As parents, we want to help our students have the best college experience possible.  We want to protect them from harmful things and keep them healthy.  As college parents, some of the difficulty that we experience is knowing that we cannot always “make things better”.  In our role as *coaches* rather than *caretakers*, we are sometimes limited to offering suggestions to our students and then letting them take control of their lives.  This may be especially true when we sense that our student is experiencing a difficult time physically or emotionally.

As college parents, we must continue to trust the parental radar that may indicate when our student’s stress is more than the normal everyday stress of dealing with college life.  If you have an indication that your student is having extreme emotional difficulty, suggest immediately that your student speak to someone at school.  Most schools have counselors, psychologists, or other mental health professionals who are ready to help and experienced in college student issues.  If you fear for your student’s well being, contact someone at school.  They may not be able to share information with you, but they can check on your student’s well being.

 For most college students, however, student stress can be addressed and, if not eliminated, at least alleviated.  According to a poll conducted by the Associated Press and MTV, 67% of students indicated that they reach out to parents when they are feeling stress.  Parents, then, are in an ideal position to discuss stress, and possible ways to deal with stress, with their students.  We’d like to offer some possible topics to discuss with your student.

 One reason to discuss stress with your student, perhaps before she has an opportunity to experience it, is to help her learn to be proactive in dealing with it.  One problem that many students encounter is that stress takes them by surprise.  They don’t anticipate that it may be a problem.  There are four steps that can help your student actively deal with her stress.

* **Expect it**.  Students who are prepared for the possibility that even a wonderful college experience can be stressful at times will not be shaken when it happens.
* **Name it**.  Student stress may be caused by many things, or by one particular thing.  It will help your student to deal with the problem if he can identify the cause.  Perhaps it is not all of college life that is causing stress, but one area.
* **Accept it**.  A certain amount of stress is almost inevitable – and possibly a good thing for some students.  It will help if your student sees this stress as part of the college experience.  Much like being caught in a current while swimming, going with the flow for a bit may be the best way to tackle the problem.
* **Tackle it.**  Going with the flow does not mean that your student needs to accept stress as a continual way of existing.  There are specific things that your student can do to lower stress to a more manageable level.

 Once your student has named his stress and determined to attempt to deal with it, here are a few suggestions that might be helpful.  Share some of these with your student so he can begin to think about changes that may be helpful.

* **Identify the cause**.  See what can be done specifically to deal with the source of the stress.
* **Get organized.**  Make lists.  Use a calendar or dayplanner.  Tidy up your desk or room or workspace.  Don’t try to carry everything around in your head, put it on paper.  A list may seem daunting at first, but knowing what needs to be tackled may be half of the battle.
* **Work on your health**.  Get exercise.  Get more sleep.  Make better food choices.
* **Get support**.  Talk to friends, but consider talking to an Academic Advisor or Counselor.  Visit the health center or clinic.
* **Use calming techniques** such as meditation, breathing exercises, visualization or positive imagery.
* **Work on balance**.  Are you involved in too many activities – or not enough to provide variety?  Are you trying to work too many hours?  Take too many credits all at once?
* **Find some quiet time** when you can be alone.  Residence halls may be wonderfully social places to live, but they are often continually active and busy.  Whether it is a few moments or a good stretch of time, try to find some time to be quiet and alone.  Go for a walk.  Find an out of the way space to sit and rest.  Take time to center yourself and do some thinking.
* **Take an occasional break from routine**.  Get off campus.  Visit home.  Visit a friend.  Go for a hike.  Go shopping.
* **Go to class**.  Don’t avoid problems.  Don’t fall behind – or more behind.  Talk to the professor.  Keep up with current work – even if you have to make up back work as well.
* **Get involved with other people and activities**.  Busy, involved, active students are often happier and do better academically.
* **Communicate.**  Talk to your family.  Talk to your friends.  Ask for help if you need it.  Keep channels of communication open.
* **Count your blessings**.  Take a few moments to think about all of the things that are going well.  Even when things may seem most difficult, there are probably some things in your life that are great.  Focus on the positive.
* **Do something for others**.  Take the focus off of yourself for a while.  Help out someone else.  Tutor a friend.  Volunteer for something.
* **Differentiate between the things you can change and the things that cannot be changed**.  Don’t waste time and energy trying to change things that can’t be changed.

http://www.collegeparents.org/members/resources/articles/talking-your-college-student-about-stress

* **Set some goals or make some resolutions**.  Be forward thinking and know where you’re headed.  Whatever is creating a short term problem may seem less troublesome in light of the larger, longer-range goals.
* **Take action**.  Be strategic in how you approach your goals.  Don’t just hope for something, create an action plan that will get you there.  Think of every small detail that you can tackle that will move you forward.  Being active and strategic will help you feel in control.

 Just as stress can take many forms, so can strategies to deal with that stress.  As a college parent, you may be in a good position to help your student think carefully about how she has dealt with her stressful situations in the past and how she can apply the coping skills that she already has to her new situation.  This may be one of those times when your listening skills may be far more important than anything specific that you tell your student.  Once again, knowing that you are there to support your student will be the most important job that you will have.