LETTING GO WHILE STILL HOLDING ON

The Do's and Don'ts for Sending Your Son/Daughter off to College - as written by a student!

Phase I: Your last month together…

Do ~ Be supportive and reassuring of your son/daughter's decision to go away to school.
Don't ~ Make them feel guilty for leaving home.

Do ~ Make it known that you will miss them but that this is an important step for them as young adults and that you are excited for them.
Don't ~ Make them feel as if your excitement is over them leaving home.

Do ~ Let them know that you are available to talk and listen to them.
Don't ~ Make them feel as if their stress and worries are unjustified.

Do ~ Give them space and freedom to make decisions on their own.
Don't ~ Make them feel as if you can no longer be bothered and that they are completely on their own.

Do ~ Help them start packing and make sure they have/know critical information (i.e. Social Security number, Health Insurance card, etc.).
Don't ~ Leave them to learn about managing money and other basics (laundry, cooking, cleaning, etc.) on their own.

Do ~ Teach them safety measures (i.e. locking dorm room, "buddy system", etc.).
Don't ~ Expect that they have already been exposed to everything they will experience at college.

Phase II: Your first month apart…

Do ~ Encourage your son/daughter to find out what support services are available to them on and off campus.
Don't ~ Make them feel as if you are the only ones to turn to for help if it is needed.

Do ~ Encourage your child to eat and sleep properly and to find time for some form of exercise.
Don't ~ Expect your child to eat and sleep properly during their adjustment.

Do ~ Discuss your views regarding alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Teach them about the dangers and how to handle peer pressure encouraging the use of these substances.
Don't ~ Be naïve and believe that your son/daughter will not feel pressured to use these substances.

Do ~ Discuss your views and values concerning sex. Teach them how to be safe if they choose to be sexually active, or suggest they talk to a health-care provider if the subject is
too uncomfortable for you to discuss with them.
Don't ~ Ignore the issue of sex on college campuses.

Do ~ Discuss alternative ways for your son/daughter to spend their free time so they can see they have other things to do for fun as opposed to drinking, etc.
Don't ~ Be close minded about the fact that your son/daughter will have many new experiences at college and that they need to be prepared for.

Do ~ Stay in touch with your child. Letters/cards and e-mail are a good way to let them know you are there for them without being too intrusive.
Don't ~ Call your child everyday.

Do ~ Keep visits to a minimum so that your son/daughter doesn't become dependent on you.
Don't ~ Allow them to come home every weekend if they are homesick.

Do ~ Encourage them to become involved in campus or community activities.
Don't ~ Let your son/daughter give up on college without giving it a fair amount of time.

Do ~ Give suggestions and advice about academic problems.
Don't ~ Push or put too much pressure on them especially during this time of adjustment.

Phase III: Being reunited (college breaks and vacations)…

Do ~ Expect to see changes in your son/daughter (attitude, clothing, group of friends, etc.).
Don't ~ Get angry that they have changed or expect them to change back.

Do ~ Be prepared for them to want/expect more freedom at home then they had prior to leaving.
Don't ~ Expect them to spend all of their time at home with you.

Do ~ Take time to sit down with them and negotiate new rules.
Don't ~ Order them to follow all of the rules (i.e. curfew) they had previously.

And finally, if you need assistance or would like to encourage your son/daughter to speak with someone on campus, don't hesitate to contact the Counseling Center at (607)-431-4420.

Credits: This hand-out was developed using many of the questions raised and comments made by Hartwick parents who have attended "Separation Anxiety" workshops over the last few years. Organized and written by Beth Gilroy, Hartwick class of 2001 and former Counseling Center work-study student.