

## **Coping with College Series**

### **Developing a Self Identity**

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College students face many personal and professional tasks and challenges. One of the more difficult tasks is the development of self identity. When we were younger, our sense of identity was often related to who our parents or caretakers expected us to be. By the time most people reach early adulthood, we have become aware of how much our parents or other role models influence who we are. This awareness can be both satisfying and frightening. We can certainly feel proud if we are living up to our parents expectations, but it can be frustrating if pleasing others compromises our identity.

For many people early adulthood is a time to begin to forge an identity which is unique. This process often involves becoming more independent, separating from family, and defining one's own individuality. Although a typical process for most people, this separation and individuation period is often fraught with a variety of challenges. At times parents or caretakers have a difficult time allowing the natural separation to occur. This can be especially true if one's emerging self identity is in conflict with parental expectations. The development of one's identity can also be complicated by our peer group. Have you ever had an opinion or perspective that was different from your friends? Of course you have, but having the confidence and assertiveness to communicate your opinion can sometimes be quite difficult. Thus, some people regularly choose to say and do what is expected of them by others. If this becomes a pattern, it can be quite difficult to establish your own unique identity.

There are several strategies that can make the process of determining one's self-identity easier. First, allow yourself opportunities to self reflect about what is important to you and what kind of person you want to be. Second, involve yourself with different friends and activities so that you can get an idea of what you like and what you don't like. Third, practice communicating assertively regarding who you are and what you believe. Finally, realize that other people who have good intentions may be disposed to tell you how you should think, feel, and act. However, know that only you can decide who you want to be as a person. For more information or assistance in the process of identity development, contact Student Counseling Services at 438-3655.