



Deerfield Parent Network

“Network Notes”

The Naked Roommate
Harlan Cohen
May 6, 2014 Deerfield High School

The program began with Mr. Cohen’s original and hilarious song, “The Naked Roommate”, accompanied by his own guitar playing. For those who were unable to attend, here is a brief summary of the presentation.

Please visit Mr. Cohen’s website, www.nakedroommate.com, for access to free mini-courses, videos and more for both parents and students.

There are 3 types of students:

Thriving (not many of these are freshmen)

Surviving (the majority of students)

Struggling (there are many of these, the ones who didn’t know that college would be “uncomfortable.” No one teaches kids how to deal with being uncomfortable. When college kids contact their parents because they are feeling uncomfortable, parents are supposed to listen via cell phone, text message, Facebook, etc. Parents today know much more about their child’s college experience than parents ever have before. But they don’t always know the best way to respond.

Up until now, parents and students have only had to think about the college search process. There is so much information about how to go about the selection of a college. There is very little though about how to deal with what comes after that.

Up to 25% of students will transfer to another institution during their college experience.

Going from high school to college is a major transition and all transitions are difficult. There are 5 areas of transition for your student:

Social – the time your student spends outside the classroom, and this can be as much as 90% of their time at college.

Emotional

Physical – those things that relate to your student’s health and well-being

Financial

Academic

Mr. Cohen is an expert on transitions; it’s all about learning to get comfortable with the uncomfortable. His own experience as a freshman was a case in point: he expected to be friends right away with his roommate, but that didn’t happen. He made friends with the other kids on his floor, but the majority ended up pledging a fraternity and he didn’t.

His mantra, like most kids, was: like me, want me, accept me. When he wasn’t able to connect with a group of friends right away, he started to think about transferring. All parents should make sure they give their kids the





Deerfield Parent Network

“Network Notes”

message that they have the option to transfer if things don't work out. The students who struggle are the ones who are impatient (and most kids are) and who don't feel they have anyone in their corner (other than parents). Once he accepted that he could transfer if he wanted, and that he didn't really care whether other kids liked him or not, he started to try new activities, clubs, etc., on campus and when the year was almost over and he had to decide whether or not to transfer, he liked the school enough (UW, Madison) to almost decide to stay. Ultimately, he transferred to U of Indiana, where his older brothers had gone, because he wanted a “do-over” of his freshman year. At Indiana, he joined a fraternity right away, but then found that he didn't like the fraternity, which led to the conclusion that the problem was himself. He realized that going to college was 90% amazing and 10% bogus, but the 10% can easily take over and consume all of a student's thoughts.

He learned that to effectively deal with the college transition, there are three critical “Ps”: places, people and patience.

Places: every student should figure out three places on campus where they will feel comfortable, and, preferably, they should know this before arriving. They should seek out places that will be similar to the things they did in high school that they liked. For athletes, they might feel comfortable on a team, but if they end up not liking teammates, they will need at least two other places. It might be a fraternity, it might be a volunteer job in the community, or it might be a campus job. Campus jobs are great because they not only are a source of income, but they are a built in “community” where a student can feel comfortable.

People: ideally, everyone should have 5 people on campus who are “in their corner.”

Patience: as a society, we suck at patience. Year one of college is the uncomfortable year, but being uncomfortable will force kids to find their people and their places, and those are skills they will take with them for the rest of their lives. Your student will have to learn to be comfortable with the uncomfortable, and whenever he or she is in an uncomfortable position, remember the three Ps.

When kids contact parents with a problem, parents need to apply the “24-hour rule”. Wait a day to respond to the issue; by then, it's very likely your child will have solved the problem on his own, or will have a new problem that supersedes the original problem, or at the very least, you will have had time to think of the best way to respond.

Get used to asking your child: “What do you think you should do?” A good thing to remember is struggles belong to them, victories belong to you.

Greek life can be a wonderful way for kids who are shy or not naturally social to navigate campus life.

Parents should get the cell phone numbers of their student's roommate or one or two close friends, in case of an emergency.

Contrary to what parents may think, gaming can be very social because on campus, kids participate in gaming as a group activity.

Students say it takes a good two years to make close connections on campus.

Mr. Cohen's 3 Rules of Roommates:

Roommates who want to get along will find a way to co-exist.

A roommate is someone to share living quarters with; if a friendship develops, that is a bonus, not a given.

Apply the “uncomfortable rule”: if one person is uncomfortable with a roommate's behavior, it must be discussed within 24 hours of the initial problem.

