

Home for the Holidays: How College Students and Their Parents Can Survive, and Even Enjoy, the Holiday Break

CANTON, N.Y., Oct. 14 (AScribe Newswire) -- With year-end holiday celebrations come thoughts of home, and for college students and their parents, those thoughts are often accompanied by feelings of stress. Holiday breaks are usually the first extended periods of time that families spend together since saying goodbye at the dorm in the early fall. St. Lawrence University (Canton, New York) director of counseling services William B. Burns has advice and tips for making the holidays happier for the whole family.

Burns states, "Stress can be brought on by a variety of things. Students' visions of what will take place over the holiday break can be much different than that of parents. Parents often assume their student will spend significant amounts of time with the family, while the student has plans to spend every night visiting old friends."

"Another common area of conflict is parents' reluctance to see the student as an adult and to adjust house rules to the new adult status felt by the student, and to the freedom the student has been enjoying since school began."

"Students also find changes in family patterns to be stressful. Parents who 'stayed together for the sake of the kids' may have decided that it is time to separate or divorce. Single parents may have developed new friends or interests while their student has been away. Students coming from blended families often face the stress of dividing time equally between parents."

"Making the most of this much-anticipated, and needed, break can be challenging for everyone involved."

Burns offers the following tips to help make the break as stress-free and as enjoyable as possible:

- Plan ahead. Parents, think about the needs of your student as they seek a break from a stressful semester of academic work. Students, have some empathy for the needs of your parents - especially their need to spend time with you. Make sure your plans include your family in some way. This will help them feel included in your life and will make it less likely that they will try to plan extra activities just to get a chance to see you.
- Students, let your parents know what your holiday plans are before you arrive at home. Give fair warning to your parents about how often you plan to be away from home. Expect to make compromises in order to help your parents enjoy your visit, and as the need arises to make changes in family plans. If you will be splitting time between various family members, establish your plans ahead of time and inform everyone of when you will be spending time at the various family locations. State decisively what you are doing and that you are doing your best to accommodate everyone's needs.
- Parents and students, discuss what the house rules have been in the past and how they could be changed now that the student has been living away from home for a number of months. This new set of rules should be the result of a mutual negotiation between students and parents - remembering that you will both have to give a little to make sure you enjoy a smooth and happy holiday break.
- Students, prepare your parents in advance if you know that your grades are not going to be up to expectations. If your grades are a sore point with your parents, it can help to establish times when talk about grades is off-limits. This will give everyone a chance to relax and enjoy the bulk of the holiday season.
- Students, if your family situation is such that going home is just too uncomfortable, find a friend who is willing to "adopt" you for the holiday break or make your own special plans. This break is for you to relax and rejuvenate so that you can return to school and have a successful academic year. Do what you can to help insure that success.
- Students, however you spend your holiday break, make sure to take time for yourself, indulge in some rest and relaxation, have fun, and stay safe.