

A Guide to Help Students - for Families

Developmental Characteristics of University Youth

University years represent an era during which an adolescent starts to become an adult by passing through many physical and emotional transformations. Young individual starts shaping his/her self via questions such as “Who am I?”, “What are my values?”, “What is my purpose?”. Through this process, the individual achieves physical, sexual, psychological and social maturity. As this process is completed successfully, s/he becomes an independent and productive individual, acquires self-control, clarifies his/her identity and personality, constructively arranges interpersonal relationships and takes responsibility of his/her physical, emotional and social experiences.

Basic developmental challenges of a young individual include ¹:

- * Establishing new and more mature relationships with peers of both sexes.
- * Adopting and enhancing male/female roles in society
- * Accepting his/her physical appearance
- * Becoming emotionally independent of parents and other adults
- * Preparing him/herself for marriage and family life
- * Choosing an occupation and preparing him/herself for it
- * Attaining a sense of social responsibility and behaving accordingly
- * Outlining a set of values and an ethical system that could guide behavior

Youth is a period that includes many positive emotions such as excitement for adulthood, freedom, autonomy, control and pride as well as various challenging struggles. Young individual may have difficulties in adapting to bodily changes, understanding sexual urges that are brought by the developmental period, establishing and experiencing sexual identity, separating from parents in decisions and preferences, forming a career plan, and learning social and cultural roles.

Youngsters try to become independent individuals, to differentiate themselves from their peers and families on the one hand, and they still need financial and emotional support of peers and family on the other hand. Their desire to prove individuality is accompanied by a doubt of competence. At this point, in order to believe that they can individuate and take their

own responsibility, they need to see that their families believe in and encourage them. This co-existing independence struggle and dependency needs may be confusing both for the youngsters and their families.

Difficulties Awaiting the Parents of a University Student

University years may bring about some difficulties and complications for the parents as well as the student. This period is a crucial one in a young person's life in terms of maturation. Until university, your son/daughter had probably lived in a more protected and easier-to-observe environment. Though, at university s/he will start shaping an environment of his/her own and acting independently. Differences in his/her behavior and attitudes due to the pain of forming self-identity may make you feel that s/he is a stranger who you can no longer recognize. It is natural for most of the youngsters to suffer psychologically, have complex emotions, and feel unhappy, anxious and angry at times. This emotional complexity of a young adult has a crucial role in developing a healthy identity. It is important to remember that the value you have taught up to this point in his/her development will guide him/her during transformation into adulthood. Besides, emergence of values and judgments that are different from yours is a normal and healthy sign of this developmental period in terms of youngsters' attainment of their individual strength. As they develop tastes, preferences and values that are different from yours, you may feel uncomfortable. This period might be stressful for you as well, since their changing needs will require you to reshape your role as parents. During these years, their need for you to make decisions and know what is best on behalf of them decreases. Instead, their need for you to understand, accept and support their differences in your own way increases.

This period, during which your son / daughter moves towards adulthood, may not only include stresses of a new adaptation process, but also the pride of witnessing his/her increased responsibility of his own life as s/he develops his/her own characteristics and skills, and his/her use of courage and creativity in shaping his/her life and individuating. This period of growing up and being an adult might be pleasurable for you to share.

However, in some cases, you may feel worried about your son / daughter's psychological or academic condition. There may be situations in which you feel that what you are doing is not enough, that there is a need for professional help. If your son/daughter,

- is depressed, has been feeling unhappy for a long time and is hopeless about the future

- has difficulty with maintaining his/her daily functioning due to psychological problems (having difficulty with getting out of the house and/or keeping up with the academic requirements)
- has attitudes or behaviors that harm him/herself or others, especially if there are implicit or explicit references to suicide and death
- is having serious trouble with family and social relations
- is experiencing an important event and/or a life change (loss of a loved one, break-up, bankruptcy, divorce, etc.),
- demonstrates sudden and marked changes in academic performance, attitudes and behavior (gradually becoming withdrawn, being more furious than usual, crying frequently, being absent minded, inability to concentrate on stuff that s/he was previously interested in)
- having serious changes in sleeping and eating patterns, and/or physical appearance (extreme weight gain or loss)

You may consider professional support.

If Your Son/Daughter Came to Istanbul from Another City:

Especially if your son/daughter had never lived away from you, his/her leaving home for university may cause intricate feelings such as anxiety and stress. Questions such as “Where will s/he stay?”, “Will s/he be able to make it alone?”, “What will s/he eat?”, “What kind of friends will s/he have?” may occupy your minds. On the other hand, the idea that your son/daughter succeeded in entering university and s/he will manage living in another city without you may make you feel excited and proud. At this point, some changes are about to come for you and for your son/daughter.

In an unfamiliar city, a youngster who is away from his/her family and friends may have some problems. S/he may feel unhappy and anxious. In parallel with these feelings, s/he may have increased physical complaints (headaches, stomach aches). S/he may have decreased tolerance and thus, may be more furious and ill-tempered. S/he may complain about loneliness, lack of friends. First, it is important to remember that these are part of adaptation process and temporary. As the youngster reaches a state of belonging to this

new city and as s/he physically and psychologically settles in this place, the negative feelings and complaints are expected to decrease.

You may find below some suggestions to support your son/daughter who is away from home for the first time and who is struggling with adaptation to university life:

- * Despite and even with the help of your mixed feelings about your child's going away and becoming independent, try to show him/her that you are trying to understand, empathize with and encourage him/her about this experience.
- * Convey the message that what s/he experiences is normal.
- * Allow your son/daughter to share his/her experiences with you.
- * Inform him/her about changes in your life.
- * If you have experiences of being away from your family, loved ones, home, share these with him/her.

How Can You Help Your University Student Son/Daughter?

Even if your child is trying to be independent, there may be times at which s/he will need your support and guidance. Below are some suggestions that may help you in dealing with being a parent of a university student:

- It is important to make your son/daughter feel that you trust and will continue loving him/her. The youngster, despite his/her attempts to be independent, may need to know that you will be on his/her side and ready to listen no matter what the circumstances are.
- It may be important for you to review your expectations. Expectations that are unrealistic, beyond your son/daughter's potential or incongruent with your son/daughter's wishes will make him/her unhappy, anxious and unsuccessful.
- Try to be patient about the changes in your son/daughter. Remember that these are common difficulties of youngsters of his/her age. In most cases the chaos and troubles are normal.
- It is crucial that you allow your son/daughter to share his/her problems with you. Share just that if s/he wants to talk, you are ready to listen and whatever s/he might have gone through, s/he is dear for you.

- Sometimes, youngsters may hesitate to share their problems with the family. In such cases, it is important to respect his/her boundaries. If you sense that there are things that s/he can't talk to you about and it might be serious, remind him/her not to struggle with it alone and to seek psychological help, if necessary.
- Minimizing the "communication accidents" (judgment, accusations, misunderstanding, etc.) has a substantial role in having healthy and efficient communication. Some attitudes or behaviors decrease the quality of the communication and subsequently leads to problems or hinders the solution of existing problems. (For detailed information, you may see the "Communication" brochure at the web page of Psychological Counseling Unit).
- Do not forget that you have a life, too. If you focus only on your children, it would be exhausting for both parties. Do the things that you enjoy. As you become a happy individual, each member of the family will feel better.
- Review your problem solving strategies. Sometimes problems between parents and youngsters become a vicious circle and each side may expect the other to change. In these situations, it may be important that you make the first move. If you need, you may get psychological help about how to behave in such stalemates.

How Can You Get Help From Psychological Counseling Unit?

The Role of Psychological Counseling Unit

Psychological Counseling Unit (PCU) aims at contributing to the personal, social and academic development of students, accompanying them in their adaptation to university life and assisting them in gaining necessary skills. PCU's services are available only to students and staff of Istanbul Bilgi University. There are some preventive activities (brochures, seminars, etc.) that offer information and recommendations about specific problems and some intervention processes such as individual counseling, psychotherapy and group therapy. After assessment interviews, individuals may get psychological or psychiatric help or if the situation calls for a different specialty, individuals may be referred to trustworthy professionals or institutions outside the university.

Referral to Psychological Counseling

Openly share the concrete reason(s) that make you think that psychological support would be of help with your son/daughter. During this conversation, try not to be judgmental and try to use “I language”. Encourage him/her to see a counselor for once and mention that the decision to continue would be of his/hers. When the student decides to make an appointment with a counselor from PCU, you may see the details of the application procedure at the web page.

If you are concerned about your son/daughter and s/he rejects any referral, you may contact with a professional from PCU or any other source and get in-depth help about how to make a referral.

Confidentiality Principle

Psychological Counseling Unit adheres to confidentiality principle. The efficiency of the psychological counseling process depends on the mutual trust of the therapist and the client. Consequently, if a student starts to see a counselor at the Unit, session contents will not be shared by any person, including family members, unless the student gives permission and consent. The confidentiality principle, which is a significant ethical principle of psychological help, will be withheld only when a student has a high risk of harm to self or others.

¹ Adams, J.F. (1995). “Ergenliđi Anlamak” [Understanding Adolescence]. İmge Kitabevi Yayınları. Ankara.