your health issue was but the University of Minnesota and many other colleges can make you produce proof that you had a legitimate reason to be absent.)
   - There is often NO opportunity to make up missed work in college.
   - They will almost NEVER let you make up a missed final, the bigger the university or class size the less chance there is they will let you make the final up even if you are sick.
   - Not having a babysitter or having the babysitter back out on you at MOST colleges does not qualify as a legitimate, excused absence. Most professors will tell you it was your responsibility to have had child care lined up before classes started. (See point #1)
7. If you worked to support yourself in high school you may not be able to do that in college.

- At the Student Parent HELP Center at the University of Minnesota, we recommend to our parents to never work more than 20 hours a week and to not work at all their first year.
- Parenting is a full time job and so is college, working more than part time while attending a four year university will hurt your grades and in most cases cost you your college degree.
- You can get work study jobs that are far easier to manage than off campus jobs due to the lack of commute time and the fact they are more understanding about giving time off for study days. (MFIP HAS TO COUNT WORK STUDY TOWARD YOUR WORK REQUIREMENT, SEE ADDITIONAL MFIP HANDOUT.)
- You can in some cases live completely off your financial aid and student loans. Many of our parents do. But, you must be willing to live cheaply, be able to manage your money well and give up a lot of extras.

8. Look into on-campus family housing.

- The University of Minnesota has two family housing units and they both offer better housing than you could get in the community for the same money.
- Family housing is not free housing but it is better housing with more “extras” than you would get renting a place off campus AND you can eliminate or reduce most transportation costs.
- The University of Minnesota family housing units have their own on-site student child care centers and so do many other college based family housing programs.
- The Jeremiah Program is also an AWESOME option for young, single moms attending college in the Twin Cities metro.
9. Find/develop a support network on campus as soon as you arrive on campus.
   - The University of Minnesota’s Student Parent HELP Center is a great option for students who are admitted to the U of M. We have a weekly parent group, a seamless child care grant application process, family friendly activities and a lounge and computer lab just for student parents.
   - St. Catherine’s University has a similar program.
   - If there is no student parent program at the college you attended, find another group or place to fit in and meet people.
     - Most colleges have programs for first generation college attenders.
       (TRIO is an example that is available at every school)
     - Some have women’s organizations where you might meet parents.
     - Look for a Student Parent student group, OR START YOUR OWN.
     - Ask the campus child care center staff if they can help you connect with the other undergraduate student parents. Can they host an undergraduate student parent night? Can you announce that you want to form a student parent group in their newsletter?

10. Know what your child care grant options are!
    - The State of Minnesota has two options:
      - Post Secondary Child Care Grant: For MN State Grant eligible students, can use in-home or center care, must take at least 6 credits and meet income guidelines, pays out directly to you at most colleges, applications available through your financial aid office (at the University of Minnesota you must apply through the Student Parent HELP Center).
      - CCAMPIS Grant (Child Care Access Means Parents In School): Must use licensed AND accredited care, must have PELL award, has to pay out directly to the child care provider.
        - Right now only available at: Minneapolis Community & Technical College (MCTC), Normandale and Century.
11. **Pay close attention to all of your application deadlines!**

- College admissions applications are typically due in early fall of your senior year of high school. That means you should know where you are applying and take all of your needed tests your JUNIOR year.
- Almost everything you need to know is on-line now on the college websites and for the financial aid applications at FAFSA.gov.
- Priority processing for financial aid is typically around March 1st of the year PRIOR to the one you are wanting financial aid for. When you first apply as a new undergraduate student it can be even earlier.
- Every week you wait to file your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) after the priority processing deadline passes decreases your chances for aid, but if you miss the deadline call your college’s financial aid office immediately and ask them if it is too late. They will accept applications all year long, but the longer you wait the less chance for free money and the greater chance of more loans.
- **COLLEGES DO NOT FORGIVE MISSED DEADLINES. THERE IS NO WIGGLE ROOM.** If you miss a needed deadline you will have to wait a year or go to a community college for a year, often as a non-admitted part time student.
- College applications are way up and 2- and 4-year programs have more applicants than they need right now, so they have no reason to want to work with people who miss a deadline.