

# **GSSM Govie Parenting Guide: Tips and Strategies for Supporting GSSM Students**

## **What You Should Expect When Your Child Enrolls at GSSM**

### **Pride in Accomplishments**

As parents and guardians (and members of the immediate and extended family), you can be proud of your child's accomplishments. All of the students at GSSM have distinguished themselves in their home high schools and local communities through their gifts and talents. The attention and support you have given to the task of parenting has made their enrollment at this school possible. Let your Govie know that you are proud of them and that you feel they are ready for the transition and the GSSM Journey.

### **Knowing When to Help**

Along with your feelings of pride, you may also have feelings of anxiety, anticipation, and hope. After you have seen your son or daughter begin his/her journey and you return home, it is sometimes difficult to know when you should become involved and when you should encourage them to handle matters on their own. Recognizing that GSSM is a high school, keeping the lines of communication open is important. You must also understand that your child will grow and change during their time at GSSM. You should anticipate some fluctuation in mood, availability, and needs. Please do not worry as this is not uncommon given their developmental stage and you may have already experienced some of this prior to their enrollment. They might seem dependent at times and very independent at others. Your child may seek your advice and guidance in some decisions and not include you in others. When you experience this behavior, remember that it is all a part of their maturation. Your family has entered a stage in their development called "launching."

Launching (Keys, 2015) involves providing a steady, supportive home base to which students can return, while they attempt to find some independence. Because your family is entering this stage two years early, we at GSSM are committed to partnering with you to ensure appropriate and regular communication and updates. We also welcome you to call when you have questions.

### **The W-Curve and GSSM**

The W-Curve (Zeller & Mosier, 1993) is a predictable pattern of stages that occur when a person experiences culture shock. This research relates to entering a residential high school like GSSM. The stages include the following: honeymoon, cultural shock, initial adjustment, mental isolation (distancing), and acceptance and integration.

The **honeymoon** starts when students are accepted and families begin to receive mailings from the school. There are feelings of excitement and positive anticipation, but it is not uncommon for there to be some anxiety mixed in with the energy of beginning a new journey.

**Culture shock** begins around move-in as acclimating to the new environment begins to set in. Adjusting to roommates and suitemates, learning where to shop, navigating the location of their classes, learning instructors' teaching styles and expectations, and maintaining ties to their home communities are a part of this stage. This is a period of positive change and personal conflict.

**Initial adjustment** occurs after working through the previous stage. Students fall into a routine and gain a sense of control. While there may still be conflicts and challenges, they are developing a rhythm and learning to manage things.

Some students may experience **mental isolation** and begin to distance themselves as they compare their new normal to the culture of home. There may be relapses of homesickness as they feel caught between two worlds. Some may feel that their beliefs and value systems are being challenged and they may have difficulty adapting or integrating to the school's standards. It is important that students figure out ways to integrate their personal values into their GSSM experience. This can be challenging for high school students, but there are individuals within the school to assist them.

The last stage, **acceptance and integration**, can also be interpreted as connectedness. As students become engaged in the life of the school and learn to balance the various aspects of their experience, they begin to feel a connection to the community. They learn to rely on their new home and GSSM becomes an extension of their family.

### **Visiting Your Govie**

Parents are welcome to visit their students as often as you like, but we ask that you be mindful of their class and study schedules. We all enjoy seeing our parental partners on the campus and as you acclimate to not having your child home every day, checking on them periodically is helpful to you and them.

We understand that in addition to missing their immediate and extended families, they also miss their pets. You are welcome to bring your family pets when you visit, but we ask that you not bring them in the building. Only certified therapy animals will be permitted inside. Also note that it is the expectation that pets remain in the care of their owners when on GSSM property and that pet owners clean up after them as necessary.

### **Constructing a Support Network**

Each GSSM student is unique and brings to the Governor's School their own strengths and vulnerabilities. For this reason, each student needs to construct a support network in addition to their parents and extended families. We ask that you encourage this while assuring them that you will always play an integral part in their networks.

**Academic Advising.** All GSSM students are assigned an academic advisor. These faculty members work with their advisees to ensure they are receiving appropriate

guidance in their courses. The registrar, college counselors, and students' instructors also work closely with students to provide support.

**Center for Academic Success.** In 2017, GSSM opened the Center for Academic Success and introduced the Academic Transition Seminar, which is designed to assist students in adjusting to GSSM's rigor by helping them learn and develop strategies to support their success. The Center also coordinates, in conjunction with the academic departments, peer tutoring centers.

**GSSM Faculty.** The faculty at GSSM is committed to the academic success of all students. They are available to work with students outside of the designated class times, and they welcome students to come by their offices if they are having trouble with course material. They also welcome hearing from parents. Email is the best vehicle for communication.

**Residence Life Staff.** Whenever school is in session on the Hartsville campus, a residence life coordinator (RLC) is physically present on the campus. These professionals live in the residence hall with your students and are available to assist you 24 hours a day unless it is a long weekend or other break (e.g. Thanksgiving, Christmas, Winter Break, and Spring Break). Under the leadership of the Dean of Students, RLCs and the resident assistants (RAs) who assist them in managing the residence hall, often have the best perspective on how your child is adjusting to life at GSSM. Every day, someone from the residence life staff will lay eyes on your son or daughter. Please encourage your child to allow these professionals and paraprofessionals to assist them as they adjust to life at GSSM.

**Wellness Counseling.** Rigorous academic coursework for talented high school students brings many opportunities, but not without some stress and challenge. These pressures, coupled with where students may be developmentally are things we have to consider in supporting the success of our students. GSSM offers on-site counseling services. Students are able to access the resources of a licensed mental health professional in a setting that is convenient, comfortable, and completely confidential.

**GSSM Technology.** The Governor's School provides a variety of IT services to meet the instructional technology needs of the school. The department works with faculty, staff, and students to enhance teaching and learning through the infusion of technology across the curriculum and the co-curricular.

**College Counseling and Advising.** Please encourage your child to investigate various college options. While you may have a "dream college" in mind, considering different types of institutions is always beneficial.

Our college counselors begin their work with GSSM students in the spring of the junior year through the College Planning Seminar. The seminar continues into the first semester of the senior year. In addition, individual meetings are held with seniors very early in the fall to assist them in refining their college lists. In most cases, college

applications are completed by December 1<sup>st</sup> of the senior year. This ensures completion before final exams and gives students the chance to relax over the holiday break. Juniors start to meet their college advisor during the second semester of their junior year.

GSSM uses a program called *Scoir* to assist students with the college planning process. Parents will receive an invitation to join and are asked to complete an online questionnaire. Access for junior parents is provided in early spring.

## **Learning to Care for Self**

**Health Services**, coordinated by our Lead Nurse, are provided to all GSSM students. Services include the evaluation and treatment of minor illnesses and the distribution of most medication in keeping with SC state regulations. Our nurses are contracted through our local hospital, Carolina Pines Regional Medical Center, and hours begin at 7:00 a.m. on the week days. The office closes at 11:00 p.m. on Sunday through Thursday and at 11:30 on Fridays and Saturdays. They generally open at 7:30 on Saturdays and 11:00 a.m. on Sundays. To support your students and ensure compliance with DHEC regulations, we require a copious amount of paperwork each year on our students. This, along with health insurance, which is also required, allows us to provide the best possible care for your children.

At this point in your child's life, it is important that they learn to take responsibility for their health and learn the habits of good health maintenance. Education on preventative and wellness strategies for healthy lifestyles is among the services offered. It is also important that students seek medical attention as soon as they start to feel sick or become injured. Referrals to local medical providers are made in consultation with parents when appropriate. Encourage your child to become familiar with services and their insurance information before it is needed and to keep a copy of their insurance cards with them for easy access. We ask that students have access to some money for co-payments and prescriptions in case they become ill. You will be contacted as soon as possible if your child is sent to the doctor for an illness or injury. Because we are a residential school, in some cases, it may be necessary for students to return home to your care to recuperate.

**Wellness Counseling Services** are provided by a licensed mental health professional in a confidential setting. Students seek assistance for a variety of issues, but it is important to note that GSSM is not a therapeutic school. Issues common to high school students include relationship issues, homesickness, stress, anxiety, grief, and depression, along with others. Referrals are made to our wellness counselor by faculty, staff, parents, or other students, but in most cases, students self-refer through the encouragement of their peers or parents.

Some GSSM students come to us already working with counselors in their local communities. We encourage you to maintain those contacts. Students who need counseling beyond what can be reasonably provided by our wellness counselor are

expected to arrange for those therapeutic services in their home communities under the supervision of their parents. This protocol is designed for the safety of the student. It also ensures that the entire family is engaged to support the overall wellness of the student. With your approval, these mental health professionals work closely with our staff to support our students.

In addition to the wellness services provided by our nurses and wellness counselor, it is the philosophy of GSSM to encourage health, positive, emotional, and psychological growth in all of our students. At the Governor's School, seeking assistance and support from members of our wellness team, the residence life staff, or others is a sign of strength, not weakness. We promote seeking help for academic, social, emotional, and residential issues that may arise during students' enrollment. We also encourage parents to be in touch if they become aware of things that need to be called to our attention.

## **Balance, Character, and Self-Discipline**

### **Standards of Conduct**

Your child will become familiar with the patterns of conduct that are indicative of good character and citizenship in this community. GSSM is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for its students. The school's community standards are designed to support community and students' safety and well-being. These standards are intended to assist them in navigating this experience. The *Student Handbook* is the official manual for GSSM students and their families and it provides detailed information on the school's policies, practices, and protocols. We encourage you to consider how these standards and expectations support student success. We are committed to integrity in our processes and in interactions with our students.

While we understand that our students come from different backgrounds and experiences, as a residential school, our community embodies values similar to those of a family. We foster civility, consideration, collective responsibility, and support in addition to personal accountability and respect for ourselves, each other, and all community members. We value diversity, and we are inclusive within the context of a residential high school for underage students.

### **Student Involvement**

Although academic excellence and success are GSSM students' main priorities, we know that they will not fully develop if the experience is not balanced with offerings that support their emotional and character development. To this end, a holistic experience, which includes social, cultural, and physical development, is a part of their educational process at the Governor's School. Engaging in athletic activities, campus life programming, and community service are important parts of their two years at the school.

The co-curricular and experiential are invaluable and critical to a holistic education. Students are expected to improve their abilities to handle various relationships as they

live and interact with people from different backgrounds. They will continue to develop their emotional intelligence along with their leadership, problem solving, and decision making abilities while enrolled at GSSM. These skills are developed and nurtured through participation in athletics, campus committees, clubs and organizations, and service.

The Governor's School provides a vibrant athletic program that is open to all students. Our sports teams are competitive and many Govies try organized sports for the first time at GSSM. Approximately 70% of our students play varsity sports through a program that has garnered a number of state and regional championships in multiple sports.

Participation in the arts is also encouraged and supported for those students who are interested. The Art Studio is a fluid space where students with artistic prowess nurture their talents and other students discover their inner artist. Spending time in the studio serves as a stress reliever for some of our students, and their work is exhibited in various venues throughout the state. Our music program is thriving and our musical groups are often sought after to perform at various activities in the Hartsville community. GSSM's music coordinator offers private lessons and partners with Coker College to support students' participation in their musical groups. Some Govies begin their performance journeys at GSSM, and some audition and participate in State and Region Band and Orchestra.

In addition, an array of programs is offered throughout the year to encourage balance in the lives of our students and to support their growth. They include strategies in managing anxiety and depression, safety and self-awareness, self-advocacy, confidence building, and others. As a community of responsible citizens, GSSM promotes the values of accountability, commitment, compassion, fairness, honesty, respect, responsibility, safety, trust, and wellness. Workshops and other activities often center on student interest and what may be going on in the life of the school at a particular point in the year.

## **Success at GSSM**

### **Recognizing the Difference**

As a member of a community of gifted and talented individuals, Govies will face new and exciting challenges at the Governor's School. Some will discover that even though they had a history of receiving excellent grades at their former high school, top grades are more difficult to earn at GSSM. At first, this may affect their confidence. Students who realize that they may need support may not be comfortable seeking it. Please encourage your child to use the resources that are available to them, which includes the entire GSSM family. Educators who provide instruction inside and outside of the classroom are able to help students explore strategies for handling challenges, but no one can provide more assistance in academic matters than their instructors. Please reinforce that there is no shame in asking for help and that it is nothing to be

embarrassed about. Support and encourage any efforts on your child's part to seek assistance for concerns inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Building Confidence in Their Decisions**

It is essential that you allow your child to accept responsibility for some decisions. Our students must demonstrate a commitment to the academic rigor at GSSM and make choices that reflect their values, dreams, and abilities while aligning with the schools standards of behavior and conduct. Some choices may diverge from your personal vision for them. It may be difficult for you to step back and allow this type of discovery, but know that in most cases, we have found that when parents and other adults expect students to be responsible, they will rise to the challenge. If they are not held appropriately accountable, they may not learn as quickly. Surprisingly, when students are given the opportunity to assert some independence, they turn to parents and respected adults for guidance and use them as role models. As they grow, you will see the fruit of the seeds you and other adults (e.g. teachers, scout leaders, coaches, etc.) have planted over the years.

It is important that you remain involved while your Govie is enrolled at GSSM. PAC, the Parent Advisory Council, is one of the ways to do this. Be sure to communicate with confidence, though you may find yourself worrying. You may also have to resist the urge to place undue pressure on them if you find that they are not making the grades you are accustomed to them making. Our academic and student development programs are designed to develop our students into critical thinkers and contributing citizens. Please guide them with empathy and consistent support and encouragement. Being an active listener is one of the most helpful ways to assist your Govie in thinking through the decisions they make and processing situations that are common among teenagers in our residential setting. Support and encourage, but please be careful not to apply too much pressure. Again, when you are concerned, never hesitate to call us. Be assured that we will also call you as necessary. ***Remember the three-pronged partnership: the student, the family, and the school.***

### **Celebrate You!**

You have done a wonderful job in getting your Govie to this point. Go ahead and brag about them! You have loved them and equipped them with the values, morals, and life skills that allowed them to seize this opportunity. Your child will build on the foundation you have laid in moving closer to achieving their dreams and being the change our world needs. Celebrate them and the courage it takes for them to pursue GSSM. And celebrate yourselves as you relax and partner with GSSM toward your child's amazing destiny!