

FAMILY COMMUNICATIONS EXPECTATIONS AGREEMENT

(To be completed by Family members and Students. Everyone's expectations should be communicated)

1. I would like to communicate _____ times per week.
2. I would like to communicate _____ times per day.
3. I would like to receive:
 - a. Texts
 - b. Phone Calls
 - c. Emails
 - d. Letters/cards
4. I would like to hear/talk about:
 - a. Friends
 - b. Daily Happenings
 - c. Classes
 - d. Activities
 - e. Struggles
 - f. What is happening at home
 - g. Things that have changed at home
5. _____ I would like to feel free to call/text/email just to say hello and check in.
6. _____ I would like to feel free to say I can't talk right now, and I will call you back later. I will commit to remembering to call you back if at all possible that day, and if not that day, the next day. If I am having trouble remembering, I will find an effective system for reminding myself.
7. _____ I will tell you if our communication is too much or not enough and I will be open to discussing ways to change it. I will also tell you if the time of day we are communicating is not working and we will discuss what time works better.
8. Students - If I stop communicating because I am overwhelmed or stressed, I want you to:
9. Family members – If you stop communicating and I am concerned about you, I want to have your OK to submit a Care Report with Pioneers CARE:
www.du.edu/studentlife/studentsupport/pioneers_care/
10. Other things I would like you to know about my preferences for how we will communicate while we are apart:



FAMILY COMMUNICATION

You and your student are used to every day face-to-face contact and now you will be moving to a more sporadic contact probably via electronic devices. It's a major shift for both students and family members. You are giving up control and knowledge about what is going on and students are attempting to pick-up and handle that control on their own. Sometimes it works really well and the handoff looks neat and seamless, and sometimes it is messy, hurtful, and contentious. Aspects of all of these characteristics may occur in one conversation. They are all to be expected and are all okay. It's a complicated endeavor and the handoff can be even trickier when family members have been effectively advocating for their students to a higher degree for many years. For family members in this scenario, the line between advocacy and interference may be difficult to locate. The line is a moving target, changes unpredictably, and is influenced by numerous factors. Navigating the handoff is not an exact science and mistakes will be made. It is doable, however, and can be immensely rewarding. The staff of the LEP is here to support your student and help them move into a place of comfort with their new responsibilities. We are not here to replace you or what you have been providing; we are team members, coaches, and cheerleaders to walk through the college experience with you and your student and all its excitement and challenges.

Many times students and family members have different expectations about how/when/how much they will communicate with each other. Sometimes students may not have time to call. Family members may feel ignored and as if students don't need them, and they may not call as often as a student would like because they don't want to bother them. Agreeing on a communication plan and determining how everyone's needs can best be addressed is something that people often don't think about until problems come up, feelings are hurt, and misunderstandings arise. Discussing expectations while everyone is together minimizes the likelihood of those things happening. Investing the time and energy in that discussion before students are on their own can save time and energy, and can lead to closer, more meaningful and productive relationships in the future.

Instantaneous messages are now part of everyday life and are likely to be exchanged multiple times per day (sometimes per hour). In the early days/quarters on campus, students face brand new challenges multiple times per day as well. Before instant communication became widely used, students would have processing time between the time they bumped-up against difficult situation and the time they communicated their distress. Now, they are able to share it in real time. This scenario, combined with the fact that emotions are often running high in first year students, makes it likely that family members will receive distress messages more frequently than ever. Determining whether an issue is large and needs to be addressed right away, or is a short lived

blip on the radar, is an art, but it is grounded in knowledge you have from your relationship with your student. Developing language and a methodology for communicating the makeup and seriousness of different situations is an important task for both family members and students.

Early on, students encounter things that at other times in their lives would impact them little, if at all. At first, those things may appear to be insurmountable, and reactions to them are frequently exaggerated and amplified. Messages to family members might be exaggerated and amplified, too. If students sit with an issue for a while, identify and access resources, and get some perspective back, they will likely calm down, do what needs to be done, and move on. Family members may be unnerved, flip into crisis mode, and think they need to take action related to an issue that the student has resolved and now sees as a minor annoyance. In the early days/months, emotions of family members are running high, too, and their responses are more likely to be disproportionate to the needs of the student. If students get a chance to develop expertise at taking care of more things for themselves, larger issues that arise may be smaller to begin with, more infrequent, easier to navigate, and less stressful.

Students:

- Sometimes just need to vent. They may not mean everything they say and they just want you to be there. They need a safe space to let everything out. You might be worrying about them afterwards; but they may feel better and have moved on.
- Sometimes just want you to listen – Working through issues out loud with people who are close to them can be very helpful. They may not want advice, they might just want to know you are there and are hearing them.
- Students may understate their distress and really need more help than they are asking for. Sometimes they may not realize how upset they are, or how big a roadblock they are facing. Sometimes they may not tell you something because they don't want you to worry. They may freeze and not be able to reach out and access the resources they need. Encouraging them to talk to you in these situations can help them start to move. Reaching out to their Academic Counselor is always something they can do as well. When students are frozen, they may not see the options they have open to them, and working through those options with Academic Counselors can be immensely helpful.
- Need to figure out how to tell you when things are more serious. Developing ways for your student to let you know whether issues are major or minor is a good investment of time and energy. Doing it when you are together and things are calm makes it easier when things are ramped up and more intense.



- May not want to talk. They may want you to carry the conversation for a while and they just want to listen. They frequently want to hear what is going on at home. You may not think that they will be interested in everyday life at home, but they can feel left out and excluded if too many things change and they don't hear about them.
- May suddenly hate everything about DU. The place that was magical and the most perfect school on earth may all of a sudden seem like an inhospitable wasteland. The honeymoon phase does end, and when the newness and excitement wear off, and they get tired of the classes, food, etc., things may sound bleak. Usually students move through this phase and find a middle ground that is more realistic, balanced, and satisfying.
- May not communicate with you as much as you would like. It doesn't necessarily mean they don't care or that they are struggling. They just might be busy and it could be a good thing, they might be doing things with new friends or busy studying. They will be in touch.
- May get overwhelmed and shut down. They may stop communicating with everyone. Again, it can be very advantageous to have a plan in place if this happens. You might not ever need to use it, but if it's there, it could make a big difference.

Yes, there are contradictions in this list and it is sometimes impossible to give the "right" response, or do the "right" thing. Don't view these times as defeats; it will likely even out and you and your student will find a language, methodology, and balance for communication that is right for you – that's the goal!