

5 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year as a West Point Parent: The Appointment Letter

BY: Marissa Yelenosky

FEBRUARY 20, 2015



Congratulations! It's a proud moment when your child is one of the few chosen to attend the United States Military Academy. After our son received his appointment to West Point as a family we experienced a variety of emotions. We were proud, excited, fearful and overwhelmed. However, we discovered quickly that there wasn't much time to bask in the glory of this appointment. After such an arduous application process, who knew there was still so much work left for him to get done? Below are five things I wish I would have known about this amazing journey that might be helpful to you as a first time West Point parent.

- **Cadet candidates endure much more STRESS and will leave for West Point at least SIX WEEKS before most of their friends leave for college.** Once they receive the great news that they have been accepted to West Point, there is a lot for the cadet candidates to accomplish and in a very short time. They have a long list of supplementary West Point requirements to complete in addition to the responsibilities they already carry as the top ranking students at their high schools. They have prom, final exams, graduation ceremonies, graduation parties, part-time jobs, extra-curricular sports and activities, friends to see, girlfriends/boyfriends to keep happy, parents and relatives to please, you get the idea. That is a lot for anyone to handle in a short time, so be patient and supportive. Our Class of 2018 Cadet Candidates had to report to West Point on July 2nd.

- **It is important to set aside time to be available to help your cadet and cherish those moments.** My son has always been very independent and seldom asks for help from us. He handled the entire West Point application and Congressional Nomination process by himself as he has handled every school assignment, job application and major responsibility. After he was accepted to the United States Military Academy, he reviewed his information packet and noted the insurmountable number of tasks that needed to be completed before his first day at West Point which is called Reception Day (R-Day). He learned quickly how to delegate and I happily used this opportunity to spend more time with him. There were additional dentist and doctor's appointments to make, bank accounts to open, supplies such as boots, socks and other items to order and so much more to do. This way he had more time to focus on the speech he had to write for his graduation ceremony, his final responsibilities as the National Honor Society president, homework assignments and other important tasks that needed to be completed at the same time.
- **You'll have additional monetary expenses and need extra documentation.** West Point cadets don't pay cash for their West Point education but they pay for it with something far more valuable—their commitment to serve our country for five years upon graduation. However, there are many expenses that will be incurred before arriving to West Point. A \$2000 deposit that West Point requires for school fees/supplies (amount may be subject to change each year), a couple hundred for the boots and shoes, an additional couple hundred for special socks, U.S. Army Tape and other miscellaneous expenses including travel to and from West Point will start to add up. Don't wait until the last minute to order boots and shoes. Those are harder to find than you think and have special requirements that need to be met. We ended up ordering those via phone from the Exchange but it took a few attempts to sort it out. We ordered the military boot socks and liners from Covert Threads and the U.S. Army Tape from Military Names. You'll also need to make sure you have an extra copy of your cadet's birth certificate, social security card and other types of documentation. I recommend that your cadet also gets his or her passport for travel later in the year.



- **There are some great local parent chapters and private Facebook groups for West Point parents to join.** My son never mentioned West Point to us until his senior year, so we knew very little about the esteemed academy. Attending the *West Point Parents' Club of Illinois* Welcome & Information Picnic was the best step we took to get prepared for our West Point journey. We met cadet candidates and their families along with upperclassmen and their families. Our son attended a private session for cadets in which he could ask any question in confidence to upperclassmen. There was also a separate session for parents, family and friends. Although my son didn't want to add one more event to his to-do list he was thankful that his girlfriend and the entire family attended. The *West Point Parents' Club of Illinois*, *West Point Moms*, *West Point Class of 2018 Parents* and *West Point Parents Prayer Group* Facebook pages to name a few have also been life savers for us! Especially since my son has never been one to communicate experiences in his life in great detail. You'll get the answers to questions you might not get from your cadets and you'll get to see lots and lots of pictures. You'll need to decide which of the many Facebook groups is most suitable for your family. In addition to the helpful information they provide at the **West Point Parent Information** page, West Point also assigns a parent communications liaison who will answer any questions privately, via email or on Facebook. Managed by the West Point parent liaison, The *West Point Class of 2023 Parents* Facebook page is now up and running for the parents of the cadets that have accepted their appointment. There are also books available for purchase that parents have found useful including **The Mom's Guide to Surviving West Point** and **A Civilian's Guide to the U.S. Military**.
- **Cadets' appointments to West Point can be taken away.** Staying healthy and avoiding injuries, hoping they don't incur a traffic violation, making sure their grades continue at their highest and that they arrive to R-Day on schedule were things that we never thought we would have to be concerned about. I also never imagined that our son would get into a small fender bender on his way to work a month before R-

Day. Talk about stress! The laws here are quite severe for drivers that are under 21 years of age (two moving violations and your license gets suspended) so as an extra precautionary measure his friends and I ended up driving him around a bit before he left to West Point. Don't panic, get more information from West Point about this and try not to stress your cadet candidate. Just be aware and ready to act quickly in case of a mishap.

Together you and your cadet will experience an emotional roller coaster as he/she prepares for West Point. The great news is that you'll have a great support group of other West Point families to lean on that have been through this already and can guide you every step of the way.

Now available: "10 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year as a West Point Parent: Reception Day (R-Day)"

"6 Things I Wish I Had Known My First Year as a West Point Parent: Acceptance Day (A-Day)"

Please note: These are not the views of the United States Military Academy at West Point. These are my personal observations, recommendations and opinions to hopefully help parents during this important time in their lives.