

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm going to college next fall on a partial academic scholarship. Even though I'm going to a state school, the tuition, room, and board are still a lot of money. My mother is working two jobs to make sure that she can cover these costs while my father – who I haven't seen since I was six years old and who has a lot more money than we do – says my college education is not his responsibility since it was never part of their divorce settlement. I feel very grateful for my Mom, but the problem is that I feel guilty about her having to work so hard. I've offered to stay out of school next year, get a job, and try to help with the money but there is no guarantee that I'll get the partial scholarship if I do that. I've talked with her about financial aid, but she says she doesn't want me to finish college with a boatload of loans to pay back. Mom says that my education is the most important thing to her, and that she wants to make sure I get a good one. Do you have some ideas about how I can feel better about all this?

-- Melinda

Dear Melinda,

It's refreshing to hear feelings of gratitude expressed. More often, I get letters from people who are feeling annoyed that they can't get something more, better, or different from someone else. I admire your mother's values, and I agree with her that a good education or professional or technical training are the best ways for young people – or anyone for that matter -- to get ahead in life. In fact, without a higher education or skills, most people will always suffer financially, and have to work extra hard to even stay ahead of the bills. Did you know that over a working lifetime, the typical college graduate earns about 75 percent more than a high school grad does? Still, college is an expensive proposition for most families. Total expenses for the 2004-05 academic year shot up 7.8 percent to \$11,354 at the average public college, and at private institutions costs jumped 5.6 percent to \$27,516.

I'm sorry that your father is using a "technicality" of the divorce settlement to abdicate his responsibilities as a parent. One would hope that he, like your mother, would be concerned enough about your future to help as much as he could. Enough about him, though.

Make sure that your mother knows how much you appreciate her support for your education. Do what you can – while you are still at home – to make her life easier. For example, I don't know a soul who wouldn't enjoy coming home to a nice dinner or a clean house, especially after they have been working two jobs. Take responsibility for some of those kinds of things. Do you have time in your schedule – while still keeping up good grades -- for a part-time job?

There may be ways that you can contribute to the college fund. Be simple in your acquisitions. The less you spend, the more there is left to cover tuition and other costs. This doesn't mean going without the things you need, but it might mean delaying some of

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the things you want. When it comes to material things, many people don't see the difference between "needs" and "wants." Don't be one of them.

Appreciate your mother also as an example of hard work and a resolute focus on goals. Make your success in college worth every penny it costs. Work hard and earn the best grades you can. This does not mean to be perfect or a straight-A student in every class. What it does mean is doing your level best in all that you undertake.

If you can swing it, consider a part-time job while you're away at school to cover some of your living expenses. However, only take on this additional responsibility if you can perform at your best in your classes – that's why you're there. Don't feel guilty. I'm certain that given the excellent values you have learned at your mother's knee, you would do the same thing she is doing for your own daughter or son.

Don't forget about Mom next year. Regularly email, call, or send her cards to let her know how much you are learning and growing from your experiences at school. Express your gratitude directly, and from your heart. And when you give that valedictorian speech at your graduation, start it with: "This day would not be possible without the loving support of my mother..." Believe me, the tears you see in her eyes will be tears of joy.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.

