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How to help your college grad move on to the career phase of their adult life

By Kathleen Furore
Careers Now

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DEAR READERS: A friend told me that his recent college graduate is having a hard time deciding what his next move should be. He thinks his 22-year-old is having a tough time accepting that his school career has come to an end and that he now has to make some decisions about where his life is headed. What are some steps parents can take to help their young adult children move on to the career phase of their lives?

Taking that plunge into the next chapter of life is one fraught with uncertainty, and often anxiety, for students who have been in the somewhat protected cocoon of school, surrounded by people their own age. And that anxiety ultimately can hit parents trying to help their adult kids cope.

“The transition from college to the next phase of adulthood can be hard. College provides many opportunities for learning, socializing and new experiences,” says career coach Beth Hendler-Grunt, founder and president of Next Great Step and author of [“The Next Great Step: The Parents’ Guide to Launching Your New Grad Into a Career.”](#)

“Your grad comes home, unloads a ridiculous amount of stuff, and needs a well-deserved break from the stress of school, exams, and dealing with the pandemic for the last few years. But then the feeling sets in...your grad is struggling to cope with the end of their school career and needs to plan for their next step.”

While the way parents ultimately handle the situation will depend on their relationship with their offspring, there are a few steps they can take to get the ball rolling, Hendler-Grunt says.

Ask questions and listen. “Ask them what they are thinking about or have in their mind about the search process,” she advises.

Help them clarify their skill set. Telling a son or daughter to just start calling and applying for jobs might be your first instinct. But as Hendler-Grunt notes, young adults often don’t know themselves well enough to understand the skills they need to highlight in a job search.

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“They might say, ‘Well, I’m hard working and I’m responsible,’” Hendler-Grunt says. “Instead, help them home in on what they know how to do. Are they analytical? Are they great writers? Creative? Problem solvers? Help them figure out what that is. And help them pick their top three skills.”

Encourage networking. Suggesting they reach out to alumni, who tend to be receptive to speaking with grads, is one approach parents can take. “[Point out that] LinkedIn is a great platform to access alumni,” Hendler-Grunt says. “When speaking with an alum they should ask questions, seek common ground, be curious, and be willing to learn.”

If the networking includes a parent’s friend or colleague who might be able to lead them to a job, the parent should make sure their son or daughter knows something about the person they’ll be meeting.

“Referrals are great. However, your grad needs to be prepared when meeting anyone you may introduce them to,” Hendler-Grunt stresses. “All too often parents make introductions, and the kids blow it because they were too casual and thought mom or dad would take care of things. Referrals with preparation have the most success.”

Stress professionalism. Hendler-Grunt says a hiring executive once told her that it takes five minutes to make an impression and two seconds to get rid of it. That’s why parents should remind their graduates the importance of making good eye contact and showing appreciation for the meeting, she says. “They also should be dressed professionally — even if the video call or workplace they are visiting is casual,” she adds. “Be sure they clean up their social media profile in case the employer decides to ‘Google’ them. And most importantly, they should send a thank-you note 24 hours after every meeting.”

Helping a recent graduate take that step from student to full-fledged working adult isn’t easy. But as stressful as it might be, parents have to let their son or daughter work through the process and realize it takes time, patience, and perseverance to resolve. Offering support and being a “sounding board” are the best things parents can do.

“Giving them an opportunity to move forward and to realize successes and/or failures is what they need for their future independence,” Hendler-Grunt concludes.

(Kathleen Furore is a Chicago-based writer and editor who has covered personal finance and other business-related topics for a variety of trade and consumer publications. You can email her your career questions at kfurore@yahoo.com.)