Your college student may have been an outstanding scholar in high school, or he may have struggled throughout his academic career.  His patterns of being a student have been set for years.  However, college provides a new academic start for students.  Students who breezed through high school may find themselves challenged for the first time.  Students who found themselves labeled as poor students in high school may find that the fresh start gives them new energy and perspective on their studies.

 Whether your student is encountering academic difficulty for the first time in college, or has fought this battle before, you may receive the phone call in which your student worries about her grades, complains about the amount and difficulty of the work, is aggravated at the professor, and is generally discouraged.  Academics in college are very different than in high school and they often require a new approach.

 What is a parent to do?  First of all, listen.  Let your student vent.  Sometimes, that may be all that is necessary.  But second, ask some questions to help your student try to figure out what he can do to make things better.  Help him think about taking action.  Here are twelve questions that you might ask your struggling student to help him think through the issue.

 **Have you talked to the professor about the problem?**

Sometimes a simple conversation will clear up problems and questions.

 **How much time are you spending on your work outside of class?**

One major adjustment for many students in college is the shift from time spent on in-class work and out-of-class work.  In high school students often spent seven to eight hours a day in school and did minimal homework.  At the college level, students may spend only two or three hours per week in a particular class, but be expected to do five to six hours of work for that course outside of class.  If the student is taking five classes, that amounts to a full time job.  Sometimes students simply need to rethink the amount of time they are spending on their schoolwork.

 **Where are you studying?**

Often the most comfortable place to study – the student’s dorm room – may not be the best place to study.  Roommates may be around, music may be playing, tv’s may be playing, instant messages or Facebook may be calling, social activities may be happening next door or in the hall, the bed may be very tempting.  Your student may need to consider finding a quiet corner in the library, or a lounge, or a coffee shop for a few hours each day.

 **When are you studying?**

Some students save all of their studying for late at night.  This works well for many students, but your student may want to consider whether he is doing his best thinking if he saves all of his work until he is tired.

 **How are you managing your time?**

Time management may be the one most valuable skill for a college student.  With so much “free” time during the week, it is tempting to put tasks off until the last minute.  Your student may need to think about breaking larger assignments into smaller chunks and scheduling his day to include designated study times.  He may need to learn to say no to social invitations occasionally in order to get work completed.

 **How are you reading your material?**

Many students have not yet learned that academic reading is different from recreational reading.  Ask your student to think about how he approaches his textbook assignments.  Does he look at the material overall?  Does he take notes or highlight key ideas or make notes in the margin?  Does he allow enough time to read carefully?  Does he think about how the textbook material relates to lecture material?  Does he look up any words that are unfamiliar or unclear?  Is he actually reading the material at all?

 **Have you considered getting a tutor?**

Colleges often offer either professional tutoring or peer tutoring.  Sometimes, even the best students need a tutor in a particular subject.  Sometimes, working with a tutor can be the difference between a B and an A in a course.  Even some of the best students are grateful for some support.  Peer tutors have usually taken the course and done well and can give student guidance on both the subject matter and the professor’s expectations.

 **Have you considered forming a study group?**

If your student is struggling in a particular class, it is possible that other students are also struggling.  Whether struggling or succeeding, students can benefit from working together to take notes, review material, and help each other prepare for tests.  Encourage your student to find two or three other students who are interested in meeting regularly to work on course material.

 **How are you doing at taking class notes?**

Taking good lecture notes is an important, and difficult skill.  Your student may need to think about how she works in class.  Does she try to write down everything that the professor says?  Perhaps she is writing too much.  Does she listen but write down very little?  Perhaps she isn’t writing enough.  Does she only write what is on PowerPoint slides?  Perhaps she needs to fill in explanations or examples given orally.  Does she review her notes?  Does she compare notes with other students to fill in gaps?

 **Is there a specific stumbling block?**

Your student may need to take time to analyze where the problem seems to be occurring.  Is she struggling in all of her classes?  Is she struggling with one subject?  Does the problem seem to be in the material or in the way the material is organized or presented? Is the problem really in the subject matter, or the course, or the professor, or is it in the student herself?  The more specific the problem, the better the chances are of finding a way to address the problem.

 **What are your academic goals?  Do you want to do better?**

These are important questions for your student.  He may need to think carefully about his goals for college – both short and long term.  It is possible that doing well academically may not be important to your student.  It is crucial that he be honest with himself.  Perhaps, if he truly doesn’t care about his studies, a break from school may be appropriate.  He may need to take some time off to decide what is important to him and why he should be in school.  If he decides that he truly does what to do better, then he will have the motivation to take action.

 **What do you plan to do now?**

Whatever other questions you might ask your student, try to help her think of a plan of action.  Help her consider herself as empowered to take some kind of action to improve the situation rather than considering herself a victim.  Ending the conversation with an action plan – even if the action is small or only a beginning – will help your student know that she can change the situation and move forward.

http://www.collegeparents.org/members/resources/articles/helping-your-college-student-be-better-student-twelve-questions-ask