



Papers by Yellowbrick Leadership

Six Degrees Of Separation **A Guideline For Parents**

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Emerging adulthood is a period of transition toward increasing autonomy while struggling to define new ways of remaining connected. The family is undergoing a parallel transition of its own. As such, it may be necessary for parents to be open to changes that will occur -changes within your emerging adult as well as within the family relationships. Parents can help by being supportive, trusting, open to reciprocal communication, and encouraging independence. For every step the emerging adult takes, there is a corresponding need for change within the family.

Entering Yellowbrick Residence or Supported Apartment Program may be the first time your emerging adult has lived away from home or lived in an independent setting. Or your emerging adult may have, in the past, attempted college or living on their own and experienced difficulties in managing and regulating their lives. Your son/daughter's involvement at Yellowbrick represents a step toward autonomy and self-management. You, as parents and partners in the treatment, can be an invaluable aspect of that process.

Here are six ways to help your emerging adult help themselves:

Connection: The primary goals, as the emerging adult enters Yellowbrick, are to adjust to living on their own, to connect with the Yellowbrick community, and to engage in the treatment and other productive activities such as school or work. Much time and energy may be expended in the process of this developmental step. The "phone call" may come during a period of being overwhelmed or feeling unable to manage. Initial anxious or tough moments in treatment often are expressed as complaints or accusations about the program that provoke fear and anger in parents. As much as you would like to alleviate the stress, you cannot and should not try to "fix" this for them. Be calm and reassuring about their ability to work through the challenges and to seek help from the support system at Yellowbrick. Speak with the Yellowbrick Family Liaison directly about any concerns being evoked in these communications.

Separation: Accept that, as much as you may have needed to in the past, you won't know the details of your emerging adult's life. Your son/daughter may not have lived away from you before and the opportunity to move toward adulthood and establish autonomy is an important step in their growth. Your emerging adult may need to experience the outcome of their choices and manage this outcome on their own with the support of others in the Yellowbrick community. This may require of you that you find support to manage your own anxiety about the separation. Our family liaison is available to provide support to parents as needed and the Parent Weekends, held on a monthly basis, are an opportunity to meet with others who are parenting emerging adults and may share similar concerns.

Problems: Managing complex problems within society, i.e. dealing with the daily business of life, is a vital part of becoming a competent adult. Empower your young adult to solve problems by offering guidance, expressing confidence in them, encouraging a balance of independence with thoughtful reliance on others for needed support, and trusting their decisions. Handling difficult situations for them only impedes their development and conveys a lack of believing in them as capable of developing their own strategies. They are learning important skills and becoming empowered to undertake other challenges with confidence.

Personalities: Learning to live with other people teaches essential skills like communication and boundary setting. Your son/daughter is living in a setting where the staff is available at all times and understands the multiple challenges of this developmental period. The culture at Yellowbrick urges the emerging adult to deal openly with relationships within the community with support from the staff and peers. Several meetings a week are devoted to the experience of community and the relationships with staff, peers, and others in the Evanston community. Encourage your emerging adult to actively work through issues instead of avoiding, looking for easy solutions, or fleeing. Help your emerging adult to seek solutions that will enhance their growth and learning.

Responsibilities: Rules and structure are a part of any setting that your emerging adult may experience. Learning accountability for their actions and conduct is an important aspect of life at Yellowbrick and an important tool for managing responsibility in the future. The Yellowbrick agreements and policies are designed to provide for their safety, health, and security as well as assist in self-regulation, engagement in treatment, and neurobiological growth.

The Treatment: Your son/daughter is involved in an intensive treatment program. Days are often long and can be exhausting. Outside of IOP programming, there are many activities designed to promote community, provide cultural and fine art experience, enhance living skills and have some down time and fun. The weekends are less rigorously scheduled but developing the skills to be alone with oneself and to be an active agent in life are an important aspects of the program at Yellowbrick. It is also a time in which grocery shopping, caring for the apartment, and other tasks may be completed. It is important to take the cues from your emerging adult in regard to time spent at home and family obligations. Often, the emerging adult will need a period of separation in order to work on building autonomy, a stronger sense of self, and the skills of self-expression and self-declaration. The ultimate goal of the separation process is relational autonomy - to become able to achieve and affirm independence and self governance while maintaining close and mutually validating relationships.

Six degrees of Separation can be guidelines for providing support to your emerging adult as they work toward increasing autonomy. Yellowbrick is here to provide support to you, as well. Please contact us with any concerns or questions.