

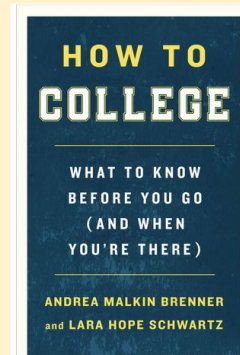
Home for the Holidays: Your Freshman's First Homecoming



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Your new college student's first long visit home can be wonderful, but also stressful.

Knowing the common pitfalls can both normalize the discomfort of welcoming an “adult” who has lived away from home and also help create a positive visit for all members of the family with open dialogue.

“I WANT TO SEE MY FRIENDS!”

- important for them to connect with friends/romantic relationships over break
- build in time for them to catch up with peers
- set rules about visits:
 - time with friends vs. time with family
 - high school vs. college friends
- prepare for feelings about changed friendships



Biggest complaint about Thanksgiving break from first-year parents is sharing their kids with their high school friends!

“HOME FEELS DIFFERENT”

- prepare them for changes in family dynamics and physical spaces
- desire for the sense of their childhood home with all the adult privileges
- anxiety about being on *your* turf (especially if the last visit was on *their* turf)
- am I the “outsider” now?



Many parents report that their student's new lens on the world comes off sounding critical of family dynamics and behaviors.

“I’M EXHAUSTED”

- leave time and quiet for them to sleep in their own beds
- avoid over-programming during their visit
- school work doesn’t end during school break- ask what they will need
- their sleeping patterns have changed since high school (napping)



60% of college students don’t get quality sleep. Breaks are the perfect time for them to recoup before they head back for the last stretch of the semester. This often doesn’t line up with what families have planned.

“DON’T JUDGE THE NEW ME”

- many students explore new identities in college
- hot button issues for some families may arise during the first lengthy homecoming
 - announcement of romantic relationships
 - identifying as LGBTQ+
 - changing major/career path
- fear of being misunderstood or alienated for new choices and identities



Many first-year students report anxiety about interactions with their families during their first lengthy homecoming because of issues of criticism, acceptance, and withholding tuition or spending money.

“BUT IT’S MY ROOM!”

- alone time is important, *especially* if they have a roommate; respect privacy
- if they share a room at home, consider a separate temporary space
- be realistic about room cleanliness/organization rules
- provide a quiet place to study without others interfering
- coming home to “my childhood”

Parents relate neatness and organization in a different way than teens do. “Messy” does not necessarily mean “disorganized.”



“UGH... TOO MANY QUESTIONS!”

It's natural for extended family to be curious and to want to ask students a barrage of questions about their college experience:

- how's college? do you like it?
- what's your major?
- how are your grades?
- what are you doing for summer break?
- what are your post-graduation plans?



Think through your student's lens. How will these questions be received? What are ways they can reply?

“I’M AN ADULT AT SCHOOL”

- parenting an “adult” who has lived away from home can be challenging.
- remember that college success relies on self-reliance and decision-making (time management, sleep schedule, choosing food), and now they’re being told where to be, how long to sleep, and what to eat– this can invite tension.



Especially if your student has struggled with independence, attempt to limit caretaking during their homecoming. Ask yourself if pampering them will set them back.

“I DON’T WANT TO GO BACK”

- sometimes it’s part of the first-year process
- other times it’s a real concern, especially if student:
 - has not yet found connections to peers
 - is struggling to live independently
 - is facing mental health challenges
- college is not right for all students immediately following high school
- not all colleges are right for all students (student has changed since decision)
- normalize the challenges of the first semester of college



Students whose parents were aware of struggles that they faced in high school (depression, anxiety, substance abuse, self-harm) are particularly reticent to let their parents know of any ongoing issues and struggles.

“I CAN’T WAIT TO GET OUT OF HERE AND GO BACK TO COLLEGE”

- try not to be hurt/insulted
- picture the freedom they are returning to
- they have found their college community of same-age peers
- new home and old home can live in harmony



Don't forget the stress of your student wondering which college would work for them. Their desire to return to campus is a reason to celebrate!

“RULES... ARE YOU SERIOUS?”

- your household- your rules (but discuss in advance to avoid conflict)
- discuss “non-negotiables” (timing of meals, visits, family obligations, etc.)
- rethink “curfew” to include more realistic expectations (texting, calling)
- share expectations (car-sharing, chores, cleanliness, sleeping in, manners)

College students need to be reminded how their behavior impacts others. They have been focused (appropriately) on their own needs in college.



“I’M A DIFFERENT PERSON NOW”

- most colleges are demographically different from home communities (racial, religious, economic, geographic diversity, political leaning/ideology)
- we have no control over what ideas will resonate with them
- reinventing the self is part of the transition to a college student identity
- 18-19 year olds embrace new views and ideas quickly
- academic: they have being asked to draw their own conclusions, challenge and criticize authors and authorities

A successful college experience includes being exposed to worlds they never knew existed and trying out new ideas and behaviors



TOP 10 REMINDERS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Focus on quality vs. quantity time (limited by sleep and school work)
- 2) Pick your battles (bedroom, eating, appearance)
- 3) Don't over-program; leave time to get reacquainted and to relax
- 4) Remember that they are bringing home college stress
- 5) Balance "my baby is home" with not babying your adult child
- 6) Ask what they miss from home and what you can provide (food, traditions)
- 7) Make time to discuss big stuff/concerns (grades, budgeting, behavior)
- 8) Don't expect perfection (Thanksgiving can be practice for winter break)
- 9) Set homecoming expectations/discuss common challenges before arrival
- 10) Remember: their wanting to return is positive and not a criticism of home

FINAL THOUGHTS

Be curious about who your child is becoming and what they are learning.
Cut them some slack as they play with new ideas and identities.

Bring the same spirit of curiosity to interactions with your adult child that you did to:

- your infant's expressions,
- your toddler's new words, or
- your young child's curiosity about the world.

Remember: you helped make college possible for your teen. Don't forget to give yourself some credit!

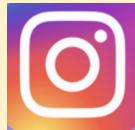
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