Preparing for Your Student’s Return Home

The holiday season is upon us, which means that soon your student will be on school break. This is an exciting time; for many families, it will be the first extended time they’ve had with their student since he left for college in August.

Sometimes, this holiday break can provide unique challenges for families, as everyone has grown during the last few months. New perspectives and new routines can provide a source of unexpected conflict. You can be prepared by expecting that your student might...

- Express newly-developed or developing ideas surrounding religious, political and lifestyle beliefs.
- Try to balance reconnecting with friends and spending quality time with family (and she might not always be perfect at doing so).
- Readjust to house rules and routines after living independently (for some, this might be more difficult than others).

All of this is normal. But, when you and your student don’t see eye-to-eye on things, and a verbal tussle ensues, there are a few tactics you can try as you agree to disagree.

Keep in mind that these types of disagreements can actually be good for your parent/student relationship. The key is agreeing to disagree in a respectful, open-minded manner. You can do this by:

- **Engaging.** Let your student know that, just because you have had differences in opinion before, you’re still very interested in hearing what she has to say about things. Don’t avoid the tough topics. You can both learn a great deal from one another by engaging in meaty conversations.

- **Listening.** Allow your student to say his piece, without interrupting to inject your opinion. Show that you’re listening by maintaining eye contact, keeping an open posture and reflecting back some of the things he is saying. Sometimes just knowing that you’re being listened to makes all the difference in the world.
Keeping an open mind. We all change and grow. And we can all change our minds once we hear the facts presented in the here and now. Stay open to this possibility as you and your student exchange opinions and perspectives. It’s all part of being a growing, engaged human being.

Not taking differences in opinion personally. If your student takes a different stance than you do, it’s not because she hates you or disrespects you. It’s likely because she has had experiences that have led her to form a different opinion. It’s really not about you.

Sharing your pride. The fact that your student is an independent, critical thinker, no matter his opinion, can be a source of great pride. Don’t forget to praise your student for his abilities and his curiosity.

Having an intentional discussion about agreeing to disagree is an important step in developing an adult relationship with your student. Give the gift of conversation this season!

As your student wraps up coursework and exams on campus, she may forget an important task: making arrangements to get home for the holiday break. Oops! You can be really helpful to your student, as long as your reminders and concerns don’t become added stress on your student’s already overflowing plate.

Here’s how you can help:

If you need to pick up your student:

■ Ask your student when he is planning on coming home (keep in mind that this may change based on academic commitments; let your student know your level of flexibility up front).

■ Find out when would be a good time to arrive (remind him to check the school’s policy on the time he is required to be out of the residence hall).

■ Try to determine how much stuff your student plans on bringing home, so you can plan accordingly.

■ Stay in touch with your student throughout finals change—on your end or his—and try to be as adjustable and understanding as possible.

■ If something happens and you can’t get to your student prior to the time he is required to be out of the residence hall – don’t panic! Encourage your student to find out what plans are in place on campus for students in this situation.

If your student doesn’t need you to pick her up:

■ Ask your student when she is planning on coming home and how she is planning on getting there.

■ If she will be utilizing public transportation, remind her to check schedules before she leaves in case there are any last minute changes. Also, gently remind her to be safe.

■ If she will be driving herself or driving with friends, remind her to be careful and make smart decisions based on weather (if this is a concern). Let her know how you can help, if you can, and remind her that safety is more important than rushing home.

■ Help her figure out the “stuff” transfer, whether it’s getting holiday presents home or figuring out how to get items back to school in January.

No matter how your student is planning on getting home, this is a great opportunity for you to provide support as he makes these decisions for himself. He’ll learn a great deal by taking responsibility for his travels. But don’t be afraid to offer suggestions if he asks for help too.

How Is Your Student Getting Home for the Holidays?

Preparing for Your Student’s Return

Transition Tip

As much as we’re encouraging you to maintain an open mind, we’re not suggesting throwing all rules out the window! Being clear with your student—perhaps even before he comes home—about what you expect regarding his behavior and routine will help avoid conflicts later this month. Giving your student a heads up about any major changes that have taken place in your home these last few months will help ease the transition too.
The holidays are a time of giving—of all sorts of gifts. Consider getting your family members, particularly the younger ones, involved in making some creative gifts for your college student this year. It will be a special time for them to share—and a memory that will last a lifetime.

Here are nine creative, low-cost gift ideas:

1. **Make origami ornaments out of recycled school papers or drawings.** Go online to get some origami figure instructions. Craft some frogs, fans or whatever else you like—and use recycled school or art work to do so! Once you're done making the origami figure, poke a tiny hole using a pin and place it on a string loop. To stiffen the paper, water down some Elmer’s Glue or buy some Mod Podge and paint the paper with a light coating. Let dry.

2. **Decorate picture frames.** Get some cheap picture frames from the craft store and decorate the edges with meaningful phrases or images. Print off a picture and include it with the frame.

3. **Write a letter—the old-fashioned way.** Get some pretty stationery and a nice pen and write a letter from the heart.

4. **Bake a loaf of bread.** Get a mini loaf pan and set aside some time to bake a mini loaf of bread. Yummy! To make the loaf festive, tie ribbons around the loaf in the student’s school colors.

5. **Offer time.** Brainstorm a list of ways your family members can give to one another. Perhaps it’s something simple like making breakfast together or visiting a favorite local spot. Or, it’s something like helping to organize your room, do a load of laundry or spend 10 minutes making you laugh. Whatever it is, print out a certificate offering the time and talent. What a way to showcase special talents, recognize unique skills and more!

6. **Buy some candy.** Make things easy! Buy some candy and some festive cellophane bags. Wrap up a bunch and place a cute little tag on it. It’s a great travel treat!

7. **Make a set of collegiate-themed notecards.** Visit your student’s school website or gather old school mailings. Buy a pack of plain white notecards with envelopes and decorate a set for your student by printing out or cutting out words and images from the website and publications. Tie a ribbon around the bunch—voila! A set of college-themed notecards ready to give as thank yous, pick me ups and more!

8. **Decorate a journal or photo album.** Get some notebooks from the dollar store—or even cheap photo albums that have a clear plastic cover overlay that comes on and off—and collage the front and back. Personalize the collage by using images and words that fit the person for whom you are making the project. For the notebook, cut contact paper to fit over the front and back (leaving some extra to fold over the edges to the inside works best). For the photo album, the clear plastic overlay should provide enough protection. Fun!

9. **Create a slideshow DVD.** Gather a bunch of pictures from the year thus far and put together a cool picture slideshow. Add some text (such as memorable quotes or experiences, the date, etc.) and make a DVD copy as a gift.

Just remember the old cliché—it’s the thought that counts when it comes to giving gifts. Your student will appreciate your family’s thoughtfulness and attention.

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Getting the Youngsters Involved

Fun-themed Holiday Gifts

Another Twist

Offer these ideas to your student and encourage her to work with a younger sibling to make these gifts together for friends and family. You can help build the excitement for the younger by encouraging your student to call home to begin the planning process and gathering of supplies ahead of time. Plus, since your student may be strapped for cash, these low-cost ideas will be a help in that regard too!
December is an incredibly stressful time for students. From academic to social pressures, they’re likely being pulled in a number of directions. Taking a look at the list of seasonal issues we listed on the front page will give you a clear idea about what they may be facing. Plus, this will help prepare you for any frantic phone calls you may receive in the next few weeks!

You can also be supportive to your student by:

▲ Calling to check in so your student knows you care, but not requiring him to stay on the phone for long periods of time.
▲ Waiting to discuss important details or have thoughtful conversations until after finals are over—when possible.
▲ Understanding the pressure she is facing and validating her frustrations and stress levels.

▲ Helping him keep things in perspective (i.e. this will all be over in just a few weeks, grades aren’t everything, etc.).
▲ Offering to take responsibility for the things you can (i.e. picking up gifts or running last minute errands, etc.).
▲ Making suggestions for eliminating stress.
▲ Reminding him to take care of himself—this is probably the last thing he’ll want to hear (“Sleep? Are you kidding?”), but the reminders to get adequate sleep and food are still important.

Overall, your student may just need a listening ear during these next few weeks. If that’s the case, let her vent, validate her feelings and then remind her just how much you love her. More often than not, this is the most helpful thing you can do during this busy time of year.

### Great Gift Ideas for College Students

Not sure what to get for your college student this year? Here are a few suggestions:

- Magazine/newspaper subscriptions
- iPod
- Books to read for fun
- Galoshes
- Flash drive
- Goofy retro decorations for his room
- Board games
- Gift cards
- Tickets to a show or sporting event (with an extra one to take a friend)
- Portable DVD player
- Movies
- $$ toward Spring Break travels
- Comfortable desk chair
- Flannel sheets
- Comfy or fun slippers
- A universal remote control
- Fun flip-flops
- A good dictionary or thesaurus
- A gift certificate to the school book store for spring semester books and supplies
- Warm gloves
- A sturdy travel coffee mug or water bottle
- A bicycle (and a lock)
- A subscription to Netflix or a similar service
- A gift certificate for digital music downloads
- A cool calendar
- A donation to a cause she believes in

### Care Package Ideas for Finals

Your student will likely be doing a great deal of studying this month! Consider sending a thoughtful care package to let him know you are sending love and good luck vibes his way. You could include:

- Hot cocoa or tea and a festive mug
- A mix CD of motivational songs or soothing instrumental selections
- Candy
- Homemade treats
- Vitamin C drops
- A good luck note
- A recorded MP3 audio clip or DVD video offering fun tips and advice from the folks at home
- A comfy pillow, slippers or sweatshirt for late-night studying