



Dunwoody Strong Presents: Thriving, Not Just Surviving, in College

March 18, 2026



Today's Agenda

- Introductions: *Tom Bass, Amy Halligan*
- Seasoned College Parent Advice: *Libby Pollock*
- Preparing for College: *Emily McEntyre & Jason Otwell (Atlanta Counseling Center)*



DUNWOODY STRONG

**Strong Minds. Strong Futures. Dunwoody Strong.
Promoting mental health and preventing substance misuse at
Dunwoody High School**

**Empowering students, parents, and Dunwoody High School staff with
knowledge and tools to prevent substance misuse, promote mental and
emotional health, and foster a supportive environment**

Together, we are Dunwoody Strong.



TOGETHER WE ARE DUNWOODY STRONG



GRACE BUCANAN



LY DOUGLASS



AMY HALLIGAN



AMY QUINN



ELEANOR REMIGAILO



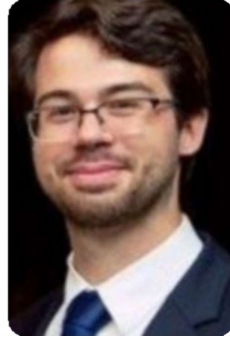
MEAGHAN ROHLETTER



ERIN ZACK



TOM BASS



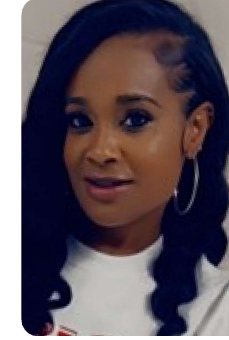
LUKE INGRAM



ANDY JAMESON



DENISE SPAIN



ASHANTE THOMPSON



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Libby Pollock, Seasoned College Parent



Emily McEntyre, LPC



Jason Otwell, LPC

Prepare Your Wildc



FOR COLLEGE AND BEYOND

EMILY MCENTYRE
JASON OTWELL
ATLANTA COUNSELING
CENTER



Four *Maybe Not So* Easy Steps

- Launch Confidently
- Connect Quickly
- Talk Openly
- Notice Early



Launch Confidently

- Daily Living Skills
- Emotional Regulation
- Self Advocacy



Environment doesn't necessarily
determine direction.

A plan, emotion regulation skills,
and advocacy skills
will help your student find a
successful path.



Launch Confidently

Daily Living Skills



- Wake Independently
- Manage Time
- Handle Money/Banking
- Do Laundry
- Make/Keep Appointments
- Refill/Pickup Medication
- Clean Room/Bathroom/ Change Sheets
- Personal Hygiene/Product Shopping
- Cooking/Groceries



Launch Confidently

Why is skill building important?

The Shame Spiral



Upward Behavioral Spiral



Screenshot



Launch Confidently

Self Advocacy

- Talking to/asking for help from professors, medical personnel, law enforcement, retail employees/staff Talking to roommates
- Working through conflict
- Making friends and connecting in groups Saying
- no
- Refusal skills/midstream refusal skills
- Writing emails
- Making phone calls
-



Launch Confidently

Emotion Regulation



- Notice emotions
- Name emotions
- Notice downregulation patterns
- Notice upregulation patterns Use
- grounding techniques
- Manage sleep, stress, hunger, and hydration



Connect Quickly

Humans are Social



- Make connections now Talk
- about joining groups
- Connect offline
- Understand the time and effort needed
- Use repetition as a strategy Know
- that quality matters Have a working knowledge of boundaries



Talk Openly

Manager to Consultant

- Communicate relational safety Practice
- resolving conflict when it arises
- Use open, connecting language rather than problem solving Tolerate
- discomfort as you watch them make their own choices Take care of yourself
-



Talk Openly

Example Language



- “That sounds hard.”
- “That sounds .”
- “I see why you would feel that way.” “What do
- you think the next step is?” “I’m sure you’ve
- already tried some things.”/ “What have you
- already tried?” “I trust you to take the next
- right step.” “You sound like you’re really
- thinking through this. Good work. Let me know
- if you need help.”



Your child needs to know
that you believe in them
and their ability
to make good choices.



Notice Early

Normative Adjustment

- Having a Down Day Seeing
- Friends on Socials Some
- Loneliness
- Stress About Schoolwork
- Roommate Tension/Conflict
- Emotional Ups and Downs Some
- Homesickness Uncertainty

Signs of Struggle

- Changed Affect/Demeanor Loss
- of Appetite
- Increased Addictive or
- Compulsive Behaviors
- Increased Despair or Panic
- Missing Significant Amounts of
- Class
- Unable to Attend to Daily
- Tasks of Living



Action Steps

Notice and name

“You sound overwhelmed lately, and I want to check in.”

Ask directly

Ask calmly and directly about self harm, suicidal thoughts, substance use, or disordered eating.

Point to specific supports

Have a direct conversation about counseling services, tutoring, or other supports

Step in directly, if needed

Suicidal ideation/language, substance abuse/addiction, and difficulty with daily living tasks are signs that a higher level of care is needed



The nature of your relationship
with your young adult child may
have changed,
but you are still
one of their best resources.



This presentation is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for mental health care, medical care, or other professional services.

More Resources:

www.atlantacounselingcenter.org

[www.https://www.lifegategroup.org/](http://www.lifegategroup.org)

[https://atlantaspecializedcare.com/](https://atlantaspecializedcare.com)

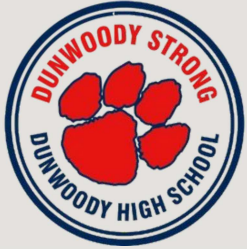
<https://www.anxietyspecialistsofatlanta.com>

<http://kaloncounseling.com>

Suicide Hotline

Call or Text: 988





Thank You!

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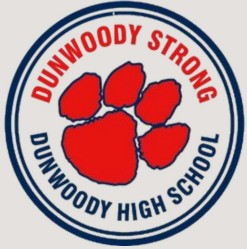
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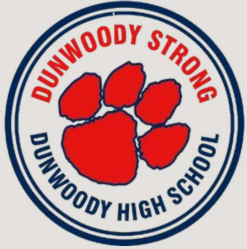


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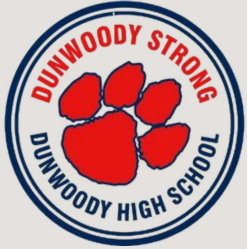
Advice from Seasoned College Parents: *... What I Wish I Knew Before My Child Went to College*

- The “sadness” of your child being gone often hits a few months in - around November for me. It takes time to realize your new normal.
- Once your child is in college, you don’t automatically have access to their grades - they’ll need to share them with you.
- College students actually have more free time than you might expect, even with a full schedule, so teaching time management is key.
- Budget ahead for all the “extra” expenses - books, social activities, clubs, trips, summer semesters and study abroad, so nothing catches you by surprise.
- Parents’ Weekend is usually busy, where one-on-one time is limited, so adjust expectations to avoid disappointment.
- Practical budgeting advice is invaluable: help your child structure finances, decide on a reasonable spending budget, and learn to manage their own money. We figured this out eventually, but guidance ahead of time would have been very helpful.



Advice from Seasoned College Parents: *...What Was the Best Advice I Received?*

- Let your student take the lead on how often and in what way they communicate with you, rather than expecting daily calls.
- Allow them to make their own mistakes - they're learning to become adults.
- Put down payments on any school dorm you think they'll attend as early as possible. You might lose some money, but it's worth it to secure on-campus housing.
- If your student initiates a call to you, it's often a meaningful conversation - pause what you're doing and be present.
- Infrequent calls can indicate they're adjusting well; frequent calls may signal loneliness or difficulty adapting.
- Their college experience will likely look different from yours - and that's perfectly okay.



Advice from Seasoned College Parents: *... What Advice Would I Give Now?*

- Everyone's college journey is unique - what works for one student may not work for another.
- Get your child's roommate(s) phone number and RA contact at move-in in case you need to reach them.
- Start early: visit small, midsize, and large schools to help your child identify the environment that fits them best.
- Emphasize that GPA often matters more than test scores. Take the SAT or ACT early if possible - achieving a good score early reduces pressure later.
- Consider hiring a college advisor – Preserve your relationship! Kids often respond better to guidance from an advisor than from a parent.



Advice from Seasoned College Parents: *... What Advice Would I Give Now?*

- Recognize that transitions are hard, for both you and your child. Allow yourself and your child to process the change and grieve if needed.
- Ask open-ended questions: “How can we support you?” Let your child tell you what they need instead of assuming.
- Pause before jumping in with solutions—ask if they want you to listen, offer feedback, or help problem-solve.
- Listen actively and empathetically; only offer advice when asked, or first ask if they want your input.
- Use organizational tips like big blue bags from Amazon with a specific ribbon color for easy identification.