

# Returning Home for the Holidays

The holidays can be a stressful time just about for anyone. For college students, it will mark their return back home for their first extended visit, which will be a time of readjustment and reacquaintance for the entire family.

Changes will have occurred both at home and in your student's life. The key to a successful visit may simply be anticipating that things will be different. One of the biggest changes that college students go through is their increased sense of independence and responsibility. Your student will have been on their own for almost an entire semester and for the most part love their freedom. The expectations and rules you had once enforced will likely be a thing of the past – or so your young adult may like to assume. Tensions may arise for many families and their college student around issues such as curfew and their freedom to do as they please without having to report to anyone. Reentering the family routines may feel restrictive to your student and will require compromise on everyone's part.

Your listening and negotiating skills may get a workout and your patience may be tested during this period of readjustment. To ease into it, make plans to have a conversation with your college student about your expectations of them being at home. Expect some push back in the beginning but be firm and open to negotiation. Requests you may have as parents will less likely be an issue of contention if there is open and honest communication, in which both sides feel heard and understood. For instance, rather than demanding that they come home by a certain time, use "I-statements," such as "I would feel better knowing where you go or that you will home by \_\_\_\_." Statements using "I" will address your feelings and needs as parents without making your student feel as if they need to defend themselves. Talk about your comfort level and let your student talk about his or her feelings regarding your expectations. Be ready to negotiate and compromise. You may be surprised at how reasonable your student can be when the issue is addressed calmly and considerately before it becomes a problem. Parents and students will need to pick their battles carefully – consider what's really important and let the other stuff slide.

Other things to consider as your student returns home for their first extended visit: Plan early and consult with your returning student when making plans for family vacations and other activities. Don't assume that your student is going to just hang out at home. They will have likely made plans with friends they haven't seen in a while and will want time to reconnect.

Expect your child to do a lot of sleeping. Your student will probably come home exhausted from the last few weeks of classes and final exams. While your day may end at 10 p.m., that is when most college students get going. Their sleep schedule may have changed dramatically and they may need to spend more time than usual catching up on sleep.

Your student may arrive looking unexpectedly thin or pudgy. Because many college students experience fluctuations in their weight and appearance, they can be highly sensitive to comments and messages about their weight. Rather than commenting on their weight or sleep-deprived eyes, make caring comments like "It's so wonderful to see you."