

A resource for when your academics don't go as planned



Sneak peeks of what you'll find in this resource:

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SITUATION

What's going on? What are the challenges and emotions at play? Let's get some clarity before we take action. p. 02

THE FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE

Cultural, personal, and economic factors contribute to how your family may respond. p. 02

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

Ideas for following up with your family when they are ready. And of course, be mindful of your own mental health! p. 04

TIPS FOR APPROACHING THE CONVO WITH CONFIDENCE

We want to provide you with practical suggestions to feel equipped and prepared to talk to your family. Take a look at these ideas and see which ones fit your situation. p. 03

MYTHS ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

In a complicated education system, it's challenging to sift through which messages are true and which are false! Here's some info for you and your family, to ease some of the stress and bring accurate information to light. p. 04

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SITUATION

We understand that life happens. When academics don't go according to plan, you may find yourself in a tough spot when explaining it all to your family.

Maybe you find yourself in a situation such as:

- Enrollment has been barred
- Changing majors because you want to, or due to eligibility criteria
- Academic probation or subject to disqualification
- Expected timeframe for graduation has changed
- Mental health challenges are impacting your academics

Before breaking the news to your family, it can be helpful to gain some clarity on your situation.

Questions to consider:

- What emotions do you feel about talking to your family?
- Have you talked to anyone in your family about difficult things in the past, and if so, how did it go?
- What are some of the challenges AND positives that may come from these changes in your plan?
- What questions would you like to ask an adviser or counselor before talking to your family?

*"Change is inevitable.
Growth is optional."
-John Maxwell*



THE FAMILY'S PERSPECTIVE

putting yourself in their shoes

Imagine being in your family's position when you tell them about changes in your academic plans. Depending on cultural context, personality, and family dynamics, each family may need something different as they listen to your news. Here are a few ideas:

- Clarify your situation and explain any complicated terms. Breaking it down can be helpful in lessening confusion.
- Allow your family time to accept that you are an adult and can make your own decisions.
- Talk about money. Reassure your family that you have thought about the financial implications of these changes.
- Reframe the myth that education is linear. "Start college, get straight As, graduate, get a high paying job." That is not how it works for the majority of college students. Help them understand that your journey is unique and valuable (see tips on p. 3).
- Bring your family in. If you feel comfortable, tell them your honest thoughts, concerns, and excitement, so that they feel included in the process.

While these needs and challenges are valid, remember that your family wants the best for you. Beyond needing something from you, your family likely has something to offer you, such as:

- Your community and support system, especially during difficult times in your life.
- A non-academic space for you to exist. Your family can be a reminder that there is more to life than just school.
- Your motivation for being in college. Whether due to their stories up to this point, or because you simply want to make them proud, let that energy spur you on!

Our hope is that you are empowered to empathize with your family's needs, while at the same time finding the support you need and making your voice heard.

TIPS FOR APPROACHING THE CONVO WITH CONFIDENCE

In order to feel confident and calm, you'll want to set yourself up for the most productive, positive conversation possible. Here are some suggestions of what to say and do:

- **Ask for a distraction-free conversation.**
 - "Can we turn the TV off? I need to talk to you about something important."
 - "I'm going to leave my phone on the table while we talk, could we all do the same?"
- **Normalize the situation for your family.**
 - "I'm not the only student going through this; it's very normal. Many students are able to come back after taking a break."
 - "This isn't me failing or dropping out, but rather doing what I need to reach my ultimate goal, which is to graduate with a degree!"
- **Be clear, not ambiguous.**
 - "I have to leave UCSC for 2 quarters, due to my grades from the past year." NOT "I think I might need to leave UCSC or something, I'm not sure..."
 - "I have been struggling with my mental health, and it has impacted every part of my life this quarter."
- **Explain lingo and terms.**
 - "'Good Academic Standing' means a student has a 2.0 GPA or higher. I need to earn Cs or better in all of my classes to be in good standing."
 - "When I say I want to be an 'Anthropology' major, that means I want to do research about how people function in different cultures around the world."
- **Focus on the positive next steps you are taking.**
 - "In order to address my mental health, I am planning to attend counseling."
 - "I am going to attend community college next year and then return to UCSC."
 - "I will start taking classes for my new major this coming year, and I'll be ready to graduate after my fifth year."
- **Empathize with their worries, rather than being defensive.**
 - "It's understandable that you are worried. I don't take this lightly, and I know you might need some time to process."
 - "I can see where you are coming from, and I'm more than happy to talk about your concerns."
- **Check for understanding, and allow them to ask questions.**
 - "I have been working with my college advisers--have I told you about them?"
 - "Would you like me to explain a bit more about what academic probation means?"
 - "Great question! I'm not sure about that but let's google it. I can also reach out to an adviser to find out."
- **Tell them how they can support you moving forward.**
 - "Having your encouragement about going to counseling would mean the world to me."
 - "While I'm living at home this year, I would love to have an agreement around when I will be studying and when I will be helping out with the family."
 - "It's really important that I have your unconditional support."
- **Use facts and data.**
 - "Looking at the requirements on this job posting, my major would prepare me for the career I want to pursue."
 - "More than half of students nationwide and at UCSC change their major at least once in college, so I'm actually part of the norm."

"What boundaries do I need to put in place so I can work from a place of integrity and extend the most generous interpretations of the intentions, words, and actions of others?"
-Brene Brown

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

Following the initial communication with your family, what's next?

SUPPORTING YOUR FAMILY

If your family's response was positive, ask some follow-up questions right away. If they seem overwhelmed or resistant, thank them for talking and ask to touch base in a few days.

Remember, you've had time to think about this, whereas your family may be processing the news for the first time. Patience is key. Here are some follow up questions to ask your family:

- How did it feel to hear the news?
- What information do you need to help you better understand my situation?
- Would you like to take some time to think, and talk about this more tomorrow?
- What concerns do you have?
- What are your biggest hopes and dreams for me?

SUPPORTING YOURSELF

In the midst of stress, your own mental health is a priority. Sometimes when your goals and plans change, it can feel similar to a grieving process. Be attentive to your own needs. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Going to counseling, to talk about family dynamics and how it is affecting you
- Confiding in friends, mentors, or other people you trust
- Writing down your emotions
- Release stress and energy by taking a walk or run
- Meditation
- Positive self-talk (It's powerful to remind yourself that getting an education is a process and you are capable of succeeding!)



MYTHS ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION

We've all absorbed myths about how higher education works -- and our families have too. Offering accurate information will calm your family's worries and debunk some of the widespread misunderstandings about the education system.

Myth: You must choose a major and stick with it forever.

Truth: More than half of students nationwide (and at UCSC) change their major at least once in college.

Myth: You must earn a biology degree to work in healthcare.

Truth: Getting into grad school for health care is a holistic process. Students need a strong GPA in any undergraduate major and the prerequisites for the post-grad program.

Myth: Going to community college is a waste of time.

Truth: By taking general education requirements or major classes at a community college, you can get closer to completing your UCSC degree, and save some money!

Myth: Everyone graduates in four years.

Truth: While our goal is to help students graduate efficiently, everyone's path is different. It is very common for students to take more than four years to complete a bachelor's degree.

Myth: Bachelor's degree = get job and make money!

Truth: Getting a college degree is about a lot more than making money. We hope students learn about themselves, their goals, and the world. Also, it can take time to find a job after college, especially one that pays well and that is in the person's field of study. Campus resources can help with this.

BRAINSTORM WORKSHEET

write down your thoughts before approaching your family

Positive, productive communication requires preparation. Particularly if this kind of communication is new to you & your family, it is important to practice. Getting your thoughts down on paper is also helpful for gathering your composure and feeling more in control.

1. Write down a brief summary of what you want to share:
2. What are your goals? What steps are you taking to move toward your goals?
3. What questions do you anticipate your family will ask you? What responses would you have to these questions?
4. Review the tips on page 3. Which ones stick out to you as most helpful?
4. Anything else you want to communicate? Write it down so you don't forget!