

10 Ways to Make the Most of Your Orientation Experience

When you have the opportunity to go through a parent orientation program, there are some key ways to make the most of this gateway experience:

Prepare Questions. Think about what you really *want* to know, not just what you “should” find out. Interested in how students can apply their learning in practical settings? Ask about internships, jobs and co-op opportunities. Want to know whom your student can turn to if he’s having learning difficulties? Ask the question. Thinking ahead will help you determine what’s truly important to you and your student.

Don’t be Shy. Sitting back and listening to presenters and panels makes good sense. However, if you have additional questions, don’t hesitate to ask. Whether it’s in a group setting or one-on-one after a presentation, your concerns deserve attention. And no question is a “dumb” one!

Listen and Take Notes. Jot some notes as various presenters bombard you with information. That way, you can read through them when you get home and clear your head. It’s easy to say, “I’ll remember that point or that contact info” yet the sheer volume of information you are offered during orientation makes remembering everything from memory very difficult.

Get to Know Other Parents/Family Members. Orientation is an excellent time to mix and mingle with others who are going through the same thing that you are: sending your student to college. Develop informal support structures and compare notes with other parents and family members.

Give Your Student Some Space. This is his first campus experience as a matriculated student so it’s important that he learn to navigate on his own. Give him space to meet people, to ask his own questions and to take charge of his college life. Starting off with a dose of self-responsibility during orientation will set a positive tone for the rest of his time on campus.

Take Tours. It may be hot and you may be tired. Yet nothing beats seeing something with your own eyes. So, consider taking tours that are offered. You’ll get to see academic buildings, residence halls, community spaces and much more. Then, when your student starts talking about these places during the semester, you’ll be able to accurately picture her in her

Questions to Consider

Commuter Concerns. What meal plans are available for commuters? How can they get involved in campus life, even though they don’t live there? What is the parking situation like?

Residence Hall Life. What are students allowed to bring and what is against policy? Do the mattresses require extra long sheets? What kind of staff are available in the halls?

Academics. What services are available to students with learning disabilities? How do professors’ office hours work? If a student is feeling behind, what can he/she do?

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Determine what is important to YOU.

surroundings.

Keep Yourself Healthy. Orientation sessions often happen on some of the hottest days of the year. Drink water, stay cool and pace yourself.

Don’t Cause a Scene. If you cause a ruckus during a session or raise your voice at an administrator, not only will you cause an unpleasant scene, you’ll also make things harder for your student by embarrassing him. We all know how to handle concerns with care and dignity. Make that your mode of operation so that people will respond to you better and so that your student doesn’t have to suffer.

Have Paperwork in Place. Work with your student to make sure that you’re bringing all the required paperwork to campus for orientation. Go through a checklist ahead of time so that you both feel prepared to dive into orientation without worry!

Join the Parent Association. If your campus offers a Parent/Family Association, why not join? These organizations typically do everything from keeping families informed to planning Parent/Family Weekend events—and much more. Plus, they offer another connection to campus that can be invaluable when you have questions, concerns and ideas.

Orientation can be an exciting time for both you and your student. Make the most of it!