

Home for the Holidays

Having your student home for the holidays after they have been away for an extended period can be stressful. The gap between our expectations and the reality of this reunion is often quite jarring. Even in the best families we must adjust to a different rhythm of life and stubborn expectations may no longer fit who they are. Feelings that commonly arise during the holidays along with joy include guilt, overwhelm, boredom, and resentment. Don't be wounded if your student tells you they miss their college life and friends.

Some ideas to ponder before your student arrive:

1. Frustration is built into the system. Wherever our expectations of love and understanding are the highest so may be a sense of hurt and disappointment.
2. Having few or no expectations is the best preparation for being satisfied with whatever happens. The Taoist discipline of becoming like water and "going with the flow" can keep us from getting stuck.
3. Ask your student to fill you in on their plans BEFORE they return home so there are minimal surprises –"What do you mean you are going skiing for a week?!"
4. A sense of humor can be helpful. Psychologist James Hillman extols extended family gatherings as the one place where we get to meet people with whom we have so little in common!