

# The First Year Experience

## Coping Strategies & "Food for Thought"

### **1. Recognize that feelings of ambivalence about your child's leaving home are normal.**

For most families, this step can seem like a dramatic separation of parent and child, although it is usually the separation of adult from almost-adult. It is normal, too, to look forward to the relative peace and quiet of having your active older adolescent out of the house and having the place to yourself, or being able to spend time with your younger children!

### **2. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions come up.**

There is little benefit in pretending that you don't feel sad, guilty, relieved, apprehensive, or whatever feelings you do have, while your child is getting ready to come to Brandon University. You probably aren't fooling anyone by trying to hide your reactions; a healthier approach is to talk about them-with your family, friends, clergy, or whoever is a source of support for you.

### **3. Make "overall wellness" a goal for yourself.**

Especially during stressful times, it helps to get enough sleep, eat healthful meals regularly, and get adequate exercise. Spending some recharging time -doing the special things that you especially like - is another step toward wellness. If you are feeling good, you are more likely to have the energy to help your child and be a good role model.

### **4. Remember that, for your child, coming to Brandon University is a tremendously important developmental step toward full adulthood.**

It represents the culmination of the education of 18 years or so - much of it geared toward helping your child assume a productive place in the world. This is the time when your hard work will show itself in the form of a framework that your freshman will use in beginning to make independent choices. Many parents find that it helps to focus on the fact that providing your child with this opportunity is a priceless gift. Be proud of yourself!

### **5. Find a new creative outlet for yourself.**

Especially parents whose last or only child has moved away to university find that taking on a new challenge is an excellent way to manage and channel their energy and feelings. Have you ever wanted to write a book? Learn to fly-fish? Make a quilt? Volunteer in your community? Assume a new project or responsibility at work? Travel? Get your own bicycle and ride all over town? Make a list of all the things you intended to do while your child was growing up, but never had the time to do. Now is your chance!

## What parents can do?

- Understand the system their child is entering.
- Understand that the best laid plans can change.
- Understand that growth is along many dimensions, not just academic.
- Validate their children's' feelings.
- Expect and accept that change and, perhaps, "rebellion" will occur and that it's not always terrible; often it's healthy.
- Help students develop responsibility for their education. Once they are underway, they should be:
  - Taking responsibility for knowing regulations and for tracking progress toward their degrees; that can mean checking in with advisors to determine progress;
  - Taking responsibility for what courses they take, that is, for their registration and withdrawals;
  - Taking responsibility for what they learn and for their grades;
  - Taking responsibility for organizing their time and then, doing the work necessary for course completion;
  - Taking responsibility for the need to access resources and help necessary for success.

## Help Students make BU their “Home”:

- Questions: What or who would you send from home to help your child make Brandon and Brandon University their home?
- Knowledge: What do they need to know about Brandon and the university in order to make it their home?
- Action: What can you do to help your child make Brandon and the university their home?