PARENTS, PEERS, AND PRESSURES: BALANCING LIFE AS A COLLEGE STUDENT

Presented by the IU Health Professions and Prelaw Center and IU Counseling and Psychological Services
TRUE FOR EVERYONE:

Every student deals with pressures from different sources that can affect their college experience in various ways.
SELF-PRESSURE:

Practice being your own friend, instead of your own worst enemy
What are emotions?

- Emotions help survival
- Emotions are feedback about the world
- Emotions are not logic based – they can conflict and often do
- Emotions are not bad but negative ones can be uncomfortable
- Emotions are hard to ignore

Healthy responses to emotions

- Become aware of them
- Acknowledge the feeling – you don’t have to like it
- Appreciate that it will pass
- Recognize that you are okay
- Ask yourself what the emotion is trying to tell you
HOW TO COPE WITH EMOTIONS

We cope with emotions by the way we acknowledge them and our ability to control.

External Locus of Control:
- Belief that events are caused by uncontrollable factors (e.g., people, environment)
  - “The test was unfair!”

Internal Locus of Control:
- Belief that events are caused by controllable factors (e.g., my behaviors)
  - “I didn’t study enough for the exam and didn’t understand some of the questions.”
FEELINGS AROUND CHANGE

You may feel:
- Alone
- Confused
- Frustrated
- Anxious
- Misunderstood
- Hopeless
- Helpless
- Excitement!

Remember:
- These feelings are normal
- You are allowed to feel whatever you are feeling, try not to judge them
- You do not need to compare yourself to your peers
- Changes can be scary but also a new experience
COMPARISONS AND PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism brings burnout faster

You may think:
- I have to be perfect
- I should be better or as good as my peers
- If I am not perfect, I am worthless
- No one else ever struggles, everyone else is doing better
- You can feel academic pressure no matter how well you do

But remember:
- Some people are better at some things than others
- Everyone faces difficulties, you are not the only one
- Figure out your own aptitude
- Identify the things you are good at
DEALING WITH PEERS

- Some peers may be collaborative and supportive.
- Other peers may be competitive and play one-upmanship.
- You may feel insecure because of what your peers are doing or saying.
DEALING WITH PEERS

- We can choose which peers we want to hang around with; we do not have to associate with peers who arouse our insecurities.

- How to deal with peers who play one-upmanship.
  - Embrace the view that what works for one person may not work for another!
  - Take courses and become involved in activities you are comfortable with. Advisors can help you develop these plans.
HOW WILL I KNOW IF I AM NOT MAKING IT?

Look at **Objective Data:**
- Grades matter – If you are not making it that says something
- Skipping or withdrawing from classes – You have to be there to learn
- Cheating – If you have to do this to succeed you aren’t succeeding
- Repeating courses – If you are hitting a mental block that is real
- Not putting forth your best effort – Success can be scary...

Look at **Subjective Data** (Our emotions can be a good indicator of what we want in a situation):
- Do you hate what you are doing (whether or not your grades are strong)?
- Do you dread going to class or clinic?
- Do you feel you are not grasping the material?

These can be signs that we are overwhelmed or are facing burnout. These do not necessarily mean this field is not right for you.
RECOVERY FROM BURNOUT

You have permission to:
  - Relax
  - Step back
  - Recover

Useful Attitudes:
  - Give yourself down time
  - Go slow to make haste (slowing down a bit can save time in the long run)
  - Learn to work with your own style
IF I AM NOT MAKING IT, WHAT HAPPENS?

Negative Attitudes:
- Self-Condemnation
  “I’m so stupid.”
- Fear of disappointing others
  “What will my parents say?”
- Embarrassment
  “My friends will think I’m a loser.”
- Denial: question whether the evidence reflects reality
  “If only I work harder it will change.”
  “I can make it all on my own!”

Positive Attitudes:
- Be Gentle and Kind with yourself; treat yourself as well as you would your best friend:
  If you wouldn't say something to your friend don't say it to yourself
- Be open and upfront as soon as possible
- Bring your parents in as a resource rather than waste their help by keeping secrets
- Test the evidence – if it continues to give the same results it’s likely true
ASKING FOR HELP IS NOT WEAKNESS!

Ask for help early to maximize your academics. In fact, the most successful students are often the ones getting extra help, from:

- Instructors
- Advisors
- Tutors
- Family – Their words of encouragement and advice help
- Counseling – Depression and Anxiety are treatable
WHAT WILL MY FAMILY SAY?

They may not be happy about it, they may be upset or disappointed…
WHAT DO YOUR PARENTS KNOW ALREADY?

- Hopefully you have been keeping them informed about what is happening
- If they haven’t then you might need to show evidence

- Sometimes the evidence is objective – grades etc.
- Sometimes the evidence is subjective – how you feel about your situation or path

Telling your parents may not be easy but you can do it!
FORESHADOW

You can:
- Begin to show your parents your grades
- Don’t make assumptions about the evidence
- Let the evidence speak for itself
- Start telling your parents how you feel
- Describe in detail your daily challenges. Share your failures
PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES

- Explain that it is not quitting but making a different life choice
- Share about other interests
- Share examples of other successes

- Think about this as a negotiation
- It works better to not force an issue but to instead let it evolve
WHAT IF IT IS JUST A GUT FEELING?

If you are making the change based on a gut feeling that this path is wrong for you, it may be harder for your parents to accept.

- Be prepared for the possibility your parents won't accept it
- Be ready to explain your reasons
- Just because your parents don’t understand doesn’t mean you have to give in
WHAT IF THEY LEARN BECAUSE I “BREAK DOWN?”

Stress and secrets can overwhelm us
- Obviously if you “breakdown,” becomes suicidal, or are hospitalized, your parents will know something is wrong

- If this happens, it is an opportunity to come clean all at once
- Parents might see first hand the negative consequences of your following this path
- You can take advantage of the moment to change direction
WHEN PARENTS DON’T ACCEPT IT

Perhaps the most dreaded outcome
THE CONVERSATION

Hopefully you have been foreshadowing and sharing your data.
- if not, start doing so now
- Sometimes parents refuse to see what others see and feel
- This is still a negotiation that may happen over a number of conversations

Useful Attitude:
- Problems do not have to be fixed all at once
- It is okay for you and your parents to disagree
WRITE A SCRIPT

When you talk to your parents your mind may go blank:

- Write down the main points you want to make; refer to these simple notes as you talk
- Include data – objective and subjective
- Have a plan:
  - What do you want to do next
  - Ask what your parents think you can do instead
- Try to minimize blaming – of yourself and your parents
- Don’t try to argue a given point – state your case and then stop
- Be prepared to listen
HOW TO TALK

- Remain as calm as you can — you may not feel calm, but just try anyway
- Make eye contact with your parents
- Speak calmly and slowly
- Be prepared to answer questions — stick to your data
- There may be awkward silences. That's okay, just wait; people are thinking
- Don’t try to argue your parents out of their opinions
HOW TO LISTEN

- Remember:
  - You have had time to think about this and gather your thoughts beforehand
  - Much of what you say may catch your parents by surprise
  - That's okay; allow them time to absorb what you are disclosing to them.

- There are many reasons they might hold their opinions of your situation: Listen respectfully, and try to understand their point of view.
POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

Be realistic about possible outcomes this decision may have:

This may take many discussions or you may even reach impasse.

- Your parents could:
  - Cut off money
  - Cut off emotional support
  - Try to use guilt and influence

- OR they may be more open to your ideas and feelings than you think.

If you come prepared to the conversation your parents will probably be more responsive.
CONSIDER YOUR CONTEXT

If:

- you and your parents reach an impasse…
- you feel the overall well-being of your family must take precedence over your career choice…
- or you really feel other pressure to not change your path…
CONSIDER YOUR CONTEXT

Then:

- You can always add aspects of the career you want into your personal life
  - For example, if you had wanted to be an athletic trainer you could become active in a club sport or volunteer as a coach; if you had wanted to be a professional artist then make time to be an artist outside of your other career

- Search out resources where you can discuss the complexity of your decision, e.g., CAPS, HPPLC, career services, advisors, faculty with whom you have a rapport

- Allow yourself to act upon the fact that these values and goals are important to you; don't just give them up

- Strives to pursue your goals within the realities of your life, taking into account your familial and financial situation
RESOURCES

- CAPS – Counseling and Psychological Services 812-855-5711 (two free sessions each semester)
  http://healthcenter.indiana.edu/counseling/index.shtml
- Health Professions and Prelaw Center - http://hpplc.indiana.edu/index.shtml
- Advisors (academic, preprofessional, career, scholarship, honors, et al)
- Academic Support Center - www.indiana.edu/~acadsupp/ASChome.shtml
- Tutoring (many departments offer extra help; visit dept websites for info)
- Career Development Center - www.indiana.edu/~career/
- Other IUB Career Service Offices - \www.iub.edu/student/career.shtml
- IU Center for Human Growth (counseling - free or sliding fee scale)
- OASIS International Group
  www.facebook.com/pages/Oasis-International-Group/135803476492298 / coasis@indiana.edu
  (helps international students gain confidence in interacting and making friends with Americans.)
QUESTIONS / COMMENTS