

The Blessings of a Skinned Knee, or, “Why Outdoor Education?”

“Didn’t I tell you that I intend to install myself in the dorm room next to my son’s when he starts college?” Thus ended a new middle school RHP mom’s conversation with me about Outdoor Education week parental separation anxiety a few years ago!

Families who have been with us for a while are familiar with my annual “Why Outdoor Education?” monologue. The short version goes something like this: One of the reasons our graduates are so successful in college, along with their top-notch academic preparation, is that we prepare them better than any other school for LIFE at college and beyond. If eighteen year-olds are not prepared for the challenges of sharing a room, doing the laundry, managing their new-found freedom and advocating for themselves—in short dealing solo with life’s daily curveballs—then they never get to the point of being able to properly show off their academic prowess. National statistics still show the rate of graduation from four-year colleges within the four-year period to be as low as 22% of those who start that journey. For our alumni the rate remains approximately four times as high. Actively nudging students outside of their comfort zones as part of our curriculum contributes massively to our alumni’s success.

And it occurs to me now that the same might also be said for us parents. My favorite reading on the subject is Wendy Mogel’s *The Blessings of a Skinned Knee*. If schools and parents are not collaborating to prepare kids for adult independence we are not doing our jobs. But of course it’s more difficult for some than for others to let go. I am sure we’ve all heard the term “Helicopter Parents” to describe those of us who are still treating our 25-year-olds (and hence encouraging them to respond) as children. So, yes, the lessons and experiences of Outdoor Ed week may be as valuable for us as for our children. We provide this service at no extra charge!

And, for the record, she was joking about taking a dorm room next to her son. I know she was joking. I really do!