

You CAN Go Home for the Holidays...

(Strategies for students going home for the *first* time...)

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You've met the challenge of transitioning from high school to college~ congratulations. You've succeeded at passing your classes, making new friends, and for the first time, living on your own~ Congratulations. So why do you feel like that little kid when you go home? Did the whole world change while you were away? Does it have to be this way?

Don't be surprised if your time back home is another challenge. You have changed; you knew that... however, the family has changed too. Obviously your relationship with them will change too... this can be a great experience, if you are ready and make a few preparations.

- Prepare for change- The first thing that may set up many college students for a rough first time home is that they are blind-sided by change. Being prepared for it is the first and often most important step.
- Start the transition during now- Start thinking about how things have changed; start identifying changes in yourself, family, and home. Avoid some of the stress by being proactive now.
- You've changed- You may be more independent. You may think for yourself more than when you were in high school. Mom and dad may not be ready for this change in you. They may expect you to need them as much as you did before you left. Most likely, it is a difficult transition for them to accept you as an independent person with views different from theirs, a person who can stand on his/her own.

TIP: Remember that Mom and Dad want you to be independent. NO one wants you asking to borrow the car when you are 40! They just may be shocked that it's happened so soon. Give them some time and ease them into it... give them a chance to be proud of your independence. Remember~ this is as much a transition for them as for you.

- Appearance- Not only have your views perhaps changed, you may not even look the same! This can be a real shock to your parents and high school friends. During this new time of independence, you made many decisions on your own and change in your appearance may be one. Although you may feel the same, be prepared for reactions from others.

TIP: If you've made drastic changes (especially tattoos and/or piercings), let your family know before you go home. Be sure to emphasize that this is a time to try new things, and you're trying a new look. To know this is experimenting to find that new look may make it easier to accept. It certainly does not have to be forever. When at home, consider toning it down, with so many adjustments to make in how you feel and think, you may not want your new look standing in the way of being heard.

- Talking to parents- Talking is the simplest act and the one that is most often overlooked. Talk. You and your parents are becoming peers. So many problems can be avoided by a simple conversation. Start including your parents in your new life... orient them to your major, your new friends, and your goals. Your parents really are interested in your life. This is a time that is both scary and exciting. You will make it less scary by talking openly with them.
- Whose house is it anyway- The place you grew up in will become less "my house" and more "my parent's house" every time you go home. More and more, your place will be where you live and keep your stuff at school. Just as you want friends to respect your place when they come where you live, respect your parent's place as well.

TIP: This will call for re-negotiating expectations for living and house rules. It is very different to transition from being an occupant of your parent's house to becoming a visitor. Do the "old" rules still apply? Will more or less be expected? Discuss curfews. You will enjoy your time with your parents much more if you work these things out up front. Be ready for some rules to stay the same. If you think they should change, suggest a compromise. For example, maybe your parents would agree to drop the curfew if you agree to let them know where you are. Work out the compromises that best suit you and your parents.

- New friends- Keep in contact with your friends from college. Don't let the friendships you have built at school fade away while you're home. Make a few phone calls, texts, emails. You'll be glad to pick up where you let off when you get back for the next semester.

TIP: Even though you keep in contact, everyone will be busy once at home. Don't expect things to be exactly the same as they were at college or for them to be there whenever you call. The point is to maintain contact until back on campus.

- Old friends- You thing you've changed?! Wait until you see your friends from high school! They have changed as well. These changes may strengthen some of your former relationships while weakening or eliminating others.

TIP: In high school you were probably much more dependent on friends and what they thought of you. The goal may have been fitting in... college is a time to learn more about yourself, to make independent decisions, and to value your own qualities. Value your high school friends. They gauge how you've changed, keep in touch, but don't hold on for "old times' sake". You may find you connect with people you didn't before.

- Adjusting to the financial responsibilities- Money disappears much quicker when you are living on your own, and it may be difficult to manage your funds appropriately. Talk to your parent's and other mentors about this over the summer, especially if you have incurred debt (credit cards!). If you get help early, you may prevent disaster in the future.

TIP: Get help from your parents if you have gotten into financial trouble. They may be upset at first, but they don't want to see you get into a hole you cannot get out.. Let them help you succeed. Let them know it has been a lesson to you and plan with them how to manage your finances.

Summary: Remember, you didn't change over night; your family did not either. Give them some time to see and adjust to the changes in you. They expect you to have successes and failures. Be honest with them. Also, give your parents credit for the life experience they have. You have learned much in one semester. Imagine how much your parents have learned in their lives. Above all, enjoy your time back home. Realize that you may only have three or four more such breaks... make the most of them.

*Adapted from an article by Joel Duncan
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