



Conversation Tips and Questions for Family Weekend

Family Weekend is a fantastic opportunity for parents/caregivers to connect with their students while learning about their college experience. Samford CARES would like to provide some conversation tips and potential questions to help open meaningful dialogue, allowing parents to understand more about their child's college life and how they can support them throughout their academic journey.

Conversation Tips for Family Weekend

Curiosity vs. Judgement

Many times, when we ask a question, we know the answer we want or expect to hear. When we are curious, we are open and eager to understand. Judgement, on the other hand, can make your student feel misunderstood.

Tips:

1. Open-Ended Questions

- Ask questions that require more than a yes or no answer. Ex: "What has been your favorite class this semester?" or "How are you finding balance between classes and extracurricular activities?"

2. Active Listening

- Show genuine interest in their responses without interrupting or offering immediate opinions. Maintaining eye contact and nodding can be one way to convey you are present.

3. Avoid Assumptions

- Do not assume you know what they are going through. Instead of saying "You must be overwhelmed with classes." Try saying, "How are you managing your classwork?"

Asking vs. Telling

We want our children to become good problem-solvers, which is a skill developed by having experiences and thinking things through. College students need to experience trial and error. This helps them build confidence and learn to trust themselves.

Tips:

1. Encourage sharing

- Use phrase like, “Tell more” or “How did that make you feel?” This allows the student to reflect and elaborate to give you a deeper understanding of their world.

2. Refrain from Directives

- Instead of giving instructions, ask questions that lead your student to find their own solutions. “What do you think would be helpful?”

3. Reflect Back

- Show your student you understand by reflecting on what they said. (Ex: “Sounds like you are enjoying your history course. What do you like most about it?”)

Facts vs Feelings

When discussing sensitive topics, it is helpful to focus on facts rather than feelings. This approach minimizes defensiveness and promotes constructive conversations.

Tips:

1. Be specific

- Address concerns by using specific examples, instead of generalizations. (Ex: “You never call,” try, “I noticed we have not talked much this week. Is everything okay?”)

2. Stay Neutral

- Present information in a neutral way. By being aware of our feelings, we can be less reactive to the student’s choices and allow them to work through the natural consequences. (Ex: “I noticed your grades have dropped in a few courses. Can you tell me what has been challenging for you?”)

3. Seek Clarity

- Ask for clarification if something is unclear.

10 Questions to Ask Your Student During Family Weekend

1. How have your classes been so far?

This opens a conversation about their academic experiences, favorite subjects, and any challenges they are facing.

2. Are there any courses or professors that you find particularly inspiring?

This can lead to discussions about mentoring relationships and academic inspirations.

3. How do you manage your time between studies, activities, and rest?

This is a one way to discuss time management strategies and if they are finding a balance.

4. Have you made any new friends? What are they like?

By asking, parents will learn about the social circles their child is forming and how they are influencing their college experience.

5. Are you interested in any organizations or clubs?

This question is about social integration and finding out what extracurricular activities excite and engage your child.

6. Can you show us around your favorite spots on campus?

Asking this question, lets the student share parts of their daily life and introduces parents to the student's personal campus highlights.

7. What are some challenges you have had this semester?

This question helps students reflect on obstacles faced and what they need in the future.

8. What have you learned about yourself?

This question is great for getting students to reflect on their recent experiences and any insights discovered about themselves.

9. What can we do to better support you from home?

This question shows empathy and readiness to help, ensuring the student feels supported emotionally and practically.

10. Is there anything you need that would make your life here easier?

Parents can discover practical ways to support their child's college experience.

For more conversation starters, consider purchasing **Samford Talks**, a card game for families of Samford students and the Samford community at large. These conversation starter cards, priced at \$20 each, are fun and thought-provoking. All proceeds will benefit Samford CARES, the campus resource that exists to help students of concern remain successful in and out of the classroom.

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