



# Sweet Send-Offs

Send your kids off to college with hugs, and avoid those going-away fights.

BY LYNNE MEREDITH SCHREIBER

emotional episodes are a regular part of growing up and going away, says Shadick, director of the Pace University counseling center in New York City. He says conflict is a defense mechanism that makes parting less painful. In short, it's easy to leave when you're mad. "You see this behavior because it's an emotional time, and separation issues are bound to get stirred up," he says. "It's important that both parents and students be aware of their feelings and their hot buttons. Otherwise it can escalate into a real problem."

Before you send your child on to Real Life, take steps to make the transition easy—and the parting sweet.

## COMMUNICATIONS 101

The summer before Dion McInnis's eldest son, also named Dion, left for school, they played basketball daily.

"Whether we played five minutes or an hour didn't matter," says the League City, Texas-based dad of three boys. "We'd just talk, play, and laugh." Father and son had always played basketball, so it wasn't an artificial setup. But the courtside conversation made it easy for the

younger Dion to stay connected, says his dad. It was also a time when he told his son his own stories of separation and independence. "This parenthood business is catch-and-release," says McInnis. "You let your kids go, they do their thing, and you hope for the best. But you also know you'll reconnect another day and when you do, it'll be fun."

Don't just talk—listen, too. Before each of Helen Eckmann's four kids left for college, she planned a fun family vacation and scheduled alone time with the child who was leaving.

"I asked them how they wanted to connect with me once they went to college," says Eckmann, a professor in Del Mar, California, and author of *Simple Principles to Excel at School*. "Our eldest daughter asked to see us every other weekend. Our youngest daughter said we could probably wait until Thanksgiving to see each other again. I was surprised by both of their responses."

## PRODUCTIVE PARTINGS

Eckmann realized the importance of giving her kids space to gain much-needed independence. She licked her wounds privately, keeping her eye on the big picture. "This wasn't about me—it was about them," she says. "Part of me was thrilled because I wanted them to be independent and have their own lives, but part of me knew I was going to mourn."

Recognizing your own emotional stuff at this time and owning it is crucial. It's OK to be sad and even important to tell your child you'll miss

**T** rue story: At a college seminar for incoming freshmen, in the midst of talking about the adventures and

excitement of college life, a psychology professor looked out into the crowd of assembled students and parents—most still flush from the thrill of recent graduation parties—and asked, "So, how many of you have had a big fight recently?" After a round of knowing glances and more than a few guilty smiles, roughly half of the people in the room raised their hands.

Professor Richard Shadick has to smile when he hears stories like this. Going-away fights and similar

This parenthood business is catch-and-release. You let your kids go, they do their thing, and you hope for the best. But you also know you'll reconnect another day and when you do, it'll be fun.

—DION MCINNIS, FATHER OF THREE

# healthy you **FAMILY MATTERS**

him—but then back off, says John Sargent, professor of psychiatry and pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

“It’s not your kid’s job to make you feel better. It’s his job to leave without homesickness and do well in school,” says Sargent. Instead of lamenting that departure, spend the summer productively. Make sure your teen knows how to do laundry, cook, and pay bills. Visit campus and learn the location of the counseling center, health care clinic, and local stores. Talk about expectations—yours and hers. Are you footing the bill, or do you expect her to work? Do you have expectations for grades, behavior (sex, drugs, and drinking), and keeping in touch?

Sargent, whose three children attend colleges hundreds of miles away, reminds parents that they do have some power. If your child says, “Don’t bother coming up for parents’ weekend,” he suggests, respond by saying, “Too bad. I want to see you.” And you can set a minimum requirement for keeping in touch. Sargent’s

kids know they have to call him every week. “They get used to it,” he says.

Parents and teens should spend time together on the university’s Web site, learning about clubs, mentoring programs, and majors, says Shadick. That’s an easy way to talk, too—about how they’ll manage their time and what classes or activities they’re interested in.

Debi Yohn, a Los Angeles psychologist, encourages incoming freshmen to talk with an older student about what to expect. Many colleges can arrange that introduction. Yohn also recommends taking a community college course the summer before college, to get into the studying groove while still in the comfort of home.

“Most universities accept those courses for credit and they can take a lighter load some other time,” says Yohn. “It’s productive too. They’re not just hanging out.”

## EASY FOR EVERYONE

It’s essential to ease the transition for the whole family—not just the departing teen. Younger siblings often have a hard time when typical family cacophony settles into quiet. Moschel Kadokura’s younger son misses his three sisters terribly when they leave for school from the family home in Cupertino, California. “They come home, the house is full of activity. Then they go away, and he feels very sad,” says Moschel, who asked her older children to carve out special time for their brother.

For everyone involved, knowing exactly how long you’ll be apart can make saying goodbye easier. That helped Eric Papp when his Tampa-based parents pointed out that he wouldn’t be at Notre Dame forever.

“My parents said, ‘You’ll be back in eight or nine weeks—fall break, Christmas break, spring break,’” he says. “So I broke it up into sections. It was a mental thing.” ☺

## STAY CONNECTED

### INTERNET PHONE

Web phones make it easy—and cheap—to chat through your computer.

Services such as Vonage have a range of plans and options to explore. Vonage subscribers can use a USB plug-in phone (right) to connect from almost anywhere. Plans start at \$14.99 per month; [vonage.com](http://vonage.com).



### WEB CAM

Many PCs come with cameras built in, but they’re also easy enough to add on. We liked the ease of the LifeCam NX-3000 camera that plugs into any USB port and clips easily to most any laptop. Optimized to work with Windows Live Messenger. \$60 from Microsoft; [microsoft.com/hardware](http://microsoft.com/hardware).



### CREATIVE CDS

Digital images make it easy to create CD scrapbooks. Or add sound instead: For his son, Justin, Dion McInnis burned personally meaningful songs onto a CD such as “Father and Son” by Cat Stevens, “Child’s Song” by Tom Rush, and “With Arms Wide Open” by Creed. Sites such as [Rhapsody.com](http://Rhapsody.com) and [iTunes.com](http://iTunes.com) offer inexpensive access to thousands of songs.

