



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:

- Panic, fear, and cramming as finals and paper deadlines approach
- High temper as stress mounts
- The realization that some friends may not be returning next semester
- Increased pressure to participate in sexual activity because of the approach of vacation and extended separation
- Financial strain due to holiday gifts and travel costs
- Religious conflicts, as he/she gets ready to return home after a semester of gaining new perspectives
- Excitement/anxiety about returning home
- Increased use of alcohol and other drugs

## Staying Healthy During "Sitting Season"

December is one of those intense "sitting-a-lot" times, as students prepare final papers/projects and study for final exams. Here are some tips to share as you help them stay healthy during this serious time...

### At the Computer

When students are sitting, they are often at a computer. To help your student stay ergonomically healthy, encourage him to:

- ▶ Make sure the top of your monitor is at or just below eye level
- ▶ Keep your head and neck balanced and in line with your torso
- ▶ Relax your shoulders
- ▶ Keep elbows close to your body and supported
- ▶ Support your lower back
- ▶ Have wrists and hands in line with your forearms
- ▶ Make adequate room for your keyboard and mouse
- ▶ Keep your feet flat on the floor
- ▶ Take screen breaks every 20-30 minutes to give your body a break

### The Sitting Life

Studies are mounting that say sitting for long stretches of time can lead to a shorter, less robust life, as well as con-

ditions like kidney disease, diabetes and heart disease. So, reducing the amount of time we spend sitting is necessary.

Tips to help reduce the amount of "sit time" include:

- ▶ Stand up for two minutes for every 20 that you spend sitting
- ▶ When watching TV, stand up during commercials
- ▶ Try to watch fewer than two hours of TV per day to be in a lower risk group
- ▶ Stand during telephone calls

Be sure to keep on exercising, too!

**Sources:** [www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/computerworkstations/); WebMD Health News, 10/15/12; *The New York Times*, 10/17/12

### Computer Vision Syndrome

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), nearly 80 percent of those working at a computer for more than two hours a day suffer from the symptoms of Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). Symptoms include headaches, loss of focus, burning/tired eyes, double/blurred vision, and neck and shoulder pains.



# Safe Holiday Travel Tips

Student travel home for the holidays can be stressful for the whole family. Whether students are traveling via mass transportation, hitching a ride with a friend or driving their own cars, there are safety issues to keep in mind. Prepare your student for travel by addressing these concerns.

## Travel by Bus, Train or Plane

Students traveling via mass transportation should check schedules and advisories before heading out. Additionally, encourage them to:

- ▶ Review specific airline regulations and federal restrictions (at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov)) regarding carry-on items and checked baggage, so they don't have to dismantle anything or throw things out at the airport
- ▶ Keep their bags with them at all times
- ▶ Carry important documents in front of their body, rather than in a backpack, purse or messenger bag that someone could easily snatch
- ▶ Wait in public spaces where there are lots of people present
- ▶ Carry a small amount of cash in a secure spot and a credit card, if possible, in case of an emergency
- ▶ Dress appropriately for their destination



## Travel by Car

Students traveling by car should be aware of weather advisories and be prepared accordingly. Specifically, students driving through snowy conditions should:

- ▶ Winterize their car before heading out – the boxed checklist offers a great resource for making sure everything is in working order and ready to go for cold weather conditions
- ▶ Allow extra time to reach their destination when the roads are slick and avoid making sudden stops and turns
- ▶ Keep their gas tank close to full, so that an unanticipated delay or traffic detour will not be problematic
- ▶ Wear a seat belt
- ▶ Remember that bridges and overpasses freeze before road surfaces and take extra caution
- ▶ Allow additional stopping distance between cars when driving on wet roads
- ▶ Keep their windshields and lights clear of accumulations of ice and snow
- ▶ Know what to do if they skid on ice or get stuck in snow (When skidding, counter steer to regain control and then steer the car in the same direction that the rear wheels are sliding. When stuck in snow, remove snow from the area around the tire and spread sand or salt under the wheel instead of spinning the wheels.)
- ▶ Use common sense. There are occasions when the best driving decision is not to drive. It's better to be

## Car Checklist for Winter Travel

- Get a tune-up
- Check battery
- Check coolant
- Fix leaks
- Check wipers
- Fill your tank
- Fill washer fluid
- Carry sand bags/cat litter
- Check rear defrost
- Know your car
- Get snow tires
- Carry supplies
- Have a phone
- Clean off your car
- Go slowly

Source: [www.cartalk.com](http://www.cartalk.com)

safe and get home a bit later than to get in an accident.

- ▶ Have pre-loaded highway information networks for updates on road conditions, along with emergency contact numbers, in their cell phone
- ▶ Make sure they have an ice scraper and/or broom for cleaning off their car
- ▶ Be aware of alternate routes, in case weather conditions warrant detouring traffic from the main roadway
- ▶ Make sure they have extra blankets, warm clothing and other emergency gear should the need arise

Here's to a safe travel season!

Source: [www.accuweather.com](http://www.accuweather.com)



# Mid-Year Transitions

When the end of the term hits, students will be going through transitions of various kinds. Here are some to be aware of as you help your student through these trying times...

**Saying Goodbye.** Some friends may be graduating in December, while others are transferring to other schools, dropping out, studying abroad or heading off to internship opportunities. Whatever the case may be, saying goodbye to good college friends can be tough for students, and they'll need your understanding.

**Ending a Good Academic Experience.** Sometimes, a class or a teacher will touch a student in a profound way. So, when it ends, that student may understandably feel a bit lost and sad. Encourage him to talk about what he learned as a way to honor what that experience meant to him.

**Leaving a Loved One.** If your student started a relationship at school, parting over the holidays will likely be difficult. He/she may want to visit that significant other or have him/her come to your house. Talk about how to split time and be supportive, too.

**Preparing to Take on a New Leadership Experience.** After being part of the "worker bees" within a student organization, your student may soon be taking on more of a leadership position. This can be both exciting and terrifying, so let her talk about her feelings and her plans as she prepares for this important transition.

Transitions come in all shapes and sizes – and supporting students as they ready for them will give them courage, confidence and the knowledge that someone cares.

## Other Possible Transitions

Your student may also be readying for...

- A new campus job
- Living with a different roommate(s)
- A new class schedule
- An internship opportunity
- Transferring to an alternate school
- Changing a major/minor (or declaring one)

## Career Prep During Winter Break

Even if your student hasn't put together a formal internship for winter break, she can still do some very positive things for herself when it comes to career planning and soaking up good learning experiences. For instance...

- **Arrange Informal Interviews.** She can get in touch with a reporter at the local TV station if she's interested in communications or a researcher at the local hospital if biology is her thing. Setting up informal interviews with these practitioners, where your student goes in with some prepared questions about their field, can be a great way to make contacts while gathering useful information.
- **Tap into Alumni.** It's worth connecting with the campus alumni association to see if there is an alum in his hometown who might be willing to talk with him. Maybe he can shadow him at work or attend a business networking event. Many alums love to help!
- **Create That Resume.** It's an easy task to put off, yet winter break can be the perfect time for your student to hunker down and put together a resume draft. That way, she'll be ready to visit career services as soon as she gets back to campus for help. Whether she's graduating this year or searching for a summer job/internship, having a resume ready is a HUGE step forward.

## Money-Making Possibilities

Students can tap into their talents and hard work during winter break to earn a bit of extra money. Some possible ways to do that include:

- Offer tutoring in a subject they excel at
- Give music lessons
- Shovel snow/do yard work for others
- Provide "sports lessons" for kids (e.g. how to pitch, dribbling techniques)
- Baking/serving for holiday parties in the area

Encourage your student to put out a notice – via Facebook, email or other format – to let friends and neighbors know he'll be back in town, and ready to work!



# Managing Stress – and You Can Help!

December can be 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 support your student by:

**A Quick Call** – Calling to check in so your student knows you care, but not requiring him to stay on the phone for long periods of time

**Dialing It Down** – Waiting to discuss important details or have thoughtful conversations until after finals are over – when possible

**Listening & Understanding** – Understanding the pressure she is facing and validating her frustrations

while also making suggestions for effectively handling her stress level

**Offering Perspective** – Helping him keep things in perspective (i.e. this will all be over in just a few weeks, grades aren't everything, etc.)

**Helping Out** – Offering to take responsibility for the things you can (i.e. picking up gifts or running last minute errands, etc.)

**Sharing Your Care** – Reminding him to take care of himself – this may be 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 remind her how much you love her. More often than not, this is the most helpful thing you can do during this busy time of year.

## Appearance-Related Stress

It is not uncommon for students to begin crash diets and other destructive eating patterns in early December, as they prepare to come home and see family and friends. The fear of looking like they gained the "Freshman 15" makes some students worry that others will think they are not doing well in school.

However, not eating healthfully will impact their performance on exams, plus it's just not good for them overall.

Focusing comments on weight or appearance during phone conversations and email exchanges will only add to this anxiety. Instead, promote positive behaviors and image concepts by encouraging healthy fitness and nutritional habits while focusing on internal qualities as well.

## Talk, Make Space & Prepare for Students Returning for the Holidays

As you prepare to have your student home for the winter holidays, here are a few things to keep in mind...

**Make Sure Your Student Has a Space.** It's common for rearranging to take place once a student has departed for school. Has your student lost his bedroom? If so, make sure you prepare a space for him to sleep and store belongings, prior to coming home. This way, your student won't feel displaced or like he's a burden.

**Talk With Your Student About Lifestyle Changes.** Rather than waiting until your student comes home, talk beforehand. It's quite likely that your student's sleeping, eating,

and thinking patterns have changed during the last few months. Try to avoid surprises by discussing these new habits and perspectives ahead of time.

**Prepare Siblings for Your Student's Return Home.** If there are other children in the family, they will be anticipating your student's arrival, too. Remind them that your student will be very excited to see them, but also will have a lot to do while she is home. This will help alleviate disappointment if there is not enough time for extensive one-on-one interaction.

Communicating with care can help ensure a happy holiday visit for all!

## Reconnect

Reconnect with your student by...

- Planning a family game night
- Going to a coffee shop
- Sharing photos from the last few months
- Attending a local school event
- Staying up late one night chatting
- Cooking Sunday breakfast
- Asking for her help setting up a computer program
- Making cookies together the night before he heads back to school so he can share them with friends