

DORM MOVE-IN / COLLEGE TRANSITION - COMPLETE GUIDE (TEENS 17-19 YEARS)

College move-in combines roommate stranger anxiety, dorm sensory overload (cinderblock echo, shared bathroom sounds, trash chute noise), twin XL bed confusion, cafeteria noise and smells, and total independence panic. Many teens shutdown before move-in day even arrives. This guide front-loads: accommodations office contact (Week - 4), roommate expectations email (Week -2), sensory dorm kit ordered ahead (Week -1), campus map memorized, and meltdown recovery protocols locked in.

WHY COLLEGE MOVE-IN FEELS TERRIFYING

Move-in day triggers cascading sensory and social overwhelm: unfamiliar roommate small talk, dorm sounds (echoing hallways, shared bathrooms, trash chute slamming), fluorescent lighting, no personal space, cafeteria chaos, and zero control over environment. Many teens experience first major meltdown on move-in day or Week 1. Proactive setup and sensory-first planning prevents crisis.

Sensory + Executive + Social Profile Checklist

Challenge Area	What It Feels Like
Social Anxiety	Roommate small talk, RA meetings, floor meetings, stranger proximity, dorm life expectations
Environmental	Dorm cinderblock echo, shared bathroom sounds, trash chute roar, fluorescent lights, no quiet zones
Physical	Twin XL bed falling off (different dimensions), concrete floors amplify sound, no personal space, tight quarters
Executive Function	Laundry schedule, meal plan navigation, class registration, dorm rules, mailroom logistics
Food/Nutrition	Cafeteria smell overload, limited protein options, dining hall lines, food sensitivities, meal timing

PRE-MOVE PREPARATION TIMELINE

Week -4: Accommodations Office Contact

Email your college's disability office NOW (even before move-in packet arrives):

Subject line: "Autism Spectrum Disorder - Housing and Testing Accommodations Request"

Body:

"I am an incoming [freshman/transfer] student with documented autism spectrum disorder. I have been approved for accommodations including extended test time and quiet testing environments. For residential housing, I would like to discuss: quiet residential options, single or compatible roommate match, academic accommodations communication. Please let me know next steps for documentation and scheduling. Thank you."

Why this works:

- Gets you on disability office radar early
- Allows time for housing adjustment requests
- Some colleges honor reasonable requests (quiet dorms exist)
- Establishes official documentation before move-in crisis

What to send:

- Copy of your current IEP or diagnosis letter
- List of accommodations currently using
- Housing preference (if requesting specific dorm type)

Week -2: Roommate Expectations Email

When roommate contact info arrives, email them immediately (don't wait):

Subject line: "Hi! Excited to be roommates—a few quick preferences"

Body:

"Hi [Roommate name],

I'm really looking forward to meeting you! I wanted to share a few things that help me do my best:

Quiet study time: I focus best with quiet evenings, especially 8 PM–11 PM. Headphones work great for both of us!

Clean shared spaces: I'm happy to keep our shared spaces neat. I respect personal space—your stuff is your space, mine is mine.

Sleep schedule: I sleep best with lights out by midnight. Does that work for you?

Guest visits: I'm fine with occasional roommates having friends over—just a heads-up the day before helps me prepare.

I'm excited we're going to live together. Let me know if you have preferences too!

Thanks,

[Your name]"

Why this email matters:

- Sets expectations BEFORE move-in (prevents Week 1 conflicts)
- Frames autism needs as "preferences," not diagnosis
- Gives roommate chance to self-select out (or buy in early)
- Shows you're considerate and communicative

Week -1: Sensory Dorm Kit Ordered

Order and ship to campus or home (to arrive before move-in day):

Essential items:

Bed Setup:

- Twin XL fitted sheets (practice putting them on at home first—different dimensions cause panic)
- Weighted blanket 15 lb (reduces anxiety, regulates sleep)
- Body pillow (fills dorm bed emptiness, creates physical boundary)

Noise Management:

- White noise machine (drowns dorm sounds, creates sensory predictability)
- Earplugs (silicone, moldable, not foam—more comfortable for sensory kids)
- Noise-canceling headphones (for study hours and overwhelm breaks)

Lighting:

- Blackout curtains (dorm curtains are thin; darkness helps sleep)
- Red nightlight (circadian friendly, doesn't disrupt sleep like blue light)
- Dimmable desk lamp (fluorescent overhead lights cause sensory pain)

Food & Nutrition:

- Protein powder tub (whey or plant-based, depending on preference)
- Protein bar stash (RXBars, CLIF bars—nut allergy warning)
- Electric kettle (makes protein oatmeal in dorm, fills time during overwhelm)
- Instant rice packets (quick protein delivery)

Organization:

- Clear plastic bins labeled (under-bed storage, visual organization reduces executive load)
- Desk organizer (pens, chargers, medications in one spot)
- Label maker (reduces "where is X" anxiety)

Day -1: Campus Map + Parking Pass**Before you arrive:**

- Download campus map to phone
- Highlight 5 critical locations:
 1. Disability/accommodations office (first stop)
 2. Quietest library floor (scout before Week 1)
 3. Best cafeteria protein options (mapped)
 4. Shuttle stops (timed for class schedule)
 5. Laundry room with least crowd (ask current students on college forum)
- Memorize walk from dorm to classes (reduces first-week navigation anxiety)
- Secure parking pass if driving
- Confirm move-in time slot (some schools have staggered times—earlier is better)

MOVE-IN DAY VISUAL SCHEDULE

Print this and follow it step-by-step. Tight timeline prevents overthinking.

text

7:00 AM – Protein breakfast + morning medications

→ Eat before car ride (prevents low blood sugar on arrival)

8:00 AM – Load car + depart for campus

→ Sensory kit packed first (so it arrives first)

→ Phone fully charged

9:00 AM – Arrive campus, park assigned spot

→ Unload car methodically (20 minutes max)

→ Sensory kit IN dorm room first (not last)

9:30 AM – Make bed

→ Fitted sheet practice pays off now

→ Weighted blanket on (psychological comfort)

→ Body pillow positioned

10:00 AM – Desk organization (essentials ONLY)

→ Chargers, medications, lamp

→ Don't unpack entire suitcase yet

→ Clear surface = clear mind

10:30 AM – Roommate introduction

- Use script (see below)
- 5 minutes max (no extended small talk)
- Exchange phone numbers

11:00 AM – Accommodations office check-in

- Drop off paperwork
- Confirm accommodations approved
- Ask campus shuttle questions

12:00 PM – Cafeteria protein scout

- Don't eat full lunch (nervous stomach)
- Find 2–3 protein options you can eat
- Identify quieter dining times (early lunch = fewer people)

1:00 PM – Campus quiet walk (alone)

- 20 minutes to sensory reset
- Headphones on, music off
- Walk from dorm to 1 classroom building
- Establish "quiet spot" muscle memory

2:00 PM – Parent departure

- Hug, no lengthy goodbye
- Parent text: "Made it safe. Call this weekend."
- Focus on dorm setup

2:30 PM – Rest in dorm (no more unpacking)

- White noise on, lights off
- 30 minutes horizontal recovery
- Protein shake, water

4:00 PM – Light unpacking (socks, underwear, easy stuff)

- Don't force it all on Day 1
- Tomorrow is better for detailed setup

6:00 PM – Dinner at cafeteria (with roommate or quiet corner)

- Grab protein option you scouted
- Sit alone if needed (no shame)
- Early dinner = fewer crowds

8:00 PM – Back to dorm

- White noise on
- Blue light glasses if screen time needed
- No social activities tonight (you're exhausted)

10:00 PM – Bedtime routine

- Teeth brushed, meds taken
- Weighted blanket, body pillow
- White noise on
- Lights off (darkness is your friend)

ROOMMATE INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

Your teen should memorize this brief introduction. It's friendly, clear, not oversharing:

You say:

"Hi! I'm [your name]. Excited to be roommates. I'm a [major] student from [city/state]. I like [2–3 brief hobbies: gaming, reading, hiking]. I'm pretty quiet—I study a lot—but I'm happy to hang out on weekends. How about you? What's your major?"

Why this works:

- Friendly but brief (reduces small talk pressure)
- Frames you as "studious" (explains quiet preference naturally)
- Asks about them (puts focus on them, not you)
- Sets tone: "I'm quieter, but not antisocial"

If roommate is talkative:

"Hey, this is great, but I'm still pretty tired from the drive. Can we catch up later? I want to get settled."

Roommate will understand. Most college roommates expect move-in day to be chaotic.

ACCOMMODATIONS OFFICE SCRIPT

Walk in with documentation. Use this exact script:

You say:

"Hi, I'm [name], incoming [year] student. I submitted accommodations paperwork for autism spectrum disorder. I have approved accommodations for extended test time, quiet testing rooms, and note-taking assistance. Can I confirm those are in my file? Also, do you offer campus shuttle priority or quiet study spaces I should know about?"

Why this script:

- Professional tone (not "I need help")
- Specific accommodations (not vague)
- Ends with practical questions (gets concrete answers)
- Shows you're prepared

What they'll do:

- Verify accommodations in system
- Give you accommodations letter for professors

- Connect you with services (tutoring, disability support)
 - Often offer shuttle priority or dorm accommodations
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CAMPUS MAP ESSENTIALS (Learn Week 1)

Identify and mark these 5 locations:

1. Disability/Accommodations Office

- Address and office hours
- Emergency contact number
- First visit: Week 1 (not Week 8)

2. Quietest Library Floor

- Scout it yourself (go during busy time to find quietest area)
- Test your focus there
- Make it your "home study spot"

3. Cafeteria Protein Options Mapped

- Greek yogurt station location
- Protein bar section
- Salad bar proteins (chicken, eggs)
- Meal times with fewer crowds (call dining for data)

4. Shuttle Stops + Schedule

- Map shuttle routes
- Time each stop from dorm to classes
- Screenshot schedule for phone
- Practice first shuttle ride with parent if possible

5. Laundry Room (Least Crowded Times)

- Ask RAs or current students: "When is it least crowded?"
- Scout at that time

- Identify machines that work best
 - Set phone reminder for laundry day (prevent clothing crises)
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MELTDOWN RECOVERY (If It Happens Move-In Day)

Meltdowns happen. This is the protocol:

1. **Trigger identified:** Roommate awkwardness, sensory overwhelm, or anxiety spike
2. **Immediate action:**
 - Go to dorm room
 - White noise machine ON
 - Weighted blanket ON
 - Earbuds in (no music, just silence)
3. **Parent called** (but NOT to pick up immediately):
 - "I'm overwhelmed. Staying in dorm. Need to reset."
 - Parent: "Okay. 30 minutes rest. You've got this."
 - Protein shake + water consumed
4. **Reset sequence:**
 - 30 minutes quiet (no phone, no talking)
 - Protein snack eaten
 - Campus walk alone (15 minutes to reset sensory)
 - Return to dorm, rejoin normal evening
5. **Resume gently:**
 - Skip dinner at cafeteria (order to dorm if possible)
 - Early bedtime (9 PM instead of 10 PM)
 - No unpacking rest of day
 - Next morning is fresh start

Critical: If meltdown continues, parent can pick up for night and bring back next morning. One night at home doesn't mean college is wrong.

BIOMEDICAL SUPPORT (Pre-Arrival + Week 1)

Transition stress spikes cortisol 300%. Nutrition, sleep, and supplementation prevent crisis.

Pre-Arrival Protein Loading (Week -1)

- **Protein shake every 3 hours** (especially days before move-in)
- Prevents cortisol crash and steadies mood
- Signals body: "This is manageable, nutrition is abundant"

Move-In Day Nutrition

7 AM: Protein + complex carb (eggs + toast, oatmeal + nuts—nut allergy warning)

12 PM: Protein scout + light lunch (Greek yogurt)

3 PM: Protein shake (stress = low blood sugar)

6 PM: Dinner (protein-focused: chicken, fish, tofu)

8 PM: Protein bar or Greek yogurt (evening protein prevents sleep disruption)

Supplement Protocol (Consult Doctor Before Starting)

Magnesium glycinate: 400 mg evening (calms nervous system, improves sleep quality)

Omega-3 fatty acids: 2 g daily (supports mood, brain function under stress)

Probiotic: 10 billion CFU daily (stress → gut dysbiosis; prevention matters)

B-complex vitamin: Morning (supports nervous system and reaction time)

Vitamin D: If deficient (many college kids become deficient—check levels with doctor)

Sleep Non-Negotiable

Target: 10 PM–6 AM (8 solid hours)

- Blackout curtains installed Day 1
- White noise machine on by 10:30 PM
- Blue light glasses if studying late
- No caffeine after 2 PM

- Weighted blanket for melatonin support
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FIRST WEEK SURVIVAL CHECKLIST

Print and check off daily. Gives sense of control and accomplishment.

text

- Day 1: Bed made, desk organized, roommate introduced
- Day 1: Accommodations office paperwork submitted
- Day 1: White noise machine + blackout curtains functional

- Day 2: Accommodations paperwork confirmed in system
- Day 2: Two cafeteria protein options identified
- Day 2: Campus map walk completed (dorm to 1 classroom)

- Day 3: Laundry routine established (day + time identified)
- Day 3: Campus map walk #2 (dorm to another classroom)
- Day 3: Quiet study spot tested in library

- Day 4: Shuttle schedule printed and memorized
- Day 4: Roommate expectations email response received (or neutral)
- Day 4: Phone numbers exchanged with 1 dorm-mate (backup friend)

- Day 5: Classes attended (accommodations confirmed with professors)
- Day 5: First laundry load completed
- Day 5: Protein supply checked (reorder if needed)

- Day 6: Campus shuttle ride practiced with parent (if parent still nearby)

- Day 6: Emergency contact list created (RA, disability office, parents)
 - Day 6: Sensory kit fully organized (everything has a place)

 - Day 7: Scheduled first call with parent (weekend check-in established)
 - Day 7: Reflective assessment of Week 1 completed
 - Day 7: Plan for Week 2 created (no major changes yet)
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PARENT SCRIPTS FOR MOVE-IN DAY

When Arriving at Dorm

You say:

"Bed setup first. Everything else is secondary. Your comfortable sleep space is priority one."

Why it works: Reduces overwhelm by simplifying decisions to ONE task.

When Roommate Shows Up

You say:

"Hi [name]! [Your teen] is excited to meet you. They're settling in. Let's leave them to set up—you two can chat in a bit."

Why it works: Protects your teen from extended small talk on the hardest day.

When Teen Shows Overwhelm Signal

You say:

"Car break. Let's go sit in the car for 30 minutes. No talking. Just quiet."

Why it works: Validates overwhelm as normal, provides immediate relief, normalizes needing breaks.

During Unloading

You say:

"Sensory kit goes in first. Everything else is secondary."

Why it works: Priorities are clear, prevents "where's the weighted blanket" panic at bedtime.

When Saying Goodbye

You say:

"You've handled hard things before. College is just another hard thing. You're prepared. Call this weekend. I'm proud of you."

No long hugs or drawn-out goodbyes. Quick, clear, confident. Your teen will mirror your calm.

MEAL PLAN PROTEIN HACKS

College dining is hit or miss for sensory kids. These hacks ensure protein access:

Hack #1: Greek Yogurt Cup + Protein Powder

- Grab Greek yogurt at breakfast/lunch
- Store protein powder in dorm
- Mix in cup (to-go friendly)
- 30 g protein, minimal prep

Hack #2: Hard-Boiled Eggs

- Dining hall often has them (breakfast or salad bar)
- Ask cafeteria to save a couple
- Keep in mini-fridge (2-day shelf life)
- 6 g protein per egg

Hack #3: Peanut Butter Packets + Apples

- Most dining halls stock both
- Simple, no prep
- Portable for classes
- 8 g protein per 2 tbsp peanut butter
- Nut allergy warning

Hack #4: Canned Tuna/Chicken Packets

- Store in dorm (shelf-stable)
- Eat with crackers or rice

- 20 g protein per packet
- Emergency food if cafeteria feels impossible

Hack #5: Protein Shake Blender Bottle

- Powder + water in bottle
 - Shake at gym or dorm
 - No dishes, minimal attention
 - 25 g protein
 - Keep in backpack for classes
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POST-MOVE-IN REFLECTION (Week 2)

Once Week 1 chaos settles, reflect:

Roommate Compatibility (1–10):

- Are quiet hours respected?
- Do expectations align?
- Is coexistence tolerable?

Accommodations Secured (Y/N):

- Are professors responding to accommodation letters?
- Did disability office provide expected support?
- Are extended test times approved?

Protein Access Confidence (1–10):

- Can you find 3+ protein options daily?
- Is meal prep/storage working?
- Any cafeteria meltdowns?

Campus Navigation Mastery (1–10):

- Can you walk to classes independently?
- Shuttle system understood?

- Quiet spots identified?

Overall Adjustment (1–10):

- How many meltdowns this week?
- Sleep quality improving?
- Feeling slightly more in control?

Use answers to adjust Week 2 plan. Small changes matter.

EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

When to activate each: (Print and keep on phone/dorm wall)

Sensory Overload Hits

Immediate: White noise + weighted blanket + dorm isolation (30 minutes)

Next: Call accommodations office, explain meltdown

Resolution: May request emergency quiet housing, counseling support, or class schedule adjustment

Roommate Conflict Emerges

Do NOT text room conflict complaints to parents (they panic)

DO contact RA (that's their job)

RA will mediate (professional conflict resolution)

If unresolved: Disability office can request roommate change with documentation

Homesickness Hits Hard

Scheduled parent calls: 2x per week maximum (establishes routine, prevents overdependence)

What NOT to do: Skipping classes, isolating, cutting contact, or considering dropping out in Week 2

What TO do: Talk to disability office about counseling; most campuses offer free mental health support

Academic Overload Appears

Don't suffer silently (disability office exists for exactly this)

Email professor with accommodation letter and brief explanation: "I have extended time accommodations approved. How do we implement that for upcoming exam?"

Ask for: Extended test time, quiet testing room, separate time slot, note-taker, or recorded lectures

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