

Choosing a College and Setting up College Living

We were very excited at our child's interest in attending college. We encouraged him to apply to whatever schools interested him within a 1 ½ hour travel radius of our home. Living in New Jersey provided him with many schools to choose from. We also asked him to apply to a few schools which he could commute to daily if his medical condition did not allow him to live on campus. Here are a few tips on choosing a college with your child and setting up his/her new life at college:

1. Should your child live on campus or commute? Ask your child what he or she wants to do. Is your child independent enough to live away from home? How severe is your child's CF and what medical treatment will be necessary for routine maintenance? Do you want the child to be within a certain travel time from the house so you can get there to help if necessary? Our son chose a college about one hour from our home. He lives in a college dorm yet is close enough to home when the need arises.
2. Where is the nearest CF Center? There were no CF centers near my son's school so we chose to keep him at RWJ. We schedule his routine appointments during his college breaks. When sick, we pick him up and drive him to RWJ. The local hospital near college treats him for other issues, but we've learned that they just aren't experts in CF. You may want to find a local physician who is willing to work with your CF center when your child is sick. Your CF center can also link you to a CF center close to your child's school for sick visits or wellness care while he/she is away. The bottom line is to always have a plan in place for when your child is sick.
3. Does your health insurance provide coverage for your child at this location?
4. Once you've narrowed down college choices contact the Health Services Office and the Office of Disability Services and ask the following questions:
 - a. Do they have a health center and what type of services do they provide? Speak directly to the director. Do they do PICC line maintenance, etc.
 - b. Is there a local pharmacy and can medications be delivered to your child?
 - c. How will the mail room handle drug deliveries from mail order pharmacies? Is there an alternate way for your child to get his medications delivered?
 - d. Discuss accommodations for your child's special needs. There are no 504's or IEPs in college but you can request accommodations and your student will still be protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act. What type of documentation needs to be in place to ensure your child's needs are met? Seek legal and medical counsel if necessary to ensure documentation is complete and accurate. Ask the social worker at your CF center to help prepare a medical letter requesting certain accommodations. Be very specific and include items such as single room/private bath, air conditioning, early registration for classes, etc.
 - e. What is the college's policy on missed classes etc? Will your child be penalized?
 - f. What type of housing does the college offer? How big is campus and how far will your child have to walk to class or the cafeteria? Will your child need assistance?

Work closely with your child to determine the best "fit" for a healthy and positive college experience. All kids with CF should be able to go to the college of their choice and there are systems in place to help them be successful. Involve your CF care team. They can help prepare you and your child for the transition and anticipate what you will need.