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### When Students First Leave Home, It Can Affect Everyone

Tonya Lemens

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Most of us worry about how our students will adjust to college life the first time they leave home. But other family members may feel mixed emotions, too.

# When Students First Leave Home, It Can Affect Everyone

*Most college students experience some homesickness the first time they move away from home. But the siblings and parents who remain behind may also be affected. Two St. Norbert parents share insights they’ve gleaned after their children left home for the first time.*

*Tonya Lemens is the mother of Tyler Lemens ’19 and Jonathan Lemens ’21. She and her husband, Greg, also have a daughter, Ashley, who will be a senior at Green Bay’s Notre Dame Academy this fall.*

When I dropped Tyler off at orientation, where he was going to stay the night, I drove home and cried the whole way. We only live 20 minutes away, and he wasn’t even going to college yet!

When Tyler was gone, it was a huge change and an adjustment for all of us. You’ve had them for 18 years, and suddenly they’re not there on a day-to-day basis. You worry they’ll be OK, that they know how to do the laundry, etc.

Tyler and Jon are very close. We had separate bedrooms in the house for them, but they shared a room anyway. They liked being together. I could tell Jon was upset after Tyler left. He was moody and more upset with us. So I’d text Tyler to reach out to his brother and say hi. Sometimes all it takes is a text message to totally change their sibling’s mood.

When Tyler came home the first time, he would go out with his friends. His siblings were offended. They’d say, “Hey, he should be spending time with me!” Or, “He’s always gone.” I’d say, “He’s in college now. He’s busy.”

When Jon left for SNC, Ashley wanted to move into the boys’ bedroom. I said, “No, it’s their room.” I think it helps their homesickness to keep things the same. But sometimes Ashley would go into the boys’ room to do her studying and would accidentally leave something in there. Then they’d come home and be like, “Why is this in here?!”

It helps that we only live 20 minutes away. Sometimes Tyler would ask his siblings to come over and eat with him. That was nice. Even this past year, Ashley would sometimes have dinner, then study with them in the library.

When it was just Ashley here, it was like she was an only child. She eventually liked it when they went back to campus, as much as she loved them, because she got used to her privacy. She took over the bathroom, and when they’d come back home she’d tell them to keep it nice.

The first year my boys went away to college, I missed them so much. The second year, I thought, “I can do this.” By the third year, I thought, “When are they going back to college?!”



## It’s Normal to Be Homesick

It’s common for students to feel lonely the first time they leave home. A **2016 survey** by UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute found nearly 75 percent of students felt lonely or homesick the first time they were away from home. Students can combat loneliness by joining study groups or clubs, exploring and familiarizing themselves with the campus, and understanding that homesickness is normal.

### Also in This Issue

This article first appeared in the August 2019 issue of Parents of St. Norbert College. Other features in this edition included:

**Green Knights Give Move-In Intel**

**SNC’s Career and Professional Development Hub Offers Resources for All Four Years of College – and Beyond**

**When Students First Leave Home, It Can Affect Everyone**

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Nancy Nolan is the mother of Nina (Nolan) Rouse '07 (Office of Communications), Jonathan Nolan (Marquette University 2012), Chloe Nolan '18 and Lucas Nolan '22.

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When Nina left home, she was pretty homesick, so we were sad. Plus, she helped so much around the house, there was really a void when she was gone. She was almost a second mom to the younger kids.

Nina’s siblings really missed her. Sometimes we’d call her when the younger ones needed help with homework. I’m not very good at advanced math, and I don’t know Spanish!

When Nina left, she lost her bedroom. But it wasn’t a surprise, so she didn’t feel like she was deserted. It’s good to keep your student in the loop about things like this.

With changes in technology, we can now FaceTime with our younger college kids. We also have a family text group. If there’s anything interesting or funny to share, we share it.

The student who comes home for the first time always appreciates it more. You don’t appreciate what you have until you leave.

If I changed something in the house, one of the college kids might say, “Oh, you did this. I don’t know if I like that.”

Our oldest, Nina, [now] lives down the street from us and has two children. So when Chloe left home for St. Norbert, she was leaving not only us, but also Nina’s kids. That was hard.

*Both women remind parents that they know their children better than anyone. If you think your student is struggling, have them reach out. St. Norbert has many people who will speak with students who are worried or stressed. And, in the end, have faith in your student. Your goal is for them to become independent, and, with support from their families and the college, they should be just fine.*

Aug. 20, 2019

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