



a newsletter for parents & families

TROY

UNIVERSITY

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Seasonal Student Issues

There's a seasonal ebb and flow when it comes to student issues. Here are a few things your student may be experiencing this month:

- Roommate problems and floor tension
- Academic pressures due to procrastination, workload and lack of ability
- Burnout
- Not feeling like they have the stamina to keep up the pace through finals
- Job search stress for holiday break
- Problems from increased alcohol consumption
- Lack of initiative to find new friends or activities because it seems social groups are already set up
- Concerns about going home at Thanksgiving time – whether it's concern about seeing changes among old friends, how things will be with family members or dealing with a romantic relationship

Agreeing to Disagree

How disagreements can be *good* for your relationship!

During the Thanksgiving break – and beyond – some new discussions may come up between you and your student. It's all part of the fact that she's learning new, exciting things, while also testing her own thought processes and perspectives.

As a result, you and your student may not always see eye-to-eye on certain topics. Politics, diversity, religion... there are any number of hot-button issues that can start a verbal tussle. And with the emotion of Election Day coming around this month, it's a good reminder that these disagreements can actually be good for your parent/student relationship.

Keeping an Open Mind

The key is agreeing to disagree in a respectful, open-minded manner. You can both do that by:

- **Engaging.** Let your student know that, just because you have had differences in opinion before, you're still very interested in hearing what he has to say about things. Don't avoid the tough topics.

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- **Listening.** Allow your student to say her piece, without interrupting to inject your opinion. Sometimes just knowing that you're being listened to makes all the difference in the world.
- **Keeping an Open Mind.** We can all change our minds once we hear the facts – or those facts can clarify a pre-existing opinion. It's all part of being a growing, engaged human being.
- **Not Taking Differences of Opinion Personally.** If your student takes a different stance than you do, it's not because he hates you or disrespects you. It's likely because he has had experiences that have led him 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 her opinion, can be a source of great pride. Don't forget to praise your student for her abilities and curiosity.

Having an intentional discussion about agreeing to disagree is an important step in developing an adult relationship with your student. Let the conversations begin!



Getting to Know Your Student's Friends

Getting to know your student's friends is an important way to connect. Peers have great influence on many college students – and your student is likely no exception.

The process can be easier than it may seem at first glance. The following suggestions can help bridge the gap between you, your student and her friends:

- **Just Ask.** Your student is probably excited about the new friends she has met at college. Remember names and the next time you two talk on the phone, ask how those friends are doing.
- **Connect to Classes.** Inquire if your student has met anyone interesting in any of his classes. Even if he hasn't, this might give him a chance to vent about the people he has met that he dislikes – which opens the gate for him to tell you about the better people he has met other places.
- **Look at Photos.** Does your student take pictures? If so, ask her if she has any images of the people with whom she spends time. Again, students are generally excited about their new surroundings, and will jump at the chance to show people their new homes and the people they live with. Once you see faces, you will have a better time picturing what your student means when she talks about how her roommate never does her laundry or how she always walks to class with the redhead down the hall.
- **Visit.** If the school is close enough where a drive to take your student out to dinner is a feasible option, do so, and encourage him to invite his roommate or one or two of his friends. This way, you get to spend time with your son and meet and talk to his friends at the same time. He will appreciate the offer you extended to his new friends, and his friends will love you for buying them dinner.
- **Extend Invitations.** Let your student know that you'd be glad to host a friend or two at your house during winter or spring break. It's important for friends to see each other's homes as a way of connecting on a deeper level.

What NOT to Do

When it comes to meeting friends, there are certain things *not* to do, also. Consider avoiding the following:

- **Badgering Your Student for Information.** If he doesn't want to tell you, he's not going to – and excessive questioning will most likely make him clam up in the future, too.
- **Making Your Student Suspect You Don't Trust Her.** Let her know you are excited to meet the new friends just to see who is in her life, not because you are hesitant and unsure if you're going to approve.
- **Judging on Appearances Alone.** Just because your student's new friend has a ring in her lip or his roommate doesn't dress like your idea of a successful young man doesn't mean they aren't good people and great influences. Your idea of an acceptable friend may be based on stereotypes – so check yourself before you say anything that might cause hurt feelings.

Getting to know the important people in your student's life will help you both feel more connected. The effort is well worth the reward.



Don't Try TOO Hard

In an effort to get to know their student's friends, some parents go overboard and get too involved. Be careful to keep your distance while also showing interest. It's important that students have friendships of their own that they can share with you, on *their* terms.

For instance, if you meet a male friend that you sense your daughter might have a romantic interest in, don't hint around or put your daughter in an uncomfortable position. Instead, just get to know the young man as her friend – and let them figure out the rest!



Dealing with Roommate Concerns

At this point in the game, students living on campus may experience some roommate tension. The honeymoon is over and things are getting real.

It's part of the living on campus experience – learning to cooperate with another person in your living space. Some tips to share with your student if she is in the midst of roommate strife include:

- **Bring Things Up.** Encourage your student to talk *with* her roommate directly instead of *about* her with others. That's so much more productive – and respectful.
- **Get Help.** If your student isn't sure how to talk with his roommate or what to do in a certain situation, he can talk with his residence hall staff. They are trained, kind folks who are there to help students, especially when it comes to roommate issues.



Helping Students Solve Their Issues

Part of our strategy involves helping students learn how to resolve their own issues, rather than doing everything for them. We'll provide the tools – from ways to bring things up to a roommate to mediation meetings – so they can take care of their roommate situations and learn lifelong skills in the process.

- **Be Willing to Compromise.** When two or more different people live together, no one is ever going to have things *exactly* how he/she wants it. The art of compromise takes practice and roommate situations are one of the key places where students get to practice it.
- **Don't Bend So Much You Break.** At the same time, students shouldn't need to compromise so much that they are living in uncomfortable circumstances. Encourage your student to abide by her values and talk to her roommate so both of them are bending enough to make things work without giving up key things that are important to each of them.

Roommate situations can impact students greatly, so encourage your student to try these strategies and to tap into the helpful campus personnel available to her. Things *can* get better, often with the help of a good discussion or mediation, so your student can be comfortable in her living space.

Making Room for New Traditions

With Thanksgiving on its way, your student is likely very excited to participate in family traditions that hold meaning to him.

However, he may also have some ideas about *new* traditions, based on things he has learned at school or concepts that new friends have introduced to him.

As such, consider how to stay open to these types of suggestions. For instance, he might suggest something as simple as trying a “tofurkey” at Thanksgiving, because he is wondering about becoming a vegetarian. This may seem out of left field, yet it's pretty typical that students will experiment and try new things during their time at college. This is just one way that may manifest itself.

Or maybe he has some thoughts about involving younger siblings in community service during the holiday season. He may be engaging in this during his time at school and want to share the “rush” of doing good with his brothers and sisters.

New cultural and spiritual traditions may come up, too. Perhaps he has a Jewish friend who has introduced him to potato latkes, a food often prepared as part of Hanukkah celebrations. Try to be open to him sharing these with the family, as well as any other exciting things he may be learning.

New traditions don't trump the old ones – it's just part of including your student and the things he's finding interesting enough to share, based on his experiences at college.



Navigating a Happy, Healthy Thanksgiving Break

How can you and your student navigate a happy, healthy family visit during the Thanksgiving break? Here are some things to keep in mind...

- **Discuss the Rules.** Students who are used to being on their own timetable at school and making their own decisions may feel restricted by “house rules” when they return home. Consider sitting down with your student right away to talk about respectful ways of doing things that can work for both of you, whether it involves the use of a vehicle, household chores, curfews and the like.
- **Share Expectations Early.** If you expect your student will visit a relative or be part of an all-day celebration during break, share those expectations now. That way, she can also plan her time with friends so there are no misunderstandings or hurt feelings.

- **Provide Time to Unwind.** Chances are that your student has been working very hard and could use a bit of downtime during break. So, don't be surprised if he sleeps in or craves some unstructured time. Having time to unwind, especially right before finals kick in, can do your student a lot of good.

You'll all enjoy your break and your time together more if you put these simple things in place.

Happy Thanksgiving!



Agreeing to Disagree

Due to what your student is learning and experiencing at college, new topics may come up over the Thanksgiving table. It doesn't mean she hates her Uncle Henry if she disagrees with him about something – it's likely just a sign that she's thinking in new ways and testing out her own opinions.

Check out the “Agreeing to Disagree” article on page one for more on this topic.

Seeking Academic Help: The November/December Push

November is often a time when students start worrying about how their academics will turn out for the term. Midterm exams and papers have passed and finals are rapidly approaching. They pretty much know where they stand grade-wise at this point – and know what they need to do to have a successful semester.

That doesn't mean they have to do it all on their own, however. Part of being a successful student is reaching out for academic assistance, such as:

- **Talking with Professors.** Students who attend faculty members' office hours and show interest in their learning are typically the ones who experience the most academic success. Encourage your student to visit his professors, to ask about things he may not fully understand and to talk about what he needs to do to finish a class on a positive note.
- **Visiting the Learning/Writing/Tutoring Center.** If a midterm paper didn't turn out so well, smart students will visit the writing center to learn some effective strategies. If a student feels behind in a subject, she'll check into tutoring/learning resources. Seeking this type of help is a sign of strength and we very much encourage it!
- **Asking for Suggestions.** Maybe your student is unsure of where to turn when it comes to academics. Luckily, there are multiple professionals who can help guide him to the help he needs. So, encourage your student to talk with a campus professional, whether it's a coach, someone in campus ministry, a residence hall or student activities staffer, an advisor, a counselor or any of the other helpful souls populating our campus. They are here to help your student succeed!