

Reference Guide to Building Your Social Network to Help the College Transition



This guide helps students and families use social networking portals and websites to support students' transition from high school to college. Building your social network during this stage builds knowledge, confidence and connections that ease academic and social transitions.

Inside

- Why networking matters during the college transition
- Types of networking portals
- How to Find Legitimate Networking Portals
- Making the Most of Networking Opportunities
- Balancing Independence and Support
- Common Challenges and How to Avoid Them
- Role of Schools and Counselors
- Quick Networking Checklist

1. Why networking matters during the college transition

Networking is not just for jobs. It helps you...

- Learn how college systems work
- Get timely and accurate information
- Build peer and mentor support
- Reduce isolation and uncertainty
- Discover academic, financial and career opportunities.

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Effective networking connects families to people, communities and resources.

A. College-Provided Networking Portals

Most colleges offer official platforms that connect students and families to campus communities. Examples include:

- Student portals or engagement platforms
- Communities for admitted students
- First-year or first-generation portals
- Orientation and advising platforms
- Career and alumni networks

These portals connect you with...

- Other incoming students
- Peer mentors
- Advisors and support staff
- Faculty and student leaders

B. Parent and Family Networking Platforms

Many institutions and organizations provide spaces specifically for families. Examples include:

- Family portals
- College-hosted parent/guardian associations
- Family newsletters and listservs (email lists)
- School- or district-based family networks
- Password-protected dashboards for specific groups (like incoming students)
- Discussion boards on websites
- Dedicated social media groups

You can use these platforms to...

- Share experiences and advice
- Ask practical questions
- Learn timelines and expectations
- Build family-to-family support

C. National College Access and Transition Platforms

These platforms operate beyond a single institution. They offer things like...

- College planning communities
- Virtual events and workshops
- Student and parent/guardian discussion boards
- Mentor matching

Who Benefits Most

- First-generation families
- Students attending college away from home
- Families navigating multiple systems

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D. Career and Professional Networking Platforms

While often associated with jobs, these platforms are valuable early. College-bound students can use them to...

- Explore majors and career paths
- Connect with college students or alumni
- Find internships, research and summer programs

Students should focus on learning and exploration, not job-seeking pressure.

E. Community-Based and Local Opportunities

Local organizations often provide transition-related networking. Examples include:

- School-hosted parent/guardian nights
- College fairs and admitted-student events
- Nonprofit college access programs
- Faith-based or community groups
- Library or city youth programs

These spaces often feel more personal and accessible.

E. Social Media Groups

These are groups, located in social media platform like Facebook, that students and/or families can join to help them navigate the college transition. Examples include:

- Specific groups for students from the university that they are interested in attending
- Groups on social media platforms that discuss things, either through direct communication or uploading of media content
- Social media groups for parents/guardians to communicate with each other about their students once they have moved to college

These spaces can also feel more personal and accessible.

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3. How to Find Legitimate Networking Portals

Step 1: Start With Official Sources

Look for links through:

- College admissions websites
- Admitted student checklists
- Orientation emails
- High school counseling offices

Sample prompts:

- “[College name] admitted student community”
- “[College name] parent network”
- “[College name] first-year program”

Step 2: Ask Key Questions

Students and parents/guardians should ask:

- Does the college offer a student or family portal?
- Are there peer mentor or ambassador programs?
- Are there first-generation or transition programs?
- How do families stay connected after enrollment?

Step 3: Verify Before Joining

To avoid misinformation:

- Prefer school-sponsored or nonprofit platforms
- Check privacy policies
- Avoid sharing sensitive personal information
- Confirm that opportunities are free or clearly explained

4. Making the Most of Networking Opportunities

Tips for students

Join early, even before classes start
Introduce yourself with curiosity, not pressure

Ask questions others may be afraid to ask
Attend virtual or in-person events
Follow up respectfully

Good starter questions:

- What do you wish you knew before starting college?
- How did you choose your major?
- What campus resources helped you most?

Tips for Parents and Families

Join parent or family networks with student awareness

Listen more than advise

Share experiences without comparison

Encourage independence while staying informed

Use networks for reassurance, not control

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6. Common Challenges and How to Avoid Them

Challenge: Information overload

- Prioritize official communications
- Use a calendar to track events

Challenge: Misinformation

- Cross-check advice with official sources
- Ask staff or other experts when unsure or something doesn't sound right

Challenge: Comparison Stress

- Every college journey is different
- Focus on fit and progress

7. Role of Schools and Counselors

Schools can support families by:

- Sharing verified networking resources
- Hosting transition-focused networking events
- Teaching digital literacy and portal navigation
- Encouraging family-to-family and peer connections

8. Quick Networking Checklist

- I joined the admitted student or orientation portal
- I identified peer or mentor opportunities
- I found a parent or family network
- I attended at least one networking event
- I saved key contacts and resources

Final Takeaway

Networking during the college transition helps you find connection. It helps you learn information you need. And it helps you gain and give support. It is not about competition.

This guide can be adapted for workshops, advising sessions or family handouts

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