Is My High School Student Ready for College? 
(And is My College Student Ready to Go Back?)

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA
College Can Be Disastrous

- Students who made it through HS with lots of assistance may bomb out when all that structure disappears in college.
  - College is the most tempting and distracting place in the world.

- Many of these students wind up back at home.
  - Live at home and work and/or take classes.
  - So sometimes a preemptive gap year is better.
Set the Expectations

- Talk to your teen about specifically what you need to see to feel confident that they are ready for college.
  - Focus on what matters the most.
  - Create concrete requirements for greater freedom.

- Start early, then review progress occasionally.

Focus on Process, Not Just Outcome

- A good process scales up well for the greater demands of college.
  - A bad one is more likely to break down—and more dependent on too many stars aligning.

- Applies to daily tasks, but also to the application process, SATs, etc.
  - The college application process may be predictive of their college performance.
Lifestyle Sets the Foundation

- Many teens with ADHD have terrible lifestyle habits that decrease their functioning.
  - Sleep, diet, exercise, stress, manageable substance use, media use, balance of work and play, etc.

- Makes a bad situation worse.
  - Cognitively, emotionally, psychologically, socially.

- So lifestyle is a major point of intervention.

Foster Understanding

- Many resist interventions because they don’t understand how ADHD is impacting them.

- It’s important for the teen to understand how their ADHD impacts their performance.
  - Until mid/late twenties, they often underestimate the impact.
  - Focus on specific examples and patterns.

- Identifying the causes of problems gives them more control over future outcomes.
Active Problem-Solving

- Ability to go beyond standard procedures to solve problems:
  - Recognize there is a problem
  - Ask questions in class
  - Contact teacher
  - Seek tutoring, etc.
  - Put in extra effort

- This is a crucial skill!

Highly Effective, But Under-Used

- College students are notorious for not taking their medication.
  - Despite it being a major contributor to them getting into college.
  - Some don’t see the need; some don’t like the idea.

- But it’s often a cornerstone of success.

- Don’t give away your meds!
College Alternatives: Before/During

- A planned gap year beats a forced one.
- There are official gap year programs that can be great (and expensive).
- Combination of working, volunteering, and/or classes while living at home.
  - Create a stepped transition from HS to college.
  - Give more freedom and responsibility—and focus on a self-directed good process.

Additional Resources

- Transitioning to College
  - CPAMM (Coalition to Prevent ADHD Medication Misuse) [http://www.cpamm.org/](http://www.cpamm.org/)
  - The Jed Foundation, Set to Go Program [https://www.settogo.org/](https://www.settogo.org/)

- Gap Years
  - General information
    - [http://www.americangap.org/](http://www.americangap.org/)
    - [https://www.teenlife.com/category/gap-year/](https://www.teenlife.com/category/gap-year/)
ASK THE EXPERT

Is My High School Student Ready for College? (And is My College Student Ready to Go Back?)

Ari Tuckman, PsyD, MBA

Talk with an ADHD Information Specialist 1-866-200-8098, Monday-Friday, 1-5 pm ET