

# COLLEGE LIFE SKILLS TEACHING TOUGH LIFE LESSONS

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**AS** parents, we naturally strive to instill a solid moral compass in our children. We try to encourage honesty, decency, and integrity—teaching them it's about making the hard choice to do the right thing, even when no one is watching.

So what happens when children go off to college and discover a number of their peers may be cheating and lying their way through school? What will they do if they realize fewer than 2 percent of students get caught plagiarizing a paper or cheating on an exam? Will they hold true to the life lessons their parents imparted about right and wrong? What can parents do to keep kids from straying from their established values and beliefs?

As a clinical psychologist who works frequently with teens and young adults, I've heard their responses to the questions. In essence, they say, "Do you want to know the truth or do you want me to tell you what you want to hear?"

The truth is, at one point or another, they have compromised their values, because they feel they must to be competitive or accepted. When "everyone else does it," young people feel they can't compete academically or may be ostracized for not participating. If they cross the line, they feel guilty or devoid of their morality.

The reality is that college is a time of significant growth, with influences from an outside world that includes new peers, professors and possibly co-workers. While they leave home knowing the difference between right and wrong, college-age students are still developing cognitively, morally and emotionally.

Take comfort in knowing the lessons parents teach largely remain the center of their belief system that all new information must filter through. They may not divulge they are contemplating whether or not to access the database that has previous exams from Biology 101, but they are referencing what their parents would say if they did.

Being mindful that these choices are a reality to them is your first step. Acknowledge their challenges to make difficult choices on a regular basis. Recognize that growing up is always hard.

Growing up and maintaining integrity in a way that would make parents proud is more challenging today. Technology provides access to information, which is an even greater temptation. Parents must focus on loving their children through the challenges. More often than not, children will come through it with their integrity intact. ■

## TIPS TO HELP DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

▶ **SET A GOOD EXAMPLE.** Even while away at college, kids pay attention to your actions. Talk through challenges you may observe or experience at work or at home, and discuss thoughts on situations and making smart choices.

▶ **ACTIVELY TEACH INTEGRITY.** Discuss integrity and values early and often. If they don't see you making it a priority, they won't continue to hold on to it when they are gone.

▶ **ASK ABOUT THE CHALLENGES.** All college students face challenges. Academic pressures, newfound freedoms and choices will confront them. Listen when they struggle and show compassion.

▶ **DON'T BE JUDGMENTAL.** College is about acceptance, diversity and expansion. If you as a parent appear judgmental or close minded, the child will shut you out. They are in a new world where all things are possible, but you are still the one they rely on most to guide them.