

A Parent's Tale — Preparing for the College Send-Off

By: [Stephany Pedigo](#)

Days ago, I watched our baby girl back out of our driveway in her trusty SUV that once belonged to her grandparents to venture boldly to a new state and new chapter in her life. This fall marks the third and final time we will send one of our precious children off to begin their undergraduate career. We learned a little more with each successive launch. This article takes you along on some of our college adventures as a family and seeks to share some of what we have learned along the way.

Our children have attended large public universities and small private institutions. My husband and I have faithfully and tearfully attended parent orientation for each child. In our experience, parent orientation has things in common, no matter where your child attends school. First, after some lukewarm coffee, you and your child will be directed to a large auditorium where a video will be shown highlighting all the amazing things that await your child at their chosen university. At this point, you will begin weeping, and your child will move further away from you or console you as the case may be. Next, your child and all of the other students will be ushered off to their own orientation. You will be left with even colder coffee, an empty seat next to you, and a mix of emotions you cannot possibly process in the dark auditorium with similarly bereaved parents.

Usually, a speaker will follow the student exodus with some light-hearted banter, and you find that perhaps you will be able to smile and laugh again. Then, out of nowhere, they will hit you with seemingly impossible information. They will tell you that the university can and regularly will communicate with parents regarding tuition payment. However, there is no other information the university will voluntarily share or communicate with parents. “How can this be?” you will think, “they just showed me that video and gave me coffee.”

But you are at an advantage; you are reading this article written by a similarly situated parent from the lens of an estate planning attorney. Listed below are some tools that can assist in granting parental access to student information:

1. **FERPA Waiver:** The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) withholds parental access to important documents such as the student's academic report, financial aid status, student account, and disciplinary records. However, your child may execute a FERPA waiver, granting parents access to this information. Each of our children signed the [FERPA waiver](#), and we have yet to encounter obstacles accessing information.
2. **Health Care Power of Attorney:** Access to health care providers is one area where preparation is essential. When a child turns 18, parents lose access to their child's medical records. Additionally, parents can no longer communicate with their child's health care providers to discuss their child's diagnosis or treatment. To enable you to discuss your child's medical needs with your child's health care provider, your child, who has reached the age of majority, may execute a health care power of attorney. A health care power of attorney allows you or other specified individuals to make medical decisions for your child if your child is unable to do so and, if properly drafted, also serves as a HIPAA release form that grants access to your child's medical records and medical provider.
3. **Durable General Power of Attorney:** This form of power of attorney allows your child to name an agent and empower the agent to act on the child's behalf concerning the child's financial accounts. Assuming your child has named you as the agent, you can assist your child as needed. Of course, you may be hoping to resign from this job as a financial liaison. In this case, encourage your child to name her grandparents for this role. She does, after all, drive their SUV.

So, in the end, it is not as bleak as it sounds. You are more than just a source of tuition payment and, with your child's consent, can continue to have access to her information. Now, go get an actual cup of hot coffee with your child, tell her you love her, and dream of all the adventure that awaits.

For questions regarding parental access or assistance utilizing the tools above, contact [Stephany](#) or a member of our [estate planning](#) team.